



Here is one more “Bab” drawing.

The dancers are dancing to the Four Seasons madrigal sung by a quartet in Act I. The lyrics end with:

Spring and summer pleasure you,  
Autumn, aye, and winter too —  
Every season has its cheer,  
Life is lively all the year!  
Fa la, la, etc.

Gilbert & Sullivan’s

# Ruddigore

Or, The Witch's Curse



A Guide for Young Savoyards

by Charles A. Miller

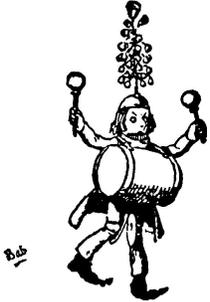
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# The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin

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**Bab drawings:** The pictures in this booklet are all by W.S. Gilbert himself. He drew them to illustrate the lyrics in *Ruddigore* and signed them with his childhood nickname *Bab* (he also illustrated his other operas). The picture above refers to the Act I song by Robin (Ruthven) in which he sings:

You must stir it and stump it,  
And blow your own trumpet,  
Or, trust me, you haven't a chance!

\* \* \* \* \*

This pamphlet was written by Charles A. Miller of New Market, Virginia. An active Savoyard when young, he is a retired college professor and the author of *Isn't That Lewis Carroll?* a guide to the mimsy words and frabjous quotations of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking-Glass*, and *The Hunting of the Snark*. The book is available from the author, who may be contacted at [npbook@shentel.net](mailto:npbook@shentel.net). He wishes to thank Ralph MacPhail, Jr., and Larry Shepley for their help.

surprise that the Murgatroyds are named Rupert, Roderic, and Ruthven. If you rrrroll the R's when you pronounce them, the words will last longer and be more scary.

**WORDS WITH THE LETTERS "ET" NEAR THE END:** "-Et" words like *operetta*, *libretto*, and *baronet* often refer to something smaller than the main word. An operetta is a small opera, a light opera, or a comic opera. A libretto is a little book. ("Libro" is the Spanish word for "book".) A baronet holds a lower rank than a baron. (What is a little cigar?)

## Notes on Singers and Songs

**THE NUMBER OF SINGERS:** In *Ruddigore* we hear solos, as when Rose sings about etiquette; duets, as when Robin and Richard sing about how to get a bride; a trio, when Sir Despard, Mad Margaret and Sir Ruthven/Robin sing "My eyes are fully open to my awful situation"; and a quartet, when four other leads in the operetta, Rose, Dame Hannah, Richard Dauntless, and Old Adam, sing about the seasons of the year. There are also choruses of bridesmaids, "bucks and blades," and the ghosts of the Murgatroyds.

**THE PITCHES OF THE SINGERS' VOICES:** High pitches are sung by women, lower pitches by men. From the highest to the lowest, the voices are soprano, mezzo-soprano (that means "middle soprano"), alto or contralto, tenor, baritone (it means "deep sounding"), and bass. In *Ruddigore* all the Murgatroyds sing baritone. The older women, Mad Margaret and Dame Hannah, sing mezzo-soprano. What voices do you think Rose Maybud and Richard Dauntless sing?

When it comes to voices, the word *top* has three different meanings: *high*, *best*, and *loud*, which can be explained by different questions. "Is that the top of your voice?" asks whether you are singing as high as you can without straining. "Is your voice in top shape?" asks whether your voice is in the best condition for singing; have you practiced well? "Do you have to sing at the top of your voice?" asks why you're singing so loud. Try to apply these meanings to the singers in *Ruddigore*.

**THE KIND OF SONG:** In *Ruddigore* we hear three kinds of songs that are typical of Gilbert & Sullivan. A **ballad** tells a long story, as when Dame Hannah explains the witch's curse, or Richard tells of his life at sea. A **madrigal** often tells of love and the out of doors and can include lines with only two lilting syllables. In the Four Seasons madrigal we hear lots of "fa la la la /lá fa la/lá." Madrigals are usually unaccompanied — singers but no instruments — but Sullivan did write music for this one. They can also be very complicated. The voices sing separate lines, but all at the same time.

