

“A Right Down Regular Queen”: Performance and Monarchy in Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Gondoliers*

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Probably the most widely received contemporary comments on the Victorian monarchy came with a catchy tune and sounded across the stage. Gilbert and Sullivan’s 1889 *The Gondoliers* provides one example of such musical analysis, integrating its political commentary into its convoluted love triangles, in which ‘two husbands have managed to acquire three wives’.¹ Two newly married gondoliers, Marco and Giuseppe, find out that one of them is the son of the king of Baratania, a Mediterranean island kingdom, and was smuggled away from the kingdom as an infant due to religious turmoil. Since the king of Baratania had recently died, Don Alhambra, a Baratarian gentleman, came to bring the new king back to rule his kingdom. There are three issues with this: no one but the nurse who smuggled the boy away knows if Marco or Giuseppe is the king, the new king (whoever he may be) was married at birth to Casilda (the daughter of the Duke of Plaza-Toro) and is inadvertently a bigamist, and both Marco and Giuseppe are Republicans. Ultimately, the story reaches a happy conclusion, in which neither Marco nor Giuseppe prove to be the rightful king, and thus, can continue merrily gondoliering with their wives. Luiz, the beloved of the Duke of Plaza-Toro’s daughter Casilda, turns out to be the true king, and all three couples live the lives they dreamed of with their spouses.

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¹ Arthur Sullivan, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 941.

Along the way to this happy ending, the opera provides plenty of commentary on the performance of monarchy, setting out to justify the British monarchy through showing what it is not: through a parody of foreign and republican monarchy that validates both British identity and the institution of monarchy itself. The three complications that drive the plot of *The Gondoliers* also drive the opera's political commentary. These plot points lead to discussions of the role of monarchs (and their queens), the relationship between republicanism and monarchy, and many less politically driven love songs. The opera's most well-known song famously dissected the life of "The Working Monarch", declaring that 'the duties are delightful, and the privileges great'.² At other points in the opera, various characters expound on the delights of being queen, the benefits (or hazards) of the marriage of monarchy and republicanism, and the duties of a monarch towards his subjects.

The *Gondoliers*, with its multiple tours, enthusiastic press reception, and five hundred fifty-nine performances (making it, at the time that it finally closed, the fifth longest-running musical theatre production in history) clearly resonated with audiences.³ This resonance, and the opera's overall popularity, indicates that something in the opera's presentation of monarchy, the key focus of this opera, appealed to audiences. Since the opera seems to present a symbolic monarch as an ideal and to disapprove of republicanism, perhaps the opera's popularity was due to its representation of a popular conception of the ideal monarch. Alternatively, perhaps this performance of monarchy had such cultural resonance, with royals and audiences alike, because of its role in facilitating bilateral discourses of power between the monarchy and the British people. A close examination of the performed monarchs of *The Gondoliers* provides insight into the ways in which presentations of monarchs on the late Victorian stage, along with the royal and public reception of these monarchs, functioned as part of relational discourses of power. In a demonstration of Van Dixhoorn's 'theatre state,' the relational discourse of power facilitated by *The Gondoliers* perpetuates and constructs an agreement between the Crown and the audience as to how the monarch should act and exercise power.⁴ Within this discourse of power, it seems that an awareness of other possible sites of resistance from lower class factions of late Victorian society helped to propagate this understanding as to the performance, power and obligations of monarchy, along with the relationship between monarchy and republicanism. This article will set the stage with a brief discus-

² Sullivan, 923.

³ Michael Ainger and Oxford University Press, *Gilbert and Sullivan: A Dual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 327.

⁴ "Introduction," Jan Bloemendal, Peter Eversmann, and Elsa Strietman, eds., *Drama, Performance and Debate: Theatre and Public Opinion in the Early Modern Period*, *Drama and Theatre in Early Modern Europe*, v. 2 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 6.

sion of Victorian monarchy, theatre, and politics before turning to the representation of monarchy in *The Gondoliers*, moving from an analysis of the opera's text and themes into a discussion of its reception. As each of these sections demonstrates, in the face of radical resistance to the crown, growing tensions over imperialism, and heightened nationalism, the parody of foreign monarchy in *The Gondoliers* acted as a mirror meant not to criticise British monarchy, but to emphasise its benefits and its Britishness, thus reinforcing the monarchical status quo.

Monarchy and the Stage in Context: Structures of Power

As other essays in this issue explore and as Bloemendal suggests, theatre states, 'in which rulers enacted their role in public events in order to confirm their legal status', were often 'also a theatre society, in which theatre, performance and drama interacted with many aspects of public life'.⁵ As Van Dixhoorn articulates, the theatre in a theatre state and society sustains 'heated exchanges about (often interrelated) political, moral, social and religious issues between different circuits in society'.⁶ Scholars such as William Kuhn and David Cannadine have shown that nineteenth-century Britain was such a theatre state as well, with the stage acting as a place for engagement for the most pressing questions of state and society.⁷

The Victorian theatre both reflected and cemented a growing societal consensus about the British monarchy in the latter years of Victoria's reign. By the 1880s, the British monarchy had weathered the worst of the anti-monarchical sentiments of the 1860s and 1870s. While, as Richard Williams points out in his monograph, criticism of the monarchy never fully disappeared, by the time of *The Gondoliers*, views of the monarchy as ill-managed, un-English, and partisan had been largely engulfed in a wave of adulation for the long-lived Queen Victoria and her family.⁸ Walter Bagehot's writings on the monarchy between 1865 and 1867, published as *The English Constitution* in 1867 and in a second edition in 1872, had helped to counter views of the monarchy as unconstitutional and partisan, laying out what he perceived as an increasingly ceremonial role for the

⁵ "Introduction," Bloemendal, Eversmann, and Strietman, 6.

⁶ Arjan Van Dixhoorn, "Theatre Society in the Early Modern Low Countries: Theatricality, Controversy, and Publicity in Amsterdam in the 1530s" in Bloemendal, Eversmann, and Strietman, 84.

⁷ Kuhn W.M, "Ceremony and Politics: The British Monarchy, 1871-1872," *Journal of British Studies* 26, no. 2 (1987): 133-62; William M Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism: The Transformation of the British Monarchy, 1861-1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); David Cannadine, *Making History Now and Then: Discoveries, Controversies, and Explorations* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, N.Y: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁸ Richard Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Aldershot, England; Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1997), 4-5.

monarchy.⁹ By the 1880s, Bagehot's view defined the majority view, to the point that the major dissenting newspaper in England changed its name from the *Republican* to the *Radical* in 1886, with the acknowledgement that republicanism was no longer a viable political idea in Victorian Britain, but rather an intriguing ideology with little practical potential.¹⁰ As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the monarchy was thought to perform an increasingly ceremonial role, and events like the 1887 and 1897 Jubilees provided the ceremony to support this point.

