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WAGNER IN ENGLAND: FOUR WRITERS BEFORE SHAW

by

THERESA MUIR

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1997

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In memory of Walter Gerboth.

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

WAGNER IN ENGLAND: FOUR WRITERS BEFORE SHAW

by

THERESA MUIR

Advisor: Professor L. Michael Griffel

This project examines Wagner's critical reception in 19th-century England, through a study of four writers: James W. Davison, Joseph Bennett, Francis Hueffer and William Ashton Ellis. These four represent the full range of Wagner reception in England during the composer's lifetime.

James W. Davison (1813-1885) was the music critic of *The Times* (London) from 1846 to 1878. Davison was long Wagner's adversary in the English press. In 1876, he attended the first *Ring* cycle in Bayreuth, and had a remarkable conversion. For the next several years, he supported Wagner's works, then mysteriously resumed a stance of robust ridicule.

Joseph Bennett (1831-1911) was the music critic of *The Daily Telegraph*. Bennett defended Wagner from irrational or uninformed attacks. Yet in his reviews of the works, Bennett seems not to have enjoyed or approved much that he actually heard.

Francis Hueffer (1843-88) succeeded Davison at the *Times*. He was the first writer in England to promote Wagner to the educated public. A medieval scholar as well as a musician, he responded to the rich complexity of Wagner's works, and was well equipped to explicate them.

William Ashton Ellis (1852?-1919) abandoned medicine for the study of Wagner. He founded and edited *The Meister*, the London Wagner Society's journal, wrote a massive English-language Wagner biography, and translated all of Wagner's prose writings.

These four critics' writings about Wagner reveal not only that the composer was the talk of the English musical scene for forty years before Shaw's *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1898), but also an evolution of artistic values in nineteenth-century England.

Acknowledgments

Professors Emeritii Siegmund Levarie and Sherman Van Solkema, and the late Professor Walter Gerboth of Brooklyn College, prepared me for advanced study with a music education that I proudly consider the equal or superior of any available. I cannot express what I owe them.

I am profoundly grateful to Professor L. Michael Griffel, who supervised this project with absolute integrity, sensitive commentary, enthusiasm, erudition and generosity.

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My sincere appreciation is due Professor Ora Frishberg Saloman, and Professor Robert Bailey of New York University, for their graciousness and flexibility, and for their valuable comments.

Professor Emeritus Joel Lester, now Dean of the Mannes College of Music, thanks for being extremely wise and very funny, and for keeping me in touch with the distant worlds of sonata forms and viola jokes while I was deep in research.

Thanks to Peg Rivers, Program Assistant, who presides over an unruly mob of scholar-gypsies, *prime donne*, and assorted itinerant musical characters. She should charge me rent for all the time I spent in her office, drinking coffee and bashing her poor

ears, while she undoubtedly had more important things to do.

I have been particularly fortunate in having the most understanding bosses and colleagues a graduate student could wish for: Provost Geoffrey Marshall and Associate Provost Pamela Reid, and their staffs; Professor Nancy Hager of Brooklyn College; Terence Ford, formerly of the Research Center for Musical Iconography. Thanks, also, to the Office of Financial Aid for their self-evident wisdom, and dramatic flair in riding to the rescue in the last reel.

I am grateful, too, to Professor Mimi Daitz of City College, Chair of our local AMS chapter, for tolerating this near-absentee Secretary-Treasurer during this last academic year, and for keeping my duties on the light side.

On a more personal level, others contributed simply by being my friends, sharing the journey and knowing the drill. I would have liked to include the names of everybody who shared a cup of coffee and an encouraging word. They know who they are. I would particularly like to mention Dr. Richard Kassel, who was a real lifesaver, lending me his computer when mine untimely closed its eye.

Sometimes when I walk into the third-floor reading room at the Lincoln Center Library, I still think I see him sitting there at the first table near the song index -- Frederic "Jake" Lowe (1944-88) -- *Leb 'wohl*.

Finally, special thanks to my mother and father, for their long suffering support, and to Edward Muir (Ph.D., 1995, New York University), my brother and friend.

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Note to the Reader

Translations

Translations of Wagner's writings are mine, unless there is a modern translation available, such as those included in Spencer, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, or when a translation was incorporated into a critic's writing.

The translations of Berlioz's letters are mine. Some letters are translated more literally in A. W. Ganz, *Berlioz in London*, but seem rather old-fashioned. I modernized some expressions that might otherwise be obscure.

Other issues

I have preserved the writers' variant spellings, *e.g.*, the frequently-used "Niblung" for "Nibelung." Of course, the writers' British spellings are preserved.