The most well-known kind of song in Gilbert & Sullivan is the **patter song**, which is sung by any number of voices, sometimes so fast that the words can trip over each other. In Act I Richard and Robin sing in a moderate tempo about how to find a bride, "When you wish in the world to advance." But in Act II, Robin, Despard, and Margaret sing "My eyes are fully open" at a tongue-twisting clip. This is also a patter song that talks about itself:

This particularly **rapid**, unintelligible **patter**  
Isn't **generally heard**, and if it **is** it doesn't **matter!**

Understand these words, and you can say them very fast, pronouncing every syllable so that it can be grasped. You probably will find that it is not so very hard — to end up loving *Ruddigore*, a perfect Savoyard.

## More on Ruddigore

**THE SCENES AND THE UNSEENS:** It takes more people than the librettist, composer, conductor, instrumentalists, and actors to make *Ruddigore* a success on the stage. The main unseen, behind-the-scenes people for a production are the *stage director*, the *music director* (who often also acts as the conductor), and their assistants (often called *managers*), who make and carry out decisions on interpreting the operetta. For instance, should *Ruddigore* be set in 19<sup>th</sup> century England, when it was written, or in 21<sup>st</sup> century Texas, where it's being performed? The stage director (sometimes there is also a separate *choreographer*) also "blocks" the stage, deciding where and how the characters move and how they relate to each other. The directors discuss the interpretation of the operetta with *designers*. The *set designer* is responsible for the scenery, such as for the village of Rederring in Act I and for Ruddigore Castle in Act II. The sets are constructed by members of the *tech crew* who are good at carpentry and painting. The *lighting designer* is responsible for bringing sunshine to the village and gloom to the castle. If an audience can tell something about the characters in *Ruddigore* just by looking at them, that's because of the *costume designer*, who is helped by the *makeup designer*.

**THE SAVOY:** This was the theater in London where Gilbert and Sullivan operettas were performed. The members of the company were called **Savoyards**. So are fans of Gilbert and Sullivan today. If you like *Ruddigore* you can call yourself a Savoyard.

**W. S. GILBERT AND LEWIS CARROLL:** These two masters of humorous verse lived at the same time. But they had different personalities, wrote in different styles and for different audiences, and they didn't know each other. Gilbert was outgoing and public and wrote for adults – yet children have always been fans of the G&S operettas. Carroll was shy and private and wrote for children – yet adults have always liked *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. What would happen if a Murgatroyd met the Jabberwock?

### Notes on some words

**"OAKAPPLE" AS A CHIMERA:** What could sound more like the countryside than "Robin Oakapple," a name about a robin and an oakapple (which is a type of growth sometimes seen on oak trees)? Gilbert probably invented the name to suggest that Robin is two different people, which he is. He is a Murgatroyd who is trying to escape his curse by masquerading as a farm boy. In science, a plant with genes from more than one species is called a chimera (pronounced *kiméra*) after a monster in Greek mythology with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail. Robin Oakapple is a chimera, both in his last name and in his being two people at once.

**"OAKAPPLE" AS A VAMPIRE:** Gilbert did not invent "Ruthven," which is Robin's other name in *Ruddigore*. (Don't forget, the name is pronounced *Rivven*.) Ruthven was the name of a Scottish clan that went back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century it was the name of the first vampire in English literature. (In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Ruthven's literary descendant was Dracula.) Ruthven is therefore a good name for someone cursed by a witch. Which witch name would you rather have, that of a chimera or that of a vampire? For Ruthven/Oakapple, Gilbert chose both.

**THE 'R' WORDS:** "Rederring" and "Ruddigore" didn't exist until Gilbert made them up. The words and the family name "Murgatroyd" contain at least two R's, so it is no

## Gilbert & Sullivan's *Ruddigore* A Guide for Young Savoyards

QUIET! (she said quietly) The conductor is about to lead the orchestra in the overture. They're going to play some of the music from *Ruddigore*, the operetta that we're about to see. . . . QUIET! Later on we can applaud.