Thus, the performance of monarchy on Victorian stages was not the only performance of Victorian monarchy with which audiences would have been familiar. Nor would Victorian audiences have associated their monarchs solely with politics, for Queen Victoria's reign saw noticeable shifts in monarchical power and practice.¹¹ In William Kuhn's analysis of ritual and the monarchy, late Victorian public monarchical ceremonies marked the completion of a 'transition from a politically powerful monarchy to a monarchy that derived its power from the hold it had on people in the streets'.¹² These shifts in monarchical power and practice were a reinvention of monarchy as performed and ceremonial in function, a reinvention that did not go unnoticed at its time. In both the theatre and the political theatre, a key means of gaining political power was from

⁹ Williams, 120 ; For more analysis and discussion of Bagehot's text and intentions, see the historiographical summary provided on pp. 20-24 of Andrzej Olechnowicz, "Historians and the Modern British Monarchy," in *The Monarchy and The British Nation 1780 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6-46; see also David Craig's essay in the same volume, David M. Craig, "Bagehot's Republicanism," in *The Monarchy and the British Nation, 1780 to the Present*, ed. Andrzej Olechnowicz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 139-62.

¹⁰ Williams, *The Contentious Crown*, 135; for more on anti-monarchical sentiment throughout Victoria's reign, see Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and Its Monarchy* (London: Radius, 1988); Antony Taylor, *"Down with the Crown": British Anti-Monarchism and Debates about Royalty since 1790* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999); for a broader consideration of politics in England at the time, and an analysis of how Britain's landed elite navigated similar criticisms regarding financial wastefulness and corruption, see Philip Harling, *The Waning of "Old Corruption": The Politics of Economical Reform in Britain, 1779-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹¹ Cannadine, *Making History Now and Then*, 41. Frank Hardie's work, focused on "the day-to-day role of the British monarchy in politics" and intent on distinguishing "as sharply as possible between royal influence and royal power," is just one example of this type of study. See Frank Hardie, *The Political Influence of the British Monarchy, 1868-1952* (London: Batsford, 1970); As Plunkett notes, "a burgeoning publishing industry helped to reinvent the position of the monarchy in national life." John Plunkett, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

¹² Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism*, 7, 10. See also Kuhn's multiple articles on this topic: Kuhn W.M., "Ceremony and Politics"; W. M Kuhn, "The Future of the British Monarchy," *Journal of British Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 267-72.

properly performing public ceremonies, which brought the monarch into contact with all levels of society and re-established the respect and dignity so key to the Victorian monarchy. Accordingly, the performance of monarchy, as portrayed both on and off the stage, was expected of the monarch; Victoria met with criticism when she withdrew from public ceremonial after Albert's death, and her advisors recognised the importance of public performance in the maintenance of political power.¹³ *The Gondoliers* similarly recognises the vital importance of the public performance of monarchy.

Richard Schoch's work on Queen Victoria and her theatre-going experiences claims that 'put simply, monarchy works like theatre. Kings and queens 'act' before the audience that is the public'.¹⁴ Yet, the performance of monarchy in the 'public theatre' was not the only form of theatre in the Victorian theatre-state. The crown also used the theatre itself as a space in which Victoria could appear and connect with her subjects. Victoria was quite enamoured with theatre in all forms, as Schoch's and Rowell's work on Victoria and the theatre makes clear. She was a frequent attendee, kept detailed journal entries about the performances she saw, and, in times of political turmoil, Victoria used the political nature of the theatre not to 'perform [her] own power, but to stand in solidarity with [her] subjects'.¹⁵ Thus, one way in which the theatre facilitated a relational power discourse was by allowing those with official political power to publicly interact with their subjects.

Victoria utilised the nineteenth century stage not just to display solidarity, but also to generate solidarity through carefully crafted messaging about political, social, and religious topics. J.S. Bratton contends that 'one of the functions of art in a national culture is to form part of the discourses of power; in theatrical presentation one may see this operate in, for example, the generation of subversion in order to contain it, and the definition and display of subversives and enemies in order to subjugate them'.¹⁶ Accordingly, state censorship was another

¹³ Kuhn W.M, "Ceremony and Politics."

¹⁴ Richard W Schoch, *Queen Victoria and The Theatre of Her Age* (Basingstoke, Hampshire [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), xviii; Michael Diamond makes a similar argument: "the great royal occasions showed clearly the link between royalty and show business." Michael Diamond, *Victorian Sensation, or, The Spectacular, the Shocking, and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Anthem Press, 2003), 7; see also Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1857-1876* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁵ Schoch claims that Victoria attended the theatre "not simply for enjoyment, but because it made her visible and accessible to her subjects." Schoch, *Queen Victoria and The Theatre of Her Age*, xiii, 129; A fuller investigation of Victoria's personal theatre-going experiences is found in George Rowell, *Queen Victoria Goes to the Theatre* (London: P. Elek, 1978).

¹⁶ J. S Bratton, *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1950* (Manchester; New York; New York, USA: Manchester University Press, 1991), 9.

more explicit way that the theatre functioned as a key channel for discourses of power in the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Drama censorship was alive and well in late Victorian England, where the images of the monarch allowed on the stage were directly approved by the ruling monarchy through the Lord Chancellor's office, in another facet of this discourse of power.¹⁸ On the Victorian stage, political themes and politically notable personalities were censored. As John Russell Stephens notes, 'the list of personalities whose names were proscribed on the stage is extensive. It ranges down from the Queen and the royal family to members of the government, foreign sovereigns and dignitaries, contemporary theatrical personalities, indeed, to anyone whose name was a topic of public interest'.¹⁹ Due to the combination of regulations and licensing, late Victorian theatres could only discuss contemporary political issues through seemingly unrelated themes, a restriction which explains why *The Gondoliers* placed its comments on monarchy within a love story, in both a different country and a different time. Yet, scripts that were more political than the Lord Chancellor's office had intended often appeared on the stage; an 1871 issue of *The Era* contained a letter from Gilbert, in which Gilbert claimed 'that on three separate occasions after the Examiner had interfered in his plays he, Gilbert, had "systematically declined to take the slightest notice of his instructions"'.²⁰ Although theoretically, only messages about the monarchy that the Crown approved could appear before the public, the reality was slightly more complex.²¹

Theatrical performance was thus a way for those in power to shape the discourses presented to the broader public; however, reception of these discourses also gave the theatre-going public a way to communicate, within fully legal and

¹⁷ Robert Justin Goldstein notes that "throughout Europe the theatre was viewed by ruling elites as a form of communication that had enormous importance, and therefore drama censorship occupied a great deal of their time and energy, with a particular focus on proposed scripts that were viewed as potentially threatening to the existing political, legal, and social order." Robert Justin Goldstein, ed., *The Frightful Stage: Political Censorship of the Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 1.

¹⁸ John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama, 1824-1901* (Cambridge [Eng.]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 17.

¹⁹ Stephens, 116.

²⁰ Stephens, 118.

²¹ In investigating the ways in which *The Gondoliers* functioned in this discourse of relational power, I will be drawing upon the script that was performed rather than upon earlier drafts of the opera as composed by Gilbert and Sullivan. The focus of this paper is the negotiation between the ruling monarchy and the audience, not Gilbert and Sullivan's conceptualization of monarchy. Bradley presents the original intentions of the authors alongside the performed version; the original version indicates that Gilbert and Sullivan initially planned to emphasise the discussion of monarchy and republicanism more than they did in the final script. See Sullivan, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*, 859-967.

acceptable channels, their opinions and feelings on contemporary discourses such as monarchy. The Victorian theatre allowed a large cross-section of society to engage in this discourse.²² Goldstein even contends that ‘the theatre provided the most important form of mass entertainment’.²³ The number of people that each theatrical production reached is indicated not simply through the large numbers of people who attended Britain’s numerous theatres, but also by the sales of scores. When the score of *The Gondoliers* was first published, ‘twelve men were kept packing from morn till night, and on the first day 20,000 copies (eleven wagon loads) of the vocal score alone were despatched [sic]’.²⁴ Given the usual audience for Gilbert and Sullivan’s works, most of these scores would have sold to what Regina Oost describes as ‘erudite audiences’.²⁵ As David Cannadine so aptly put it, Gilbert and Sullivan ‘deliberately sought to make their works appealing to the well-educated middle classes, and they triumphantly succeeded’.²⁶ Gilbert and Sullivan’s works might have reached all classes, but they wrote primarily for middle class tastes, while drawing upon the best of older, less sophisticated traditions such as the burlesque, melodrama, ballad opera, and pantomime.²⁷

All of these factors—philosophies of monarchy as performed, monarchical involvement in theatrical censorship, and the central role of theatre in late Victorian culture—contributed to the complicated and multifaceted discourse of power in which the Victorian theatre acted as a space for engagement. Before proceeding to an analysis of the voices in this discourse of power, however, a note of caution seems necessary. Any seeming consensus created and facilitated by *The Gondoliers* needs to be mitigated by scepticism about divergence between the written script and the performed piece put before audiences. The source for this analysis is the written script of *The Gondoliers*; an exegesis of the opera’s written text cannot fully probe the silences in the script and the nuances of live performance. The limitations of available sources mean that this article will not deconstruct the possible inner contradictions, silences, and performed satire of *The Gondoliers*. Although these silences and satirical performances cannot be proven to have existed, a simple consensus between the Crown and the middle

²² The late Victorian theatre was, according to Russell Jackson, “central to popular culture.” Russell Jackson, ed., *Victorian Theatre: The Theatre in Its Time*, 1st American ed (New York: New Amsterdam, 1989), 1.

²³ Goldstein, *The Frightful Stage*, 5.

²⁴ Found in Regina B. Oost, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Class and the Savoy Tradition, 1875-1896* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 58.

²⁵ Oost, 40.

²⁶ David Cannadine, “Gilbert and Sullivan: The Making and Un-Making of a British ‘Tradition,’” in *Myths of the English*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge, MA: Polity Press; Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 18.

²⁷ Cannadine, 14.

classes seems too straightforward, and thus, some silent fracturing of this consensus should be assumed. Crowds might have interpreted the performance of the script in multiple ways, lines that seem to convey straightforward approbation could have been performed in a way that hinted at derision, and properly timed pauses could have indicated scepticism or criticism of the verbal ideas that came before.

Given the performed nature of this source, the possibility (perhaps probability) of multiple interpretations and nuances must temper any conclusions drawn from written texts alone. Yet, it is this multipotentiality that is precisely the point. In a demonstration of Bhabha's mimicry, which in 'in order to be effective . . . must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference', the play and creative tension of the Victorian theatre embodied a 'complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualises power'.²⁸ A careful unpacking of the rhetorical strategies and reception of *The Gondoliers*, particularly the way in which the play utilises the 'other,' helps to expose the functions and meanings of monarchy in the Victorian theatre state and the presentation and contortion of official discourse and performance.

'A Monarchy That's Tempered With Republican Equality'²⁹: Monarchy as Performed in *The Gondoliers*

The Gondoliers, although far from the most political of Gilbert and Sullivan's works, provides an ideal text for this study precisely because of the subtle way in which it deals with monarchy. *The Gondoliers* was one of Gilbert and Sullivan's most successful works, while their next opera, *Utopia, Limited*, discussed monarchy and political themes more blatantly and was far less successful. The aspects of monarchy that the script of the opera highlights—performance of monarchy, monarchical obligations to the people, and the relationship between Republicanism and monarchy—appear to be aspects that resonated widely within late nineteenth century Britain. The inverted version of monarchy presented in *The Gondoliers* allowed for political commentary reinforcing the benevolence and Britishness of the Victorian monarchy, binding nationalism and monarchy together and lampooning criticisms levelled at monarchical rule in general as only applicable to foreign monarchies.

As noted by many scholars, the nineteenth century was one of increasingly virulent nationalism, in which national character was starkly contrasted with

²⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial and Sara Brady, 3rd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 363.

²⁹ Sullivan, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*, 919.

foreign ‘others’ and their flaws.³⁰ Romani argues that this national character was radically abstract: ‘as potentially all-embracing, it is able to be all-powerful . . . it is as likely to surface in a piece of communitarian critique as in a commentary on a football game’.³¹ Even Bagehot’s work on the British constitution made copious reference to the ‘national character’ of the British and its impact on Britain’s systems of government.³² Against the backdrop of competition for empire, unrest and reform, and the emergence of new unified nations like Germany and Italy in the 1870s, juxtapositions of British monarchs against foreign monarchs, British virtues against foreign flaws, grew ever more potent. As Linda Colley discusses in her work, Protestant Britons increasingly defined themselves against the Catholic, ‘superstitious, militarist, decadent and unfree’ French, with the monarch playing a central role in this process, particularly in the early 19th century.³³ Thus, as *The Gondoliers* presents the performance of ceremony, philanthropy and service to the people, and a discussion of republicanism, it does so against the constant foil of the foreign ‘other’. This section will analyse ceremony, philanthropy, and republicanism each in turn, showing how *The Gondoliers*’ Italian republicans-turned-monarchs serve to highlight the efficacy, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness of the British monarchy while also providing subtle glimpses of dissatisfaction with the current system.