\* \* \* \* \*

For the audience, *Ruddigore* begins with the overture. But like all light operas, or operettas, it really began long before that. It began with the men who wrote the words and the music, two Englishmen named **William S. Gilbert** and **Arthur S. Sullivan**.

The words for *Ruddigore* were written by Gilbert, who lived from 1836 until 1911. The music was composed by Sullivan, who lived from 1842 until 1900. (When *Ruddigore* was written, Sullivan was "Sir Arthur S. Sullivan," meaning that he was specially honored by Queen Victoria for his contributions to England. Gilbert became "Sir William S. Gilbert" 20 years later.) In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in London, Gilbert and Sullivan collaborated on more than a dozen operettas. *Ruddigore* was first performed 120 years ago, in 1887.

Like all operettas *Ruddigore* has two kinds of words, which together are called the libretto, or the book. Some of the libretto is spoken, like the words in a play. But the words we remember best are the lyrics. The lyrics are the words that are set to music. As the librettist for *Ruddigore*, Gilbert was therefore also the operetta's lyricist.

Operettas have two kinds of music, too. One kind, which is sometimes called "pure" music, is played only by the orchestra, as in the overture for *Ruddigore*, or for the dances. The other kind is the music that Sullivan composed to Gilbert's lyrics. This music is sung by the soloists and the chorus, accompanied by the orchestra.

It was Gilbert who thought up the ideas for the operettas and brought them to Sullivan. As you can tell from its full title, *Ruddigore, or, The Witch's Curse*, the idea for *Ruddigore* is a scary one. Try saying it slowly in a scary voice:

### *The Witch's Curse*

But *Ruddigore* has a happy ending, and only some of the operetta is actually scary.

**This is the story:** Long, long ago, the first Baronet of the fishing village of Rederring (possibly named after a red herring), a man called Sir Rupert Murgatroyd, had persecuted witches. When one of the witches was about to be burned at the stake she uttered a curse on Sir Rupert and all the men in his family who came after him. Future baronets of Ruddigore had to commit a terrible crime every day of their lives, or else they would die a horrible death themselves.

Many generations of Murgatroyds, who came to be known as the Bad Baronets of Ruddigore, tried to stay alive by committing the crimes. But ultimately they all failed when they were overcome by guilt. They accepted their fate and died in agony. The portraits of the dead Murgatroyds were on display in Ruddigore Castle as a reminder to their descendants.

The most recent Murgatroyd to have died, or who was assumed to have died, was Sir Ruthven Murgatroyd. (Ruthven is pronounced *Rivven*.) When *Ruddigore* begins, Sir Ruthven's younger brother, Sir Despard Murgatroyd, has succeeded him as the bad baronet. Sir Despard is also desperate. "If only," he thinks to himself, "if only I can prove that I hold my title by mistake, then I can avoid a terrible death."

With the help of Richard Dauntless, an undaunted sailor whose ship has just docked at Rederring, Sir Despard's wish comes true. Richard, who is a foster brother of Sir Ruthven, tells Sir Despard that Sir Ruthven did not really die, but in order to escape the witch's curse, took on the name and looks of a completely different person, a local farmer named Robin Oakapple.

We now have to ask, "Aren't there any women and girls in *Ruddigore*?" The answer is "Yes, lots of them."

First, there is a chorus of bridesmaids, waiting around Rederring for a wedding they can participate in. Then there is Dame Hannah, a woman who was once in love with a Murgatroyd but got out of it when she learned of the witch's curse. Dame Hannah sings a creepy song about the curse. Next comes Hannah's niece, Rose Maybud, a beautiful girl and eligible bride, but also a very shy and proper young lady who doesn't know how to find a husband. She sings a song about etiquette. At the same time there is shy and proper Robin Oakapple, who would like to find a wife but also doesn't know how. Robin and Rose sing a duet about shyness.