Performing Ceremony

The opera begins by establishing that monarchs could not be easily identified without the appropriate ceremonial and performed trappings. The confusion over who was the proper king emphasises this conception of monarchy as primarily performed, for:

That highly respectable gondolier
 Could never declare with a mind sincere
 Which of the two was his offspring dear,
 And which was the Royal stripling!³⁴

³⁰ For example, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed (London; New York: Verso, 2006); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Roberto Romani, *National Character and Public Spirit in Britain and France, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³¹ Romani, *National Character and Public Spirit in Britain and France, 1750-1914*, 2.

³² Craig, “Bagehot’s Republicanism,” 155.

³³ Colley, *Britons*, 6–7.

³⁴ Part of a solo sung by Don Alhambra Bolero. Sullivan, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*, 891.

Thus, the trappings of monarchy and public performance of ceremonial were particularly important in establishing monarchs and in enabling their power.

One aspect of this ceremony was proper monarchical behaviour, defined in the text as a combination of:

A pose imperious
 With a demeanour nobly bland . . .
 An attitude not too stately,
 Still sufficiently dignified.³⁵

Tessa and Gianetta, the wives of the gondoliers-turned-monarchs, recognise the importance of ceremonial trappings for monarchs in a series of questions with which they pepper their husbands, alternating lines in their excitement:

With a horse do they equip you?
 Lots of trumpeting and drumming?
 Do the Royal tradesmen tip you?
 Ain't the livery becoming!³⁶

Giuseppe and Marco, despite their oddities and unusual style of rule, did fulfil these ceremonies of monarchy, using these ceremonies to set themselves apart as monarchs: 'We are called "Your Majesty", we are allowed to buy ourselves magnificent clothes, our subjects frequently nod to us in the streets, the sentries always return our salutes'.³⁷ The monarchs of *The Gondoliers*, as comically unusual as they were, still enacted the performance of monarchy, in a strange satirical version of Victorian essayist Walter Bagehot's conception of the monarch as the 'head of the dignified part of the Constitution', with the full knowledge and approval of the reigning monarch and government officials.³⁸

Another song from *The Gondoliers* deals with the female performance of monarchy, again setting monarchy up as a performance reliant upon material elements and a ceremonial distance meant to maintain popular respect for the monarch. Gianetta and Tessa's song, upon learning that they are going to become royalty, sets out their conception of what a queen does in "A Right Down Regular Queen":

³⁵ Sullivan, 959.

³⁶ Sullivan, 931.

³⁷ Sullivan, 921.

³⁸ Walter Bagehot, "The English Constitution 1867," in *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Norman St. John-Stevan, vol. 5 (London: The Economist, 1965), 211. Bagehot was born in 1826 and died in 1877, writing extensively about government, economics, and literature during his lifetime. "The English Constitution" was initially published as a series of articles in the *Fortnightly Review* between 1865 and 1867.

Then one of us will be a Queen
 And sit on a golden throne,
 With a crown instead
 Of a hat on her head,
 And diamonds all her own!
 With a beautiful robe of gold and green,
 I've always understood;
 I wonder whether
 She'd wear a feather?
 I rather think he should!
Oh, 'tis a glorious thing, I ween,
To be a regular Royal Queen!
No half-and-half affair, I mean,
But a right-down regular Royal Queen!
 She'll drive about in a carriage and pair,
 With the King on her left-hand side,
 And a milk-white horse,
 As a matter of course,
 Whenever she wants to ride!
 With beautiful silver shoes to wear
 Upon her dainty feet;
 With endless stocks
 Of beautiful frocks
 And as much as she wants to eat!³⁹

As this song reveals, the first ideas associated with queenliness in this opera are material splendour and public exhibition. The references to public drives, to royal processions, and to crowns and robes highlight these associations, in ways that a Victorian audience would have recognised from Victoria's public appearances and 1887 Jubilee celebration. These associations again seem to tie to Bagehot's conception of the monarchy as primarily performed and ceremonial, yet, Tessa and Gianetta, in line with the satirical nature of Gilbert and Sullivan, misunderstand the reason behind the ceremony. Bagehot asserts that the English monarch is 'but the head of an unequal, competing, aristocratic society' which is of use 'so long as it keeps others out of the first place, and is guarded and retired in that place'.⁴⁰ The material splendour envisioned by the gondoliers' wives shows the dangers Bagehot wishes to avoid: monarchical sanction 'to the

³⁹ This song is a quartet, with Tessa and Gianetta alternating verses and their husbands joining the two of them for the chorus. For the purpose of uncluttered prose, quotes in this article will not include attributions of specific lines to specific characters. Choruses will be italicised. Sullivan, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*, 905, 907, 909.

⁴⁰ Bagehot, "The English Constitution 1867," 238–39.

race of expenditure' and a reproduction of the extravagance of the French emperor.⁴¹ The 'queens' of *The Gondoliers* are performing not a satirical version of English monarchy, but a foreign monarchy; perhaps this song was meant to simultaneously support the way in which Queen Victoria performed monarchy and mock foreign monarchies.

By the time of *The Gondoliers*, Queen Victoria, despite her upcoming splendid Jubilees, sought to avoid elaborate public ceremony (she had to be forced to perform public ceremonials upon momentous occasions).⁴² It is not difficult to see why a satirical jab at queens as society figures would meet with her approval, and why the government would wish to promote the ideal queen as one devoted not to material splendour and social display but to family. The second half of this song is also interesting, for its interpretation of queenly manner:

Whenever she condescends to walk,
Be sure she'll shine at that,
With her haughty stare,
And her nose in the air,
Like a well-born aristocrat!
At elegant high society talk
She'll bear away the bell,
With her "How de do"
And her "How are you?"
And "I trust I see you well!"

The aloofness represented in this song would also not have been out of line with Queen Victoria's rather aloof, austere mannerisms, and thus, again, would not have been politically threatening.⁴³ Furthermore, contrasting the potential financial liability of monarchy with Victoria's own behaviour would have tempered criticisms of the cost of monarchy. The ways in which the unlikely monarchs of *The Gondoliers* performed monarchy upon the stage seemed to mirror the performance of monarchy that was both politically and personally favoured by the late Victorian Crown and its censors.

This aloofness and infrequent public performance of the ceremonial aspects of the monarchy identified as so central to its success tie into one final element of ceremonial monarchical performance: that of gender. As Dorothy Thompson noted, Victoria's public seclusion of the 1860s— her failure to perform the ceremonial roles of the monarchy— was made less problematic by her continued work as mother.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the performance of monarchy was, particularly for

⁴¹ Bagehot, 238–39.

⁴² Kuhn W.M, "Ceremony and Politics."

⁴³ Sullivan, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*, 905, 907, 909.

⁴⁴ Dorothy Thompson, *Queen Victoria: The Woman, the Monarchy, and the People* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), xvi, 138–39.

Victoria, delineated frequently through gendered assumptions and expectations for the proper performance of gender. Judith Butler's theoretical framework about gender as a repeatedly performed and stylised act provides further insight into the simultaneous stylised performance of Victorian monarchy.⁴⁵ Queens had the unenviable task of both performing monarchy and power while also performing expectations of Victorian gender roles: domesticity, meekness, and submission. Accordingly, female monarchs both used and suppressed gender in their performance of monarchy. Material culture, something identified with the proper performance of both gender and monarchy, provided a way for one individual to enact both performative roles simultaneously. It is perhaps no coincidence that the voices singing about the material performance of monarchy are female.

Performing Philanthropy

The performing monarchs in *The Gondoliers* clearly had a sense of obligation to their subjects, as displayed by Giuseppe's statement, 'We quite understand that a man who holds the magnificent position of King should do something to justify it'.⁴⁶ They also held power and authority, as demonstrated by Don Alhambra's statement. The Don told Marco and Giuseppe that 'as the country is in a state of insurrection [following the death of the previous monarch] . . . it is absolutely necessary that you should assume the reins of Government at once; and, until it is ascertained which of you is to be king, I have arranged that you will reign jointly, so that no question can arise hereafter as to the validity of any of your acts'.⁴⁷ Within the text of *The Gondoliers*, the monarchs receive power along with obligations to those they rule, in a sort of enactment of the idea of power as relational and reciprocal. More specifically, the monarchs exert ceremonial and judicial power through economic and philanthropic obligation.

Marco and Giuseppe's initial conceptions of kingship clearly reflected this sense of the connections between power, obligation, and economics. Giuseppe's considered response to Don Alhambra's offer of the throne conceives of 'an ideal king . . . who would be absolutely unobjectionable', even to those with the most

⁴⁵ For the foundational theoretical discussions of the performance of gender, see Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519–31; Judith Butler and Sara Salih, *The Judith Butler Reader* (Malden, MA, Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2004); for discussions of the performance of gender in the public sphere, see Eileen Yeo, ed., *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in the Public Sphere* (Manchester; New York: New York: Manchester University Press; Distributed exclusively in the USA by St. Martin's Press, 1998); for a study of Victoria and gender specifically, see Homans, *Royal Representations*.

⁴⁶ Sullivan, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*, 921.

⁴⁷ Sullivan, 901.

republican of sentiments.⁴⁸ Giuseppe and Marco plan to be kings who ‘abolish taxes and make everything cheap . . . and give a great many free entertainments . . . and let off fireworks . . . such a king would be a great blessing to his people!’⁴⁹ Marco and Giuseppe plan not only to provide economically for their people, but also to serve them in more active ways. Once they arrive in Baratavia, Marco and Giuseppe become:

Two kings, of undue pride bereft,
 Who act in perfect unity . . .
 Who put their subjects at their ease
 By doing all they can to please!
 And thus, to earn their bread-and-cheese,
 Seize every opportunity.⁵⁰

The gondoliering kings set about earning their monarchical dignity and power through making themselves ‘useful about the Palace’, in the way described by one of *The Gondoliers*’ most famous songs, “The Working Monarch”:⁵¹

First we polish off some batches
 Of political dispatches,
 And foreign politicians circumvent;
 Then if business isn’t heavy,
 We may hold a Royal levee,
 Or ratify some Acts of Parliament.
 Then we probably review the household troops-
 With the usual “Shaloo humps!” and “Shaloo hoops!”
 Or receive with ceremonial and state
 An interesting Eastern potentate.
 After that we generally
 Go and dress our private valet-
 (It’s a rather nervous duty- he’s a touchy little man)-
 Write some letters literary
 For our private secretary-
 He is shaky in his spelling, so we help him if we can.
 Then, in view of cravings inner,
 We go down and order dinner;
 Then we polish the Regalia and the Coronation Plate-
 Spend an hour in titivating
 All our Gentlemen-in-Waiting;
 Or we run on little errands for the Ministers of State.
Oh, philosophers may sing

⁴⁸ Sullivan, 901.

⁴⁹ Sullivan, 901.

⁵⁰ Sullivan, 919.

⁵¹ Sullivan, 921.

*Of the troubles of a King;
 Yet the duties are delightful, and the privileges great;
 But the privilege and pleasure
 That we treasure beyond measure
 Is to run on little errands for the Ministers of State.⁵²*

This song highlights the gist of *The Gondoliers*' commentary on the power and obligations of monarchs. Buried under satirical inversions of the way in which a palace is run in which the monarchs help dress their valets, stand guard so that the sentries can take a break, set the table for their dinners, and write letters for their secretaries are relevant comments on the types of service a monarch owes his or her people. The function of ceremonies such as review of the troops or fetes mentioned later in the song is again emphasised, but alongside engagement in bureaucratic affairs through dispatches and letters and dealings with Parliament. When combined with the earlier comments about philanthropic engagement and with more explicit remarks such as Giuseppe's about 'the inestimable privilege of heading the subscriptions to all the principal charities', the portrait of monarchical power and obligation created in *The Gondoliers* is heavily weighted to emphasise monarchical obligation over political power.⁵³

Given the importance Queen Victoria placed on philanthropy as a part of monarchy, this presentation of monarchical obligation would not have caused the Queen or the censors concern. In fact, as Bradley notes, 'Giuseppe's famous catalogue of the duties of a working monarch is said to have greatly amused Queen Victoria', perhaps for the song's emphasis on ceremonial and bureaucratic duties (albeit ludicrously inappropriate ones), perhaps for the sheer amusement caused by the spectacle of the absurd results of Republican kingship.⁵⁴ Taking a good trait—the monarchy's benevolence—and turning it into childish fantasy and silliness through an exaggerated parody of Republicanism and monarchy reminds audiences through contrast of the benefits the British monarchy conveyed on the people.

Comments about the 'inestimable privilege' of philanthropy would have also fit with Victoria's conception of what the monarch owed the public, drawn in large part from her beloved Albert's conception of philanthropy as an aid to maintaining the power of the monarchy. F.K. Prochaska notes that philanthropy was 'triumphant in the reign of Victoria' for the queen 'assumed the leadership of the philanthropic movement by endorsing its values. And the monarchy's charitable administration, which was rarely in advance of public opinion, nourished expectant voluntarists across the Empire . . . The reverential public felt grateful for the monarchy's beneficence, even if members of the royal family

⁵² Sullivan, 921, 923, 925.