At this point, Richard Dauntless, who is not shy at all, shows up and offers to speak to Rose on behalf of Robin. But when he sees the beautiful Rose, he proposes to her himself. Rose accepts. Robin, however, persuades her to change her mind. But just as the wedding is about to take place Richard spoils it by revealing that Robin is really the accursed Sir Ruthven Murgatroyd.

Rose now offers to marry the unaccursed Sir Despard. But Sir Despard declines and instead decides to marry Mad Margaret, a woman whom he had once loved but, as one of the crimes he committed in order to stay alive, had abandoned.

Act I of *Ruddigore* ends with Robin and Rose still single and unhappy.

In the orchestral introduction to Act II we hear the theme music of *Ruddigore*, just as we did in the overture to Act I. It is the music of the witch's curse. The act is set in the picture gallery of Ruddigore Castle, where Robin, who has resumed his title as Sir Ruthven, is commiserating his fate with his faithful servant, Old Adam. Richard shows up and with Robin's reluctant consent, again plans to marry Rose.

Just then, **the Murgatroyd ancestors step out of their picture frames . . . !** They march around the picture gallery singing a song that may remind you of Halloween, about ghosts and specters and how they lived their former lives under the witch's curse. They scold their relative, Sir Ruthven (Robin) for not committing enough vicious crimes of his own.

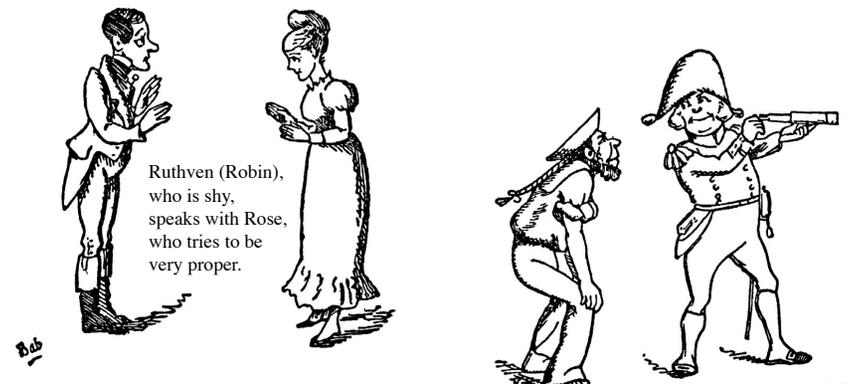
In the mayhem and confusion that ensues, Rose's Aunt, Dame Hannah, enters; she has been kidnapped as one of Sir Ruthven's crimes. She spots Sir Roderic Murgatroyd, a member of the family whom she had once planned to marry. The two recognize each other, and although they cannot do anything about it, they re-declare their love for each other. By this time, Sir Despard, who is no longer a cursed Murgatroyd, re-unites with Mad Margaret. Robin/Ruthven, however, realizing the fix he is now in, is joined by Sir Despard and Margaret in singing "My eyes are fully open to my awful situation."

Then Robin has a complicated idea for getting out of his situation. He will deliberately fail to commit a crime. Although this means that he is supposed to die because of the curse, it also means, because he has deliberately thought of causing his own death, that he has contemplated committing suicide. But contemplating suicide is the same as planning a murder, which is a crime. Therefore, Robin can commit a crime by doing nothing, just by imagining the crime. With this reasoning he stays alive and marries Rose. The same logic convinces Sir Roderic, who, coming alive again, embraces Hannah. They get married, too.

It is hard to say which is more tortured, the Murgatroyds who suffered from the witch's curse, or the reasoning by which Sir Ruthven, alias Robin, frees himself from the curse. But that's how W.S. Gilbert brings *Ruddigore* to a close.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now we can really applaud!! Wait! what happened to Richard Dauntless? Oh, him? He married one of the bridesmaids.



Ruthven (Robin), who is shy, speaks with Rose, who tries to be very proper.

Richard Dauntless is being told by his Captain that it is a "lubberly thing" to attack a French ship — "it's like hittin' of a gal."