⁵³ Sullivan, 921.

⁵⁴ Sullivan, 920.

could not fathom what it was they were bestowing'.⁵⁵ The Prince and Princess of Wales, the future Edward VII and his wife, loved *The Gondoliers* and saw it at least four times; they were even more heavily involved in philanthropic endeavours than the reigning monarch.⁵⁶ Furthermore, philanthropy often tied into ceremony, as in the case of the 1887 Jubilee, through which multiple philanthropic organizations and institutions were created.⁵⁷ In the performance of late Victorian monarchy, monarchs utilised their power through a combination of ceremony and philanthropy, just as the theatrical monarchs of *The Gondoliers* did, albeit in an exaggerated and satirical manner. Thus, the Crown exercised power through drawing upon other types of relationships. The ways in which *The Gondoliers* parodied these relationships was both close enough to the ideals of the reigning monarch to act as the voice of the Crown in this discourse of power and satirical enough to not seem like a blatant piece of propaganda to the audience. Perhaps the song even allowed room for unstated audience criticism of the monarchy's seemingly limited usefulness.

Performing Republican Monarchy

The final major facet of discussions of the monarchy in *The Gondoliers* provides a major plot point and much of the political humour for the opera; this facet revolves around republicanism and monarchy, and, yet again, is tied to power discourses hidden within the opera itself. The opera's discussion of monarchy and republicanism, delivered to a primarily middle-class audience, emphasised the discord between entirely egalitarian principles and a classless society and used this to justify the necessity of a properly performed monarchy.

Although republicanism played a persistent role in British political thought and discourse throughout the nineteenth century, even at its high points, like in the 1870s, it never took more than a minor role, at least openly. As Craig notes, most educated liberals of the late nineteenth century saw republicanism as an impossible solution for a largely uneducated British populace: the people needed a monarch, and the traditional British constitution was both unique to Britain and uniquely effective given the national character of the British populace.⁵⁸ But part of this perception came from the class-based political perspectives from which these educated liberals wrote, and, as Anthony Taylor demonstrates, the

⁵⁵ F. K. Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 67, 100.

⁵⁶ Prochaska, 106–11, 119–24.

⁵⁷ Prochaska, 132.

⁵⁸ Craig, "Bagehot's Republicanism," 144–47.

monarchy and the elite were seen as inextricably intertwined.⁵⁹ Thus, *The Gondoliers*' dismantling of true, egalitarian republicanism did not function simply as support for the monarchy, but also as support for the status quo.

The Gondoliers does not begin by pointing to the difficulties and hazards of a classless society, but by satirically portraying such a society as the 'very pith' of happiness. The beginning of Act II introduces the Baratarian monarchy under Marco and Giuseppe:

A monarchy that's tempered with
Republican Equality.
This form of government we find
The beau-ideal of its kind-
A despotism strict, combined
With absolute equality!⁶⁰

Given the previously asserted positions of Marco and Giuseppe, their institution of a classless, republican monarchy, of a sort foreign to the British, came as no surprise to the audience. Before learning that one of them was a king, Giuseppe described the two of them as 'jolly gondoliers, the sons of Baptisto Palmieri, who led the last revolution. Republicans, heart and soul, we hold all men to be equal. As we abhor oppression, we abhor kings: as we detest vain-glory, we detest rank: as we despise effeminacy, we despise wealth'.⁶¹ While Don Alhambra had assumed incompatibility between their declared convictions and their thrones, assuming that 'as you are both Republicans, and hold kings in detestation, of course you'll abdicate at once', the gondoliers-cum-monarchs believed that a monarchy could be both republican and egalitarian.⁶² With this optimistic attitude, the gondoliers set off to claim their throne, and the havoc that ensues humorously highlights for the watching audience the benefits of maintaining the classed, monarchical status quo in order to preserve the status and power of the middle classes that formed much of the show's audience, as well as the upper classes.

The chaos of the good-natured gondoliering monarchs' court is not the only way in which *The Gondoliers* refutes the efficacy of republicanism; as is the case for each of these three categories that this article has been discussing, an entire song is spent on this specific message promoted by *The Gondoliers*. Don Alhambra sings of a king:

In the wonder-working days of old,

⁵⁹ Antony Taylor, "An Aristocratic Monarchy and Popular Republicanism 1830-1940," in *The Monarchy and the British Nation, 1780 to the Present*, ed. Andrzej Olechnowicz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 188-219.

⁶⁰ Sullivan, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*, 919.

⁶¹ Sullivan, 899.

⁶² Sullivan, 901.

When hearts were twice as good as gold,
 And twenty times as mellow.
 Good temper triumphed in his face,
 And in his heart he found a place,
 For all the erring human race
 And every wretched fellow . . .
 He wished all men as rich as he
 (And he was rich as rich could be),
 So to the top of every tree
 Promoted everybody . . .
 That King, although no one denies
 His heart was of abnormal size,
 Yet he'd have acted otherwise
 If he had been acuter.
 The end is easily foretold,
 When every blessed thing you hold
 Is made of silver, or of gold
 You long for simple pewter.⁶³

The moral of this song is not simply that monarchs must be careful not to allow republicanism to go too far, but also, in a message that both the middle classes and the monarchy fully supported,

When every one is somebodee [sic],
 Then no one's anybody!⁶⁴

The Gondoliers displays republicanism as a fallacy and monarchy as a superior state of government, especially when performed by a philanthropic and appropriately dignified ruler. Its message seems to be that a monarchy properly performed and with a sense of obligation to its people is beneficially British, but that a republican monarchy is a ludicrous combination of foreign parts, anathema to British society and success.

'So Thoroughly English In Style'⁶⁵: Reception of *The Gondoliers*

Each of the three aspects of monarchy from the script explored above— performance, power and obligation, and relationship to republicanism— had been approved by the Lord Chancellor's office as inoffensive to the Crown and politically safe. Yet this approval was not the only indication of royal endorsement of the opera's portrayal of monarchy; other indications of sanction came from royal

⁶³ Sullivan, 935, 937.

⁶⁴ Sullivan, 935, 937.

⁶⁵ "The 'Gondoliers' at the Savoy," *Daily News*, December 9, 1889, 13627 edition, sec. News, BA3203211027, British Library.

response to performances, hinting that the silences and satire in the performed opera did not openly highlight criticism of the monarchy, at least to certain audiences. As previously mentioned, the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, attended the opera at least four times, with his first viewing of the opera during its first month of performance.⁶⁶ Another of Victoria's children, the Duchess of Edinburgh, also attended *The Gondoliers* at the Savoy Theatre.⁶⁷ Most strikingly, in this survey of monarchs watching performed monarchy, *The Gondoliers* was also performed for Victoria herself at Windsor Castle on 6 March 1891.⁶⁸ Newspaper accounts of the performance noted that 'the performance was an interesting occasion, as no theatrical entertainment has been given by professional actors and actresses before the Sovereign at Windsor since the death of the Prince Consort'.⁶⁹ At this performance, 'she was observed delightedly beating time' to its songs, including the song about the performance of being a queen.⁷⁰ Her diary entries describe the opera as 'quite charming throughout' and 'very amusing . . . I really enjoyed the performance very much'.⁷¹ Further support for this portrayal of monarchy as connected to the ideals that the establishment wished to promote, through either literal representation or satire, comes from the opera's extremely warm royal reception. Within the relational discourse of power tied to monarchy and its legitimization, *The Gondoliers* worked to convey the current conceptions about monarchy held by the establishment and Britain's own 'right-down regular royal queen'.⁷²

The other voices in this discourse of power are more difficult to detect, for the audience did not produce and censor their own scripted portrayals of monarchy, although Gilbert and Sullivan, both members of middle class, could arguably be considered representative of their audience. The script of *The Gondoliers*, although seemingly most reflective of the views that the censors perceived as proper, could potentially act as the voice of the audience as well; in a different reading, the silences and satire within the text could have allowed for differing audience interpretation of the opera's script and for silent dissent. However, the reception and newspaper reviews of *The Gondoliers*, written primarily by the middle class, those that the opera targeted as potential allies in this discourse of

⁶⁶ "The Prince of Wales Witnessed the Performance of 'The Gondoliers' at the Savoy Theatre Last Evening," *The Morning Post*, December 21, 1889, 36666 edition, sec. News, R3214387583, 19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II.

⁶⁷ "The Duchess of Edinburgh Witnessed the Performance of 'The Gondoliers' at the Savoy Theatre on Saturday Afternoon," *The Morning Post*, April 28, 1890, 36775 edition, sec. News, R3213790223, 19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II.

⁶⁸ Sullivan, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*, 904, 906.

⁶⁹ "'The Gondoliers' at Windsor Castle," *The Standard*, March 7, 1891, 20800 edition, sec. News, GS3215092695, 19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II.

⁷⁰ Sullivan, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*, 904, 906.

⁷¹ As quoted in Bradley, Sullivan, 904, 906.

⁷² Sullivan, 905, 907, 909.

power, provide the best available access to the audience response to *The Gondoliers* and its presentation of monarchy, both scripted and performed. As Bradley notes, 'critics were almost unanimous in their praise, and the audience's reaction was little short of ecstatic'.⁷³ In the years between the debut of *The Gondoliers* and the death of Queen Victoria, sixty-seven newspaper articles about this opera specifically appeared throughout Britain, with the earliest articles from *The Gondoliers'* opening performance providing the most detailed reviews and later articles from the opera's provincial tours indicating a continued warm response to the opera. Although it cannot be proven that this warm response was to the positive version of monarchy laid out in the script and not to a silent, satirical criticism of monarchy, these articles help to provide the articulation of one of the other voices in this discourse of power.

One of the first indications that the response of the audience was not one of resistance to the monarchical ideals of the opera but one of support comes through the opera's extreme popularity. One early review of *The Gondoliers* claims that 'the performance was from first to last so thoroughly admirable as practically to be beyond criticism'.⁷⁴ Another initial review called *The Gondoliers* 'an admirable specimen of melodious topsy-turvydom'.⁷⁵ One of the only two radical newspapers to review *The Gondoliers*, *The Sun*, felt that the opera 'passed off in a highly satisfactory manner' and that *The Gondoliers* surpassed all of Gilbert and Sullivan's previous efforts.⁷⁶ This popularity was not limited to its London performances; a newspaper article from Dundee, Scotland notes that the opera had proved so popular that 'now three companies are touring the provinces, and everywhere the business done is tremendous, and the popularity of

⁷³ Sullivan, 862.

⁷⁴ "The 'Gondoliers' at the Savoy."

⁷⁵ "The Gondoliers; Or, the King of Barataria," *The Pall Mall Gazette*, December 9, 1889, 7715 edition, sec. News, Y3200420679, British Library.

⁷⁶ "The Gondoliers," *The Sun*, December 3, 1889, Nineteenth Century Collections Online. The classification of *The Sun* and *Police and Public* as radical papers comes from the classification of these newspapers as radical in the Nineteenth-Century Collections Online database. Little work has been done on the circulation and readership of the various Victorian newspapers. For the purposes of this paper, given the lack of scholarship on radical Victorian newspapers, this classification of these papers as radical, supported by the papers' discussion of the meetings of radical political groups, will be used, although it needs further scrutiny to determine how radical these papers were. For an example of the paper's presentation of radical political news, see "Political Club Gossip," *The Sun*, December 15, 1889, Nineteenth Century Collections Online; These two works, while focused on Victorian newspapers, do not seem to address the papers of the late 1880s and 1890s, nor do they mention the *Sun* or *Police and Public* specifically. Dr Andrea Korda, *Printing and Painting the News in Victorian London: The Graphic and Social Realism, 1869-1891* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2015); Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Clarendon Press, 1985).

the opera enormous. Each evening the Theatre has been crowded with delighted audiences, who revel in laughter from start to finish'.⁷⁷ Another provincial performance review from Lancaster reports frequent encores, and a Derby review terms it 'one of the most charming of the Savoy productions'.⁷⁸

Further support for the audience response to *The Gondoliers* as indicative of some form of agreement with the vision of monarchy and society laid out in this discourse of power, whether serious or satirical, comes from phrases in reviews that noted the extent to which the opera resonated with its audiences. One of the reviews of its opening night referenced the 'laughter-provoking dialogue whereof every point is immediately recognised by Savoy audiences'.⁷⁹ Even more revealingly, one review claimed that once the opera introduced its monarchical plot, 'the audience were at once on thoroughly good terms with themselves and the piece'.⁸⁰ The radical paper *Police and Public* notes that 'Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan have produced another opera, which meets the public taste'.⁸¹ The reception of *the Gondoliers* seems to point to a discourse of power that generated not vocal opposition, but agreement regarding how monarchs should relate to their people and the means by which they should exercise power.

Additional support for *The Gondoliers*' resonance with the audience as well as with the establishment comes from a survey of the comments made regarding the opera's portrayal of monarchy by various reviewers, comments which highlighted not silent criticism but the opera's support for the institution of monarchy. One of the opening reviews of *The Gondoliers* portrays Gilbert's satire as aimed not at the institution of monarchy, but at those who would destroy monarchy: 'Consequently we find Mr. Gilbert heaping good humoured satire upon king-haters of the Continental school, upon the extremist champions of social equality, and upon more than one of the failings and foibles of fashionable life'.⁸² The combination of continental despotism, republicanism, extravagance, and effeminism acts as classic 'othering,' presenting British monarchy, industriousness, and freedom as the ideal. The *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, in a review of one of the touring performances, notes that in the opera, 'the state of things . . . is

⁷⁷ "The Gondoliers," *The Dundee Courier and Argus*, May 16, 1890, 11500 edition, sec. News, R3209326778, 19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II.

⁷⁸ "Comic Opera at the Athenium," *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser for Lancashire, Westmorland, and Yorkshire*, April 26, 1890, 6072 edition, sec. News, R3209187489, 19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II; "The Gondoliers," *The Derby Mercury*, December 11, 1889, 9126 edition, sec. News, BA3202799746, British Library.

⁷⁹ "The 'Gondoliers' at the Savoy."

⁸⁰ "The Gondoliers' at Swansea Theatre," *Western Mail*, November 5, 1890, 6698 edition, sec. Arts and Entertainment, BC3205183504, British Library.

⁸¹ "On the Boards," *Police & Public*, December 14, 1889, Nineteenth Century Collections Online.

⁸² "The 'Gondoliers' at the Savoy."

somewhat strange, and supplies an amusing parody upon the socialistic tendencies of the age'.⁸³ Thus, reviewers perceived the comical portrayal of monarchy contained in the opera not as directed at the monarchical establishment, but at those who wished to 'entertain most comical notions of a Republican character'.⁸⁴ Ultimately, monarchy in this opera was interpreted by reviewers as something that carried with a crown 'trials and troubles' for the monarch, and as a necessary burden that must be born. The implicit message seems to be that monarchs held power but also carried the burdens of their people, and thus, should be supported, not contested.⁸⁵ The discourse of power displayed in this opera allowed the continued exertion of the power of the Crown and of the middle classes by bringing these two societal factions into alliance against other groups and points of resistance and by categorizing resistance and alternative modes of government, like Republicanism, as distinctly 'not British'.

Other reviewer discussions of the opera's portrayal of monarchy, and a final indicator of the ways that this relational discourse of power worked to bring about and continue an alliance between the establishment and the audience, appear in comments about its monarchical songs. "The Working Monarch" was described as 'a capital song', whilst Don Alhambra's song "There Lived A King" presented a 'whole series of musical jokes' which 'went off successively, like a sort of symphonic cracker, without disturbing the sober melody of the main theme'.⁸⁶ Even the radical *Sun* called "The Working Monarch" a 'capital skit on the duties of a monarch, with sweet and pleasing music'.⁸⁷ Yet, the majority of comments on the opera's monarchical songs came on the opera's most popular song, the song that detailed the performance of queenship. During the opera's debut, this was the song that 'the excited house encored, the pit emphatically demanding "All of it!" a request laughingly granted by Sir Arthur Sullivan'.⁸⁸ Another reviewer noted that "'A Right Down Regular Queen," produced quite a furore, at half-time the house in its buzz of conversation was loud in its encomiums of the piece'.⁸⁹ As another paper noted, throughout *The Gondoliers*, 'encores were very frequent,' and this particular song almost always gained a double encore.⁹⁰ Even in Dublin, where *The Gondoliers* was not well received due to

⁸³ "The New Gilbert Sullivan Opera," *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, December 14, 1889, 2326 edition, sec. News, R3213382349, British Library.

⁸⁴ "Comic Opera at the Athenium."

⁸⁵ "Comic Opera at the Athenium."

⁸⁶ "The 'Gondoliers' at the Savoy"; "'The Gondoliers' at the Savoy Theatre," *The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, December 9, 1889, 11009 edition, sec. News, R3214263599, 19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II.

⁸⁷ "The Gondoliers," December 3, 1889.

⁸⁸ "The 'Gondoliers' at the Savoy."

⁸⁹ "'The Gondoliers' at Swansea Theatre."

⁹⁰ "Her Majesty's Theatre: The Gondoliers," *The Dundee Courier and Argus*, June 12, 1890, 11523 edition, sec. Arts and Entertainment, R3209327857, British Library.

the much different discourse of power between the crown and the Irish, a 'Right Down Regular Queen' was better received than the rest of the opera.⁹¹ Both the Queen and audiences loved this specific song, although the question as to whether they interpreted its performance and satire differently remains unanswered, leaving room for a potential fracturing of this perceived consensus. Regardless, this correlation between monarchical and middle-class tastes indicates that the relational discourse of power held through *The Gondoliers* was not a discourse intended to change the status quo but rather to reinforce it, either through approbation or through silent criticism that released tensions rather than demanded change.

'The Gratifying Feeling That Our Duty Has Been Done'⁹²: Conclusions on *The Gondoliers*

The Gondoliers, through its plot and songs, was obviously most concerned with presenting monarchical power and performance. The relational discourse of power facilitated by this opera proves revealing, not for the sites of opposition which it uncovers, but for the alliance between Crown and audience that the opera's content and reception constructs and exposes. Within this discourse of power, it seems that an awareness of other possible sites of resistance helped to bring the Crown and its primarily middle-class audiences to a common understanding of how monarchy should be performed, of the obligations of monarchy, and of the dangers and foolishness of Republicanism. The performance of foreign and foolish monarchy in the opera, in the end, represented not a critique of monarchy as an institution but instead an inversion of proper British monarchy.

At the end of *The Gondoliers*, the performers on stage are not the only ones who acclaim and reaffirm the glories and merits of 'a royal crown and a golden throne'.⁹³ The performances of gender, power, and national identity both on stage and in the streets helped to cement the place of the crown and affirmed the performances of Britain's own monarchs. In line with the general trend of the 1880s towards a more nationalistic, imperialist discourse in which monarchy acted as an anchor for Britishness, Gilbert and Sullivan's text countered republican and anti-monarchical sentiment with a sentimental reminder of the benefits of maintaining the British status quo. Audiences, presented with queens performing much differently than their own and with the chaos of a society turned upside down, clapped along and cheered their own monarchs, whether in the theatre or not.

⁹¹ "'The Gondoliers' at the Gaiety," *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, April 8, 1890, sec. News, BC3204885115, British Library.

⁹² Sullivan, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*, 925.

⁹³ Sullivan, 967.

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