I have modernized some nineteenth-century peculiarities in the extracts. In the names of the operas, for example, the originals usually do not have German diacritics or use italics for titles. The original presses probably did not have the typography. In the originals, titles are usually offset with quotation marks, and sometimes not offset in any way. I have italicized the titles of the operas mentioned in the quotations, and added umlauts where appropriate. The originals are also frequently inconsistent in certain conventions of punctuation, particularly in the use of the "dash." For consistency's sake I have used the same form of the dash throughout.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview and Aims of the Study

The study that follows examines the writings about Richard Wagner by four English critics who were instrumental in driving the English discussion of Wagner in the second half of the nineteenth century. The writers are James W. Davison (1813-85), music critic of the *Times* (London) and editor of the popular weekly, the *Musical World*; Joseph Bennett (1831-1908), music critic of the *Daily Telegraph*; Francis Hueffer (1843-88), Davison's successor as critic of the *Times*; and William Ashton Ellis (1852?-1918), known as the translator both of Wagner's prose works and of the first two volumes of Glaserapp's biography, but less well known as the editor and principal contributor to *The Meister*, the quarterly publication of the London Wagner Society. All, with the exception of Ellis, were professional journalists, wrote regularly on all aspects of music for both specialized and general readerships, and were well known, respected, and highly influential in their time. Each was positioned to be of particular significance in establishing Wagner in English concert life and operatic repertory, and to initiate the English "conversation" about Wagner. Their names are rarely recognized now. ¹

¹ Two other writers who played major roles in the early English reception of Wagner should be mentioned. Henry Chorley (1808-72), the highly conservative music critic of the *Athenaeum*, was a strident opponent of Wagner, but did not live to see or hear

The relationship of the English people to Wagner has been complicated by the musical politics of the nineteenth century and by the two World Wars in the twentieth. Yet, during the years since 1876, the United Kingdom has sent more music-lovers to the Bayreuth Festival than any other nation, and now, with the United States, may fairly be said to lead the world in Wagner scholarship. George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)²² and Ernest Newman (1868-1959) were the earliest writers generally associated with English Wagner studies and commentary. Shaw's *The Perfect Wagnerite*, probably the most recognized English-language, pre-twentieth century Wagner study, appeared in 1898, when Wagner's works were well established in the English operatic and concert repertoires. Newman's biography of Wagner was standard for most of this century.

Since Newman, British writers and thinkers have taken the lead in the major tasks of explaining Wagner. The sixties brought Robert Donington's innovative Jungian interpretation of *The Ring*. Deryck Cooke's brilliant and concise notes on the *Ring* explained the gigantic work to millions of Anglophones in the pioneering first complete recording of the cycle. Cooke also attempted the first comprehensive, integrated study of the entire *Ring*.³ The long list of names of English scholars who have since made

Wagner's most mature music-dramas. Edward Dannreuther (1844-1905), the German expatriate pianist, was the first president of the London Wagner Society and an energetic promoter of Wagner. His writings did not have nearly as wide a circulation as those of the four selected writers. The writings of these two critics, however, should certainly be sought out for further studies of Wagner's early English reception.

² Shaw would probably have wanted it mentioned that he was a native of Ireland.

³ Deryck Cooke, *I Saw the World End* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), left unfinished at his death in 1976. Cooke's essays on *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* are highly valuable, especially for his examination of Wagner's sources and his

distinguished contributions to Wagner study includes Barry Millington, Stewart Spencer, Bryan Magee, John Deathridge, Roger Hollinrake, Lucy Beckett, Robin Holloway, Michael Tanner, Ronald Taylor, Andrew Porter, Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Geoffrey Skelton, Iris Gillespie, John Warrack, Arnold Whittall, and Christopher Wintle. Furthermore, the English journal *Wagner* consistently offers incisive interdisciplinary scholarship and commentary.

This study seeks to demonstrate that Shaw's well known advocacy of Wagner was preceded by almost forty years of lively, heated, and deeply felt discussion among English music critics, as represented here by the four selected writers, and show that English engagement with Wagner dates back to a relatively early phase of Wagner's creative activity. I also wish to draw general conclusions about the nature and the development of Wagner reception among English musical writers and critics from 1855 to the decade after his death. Finally, the topic responds -- in a limited way -- to the need both for addressing the musical culture of nineteenth-century England and for the engagement of nineteenth-century periodical literature as an important source of access to this culture.

Current State of Research

Scholarship in English Wagner reception is sparse, especially considering the wide-ranging implications of the topic and the abundance of primary source material. Anne Dzamba Sessa's *Richard Wagner and the English* and her article "At Wagner's confrontation with traditional motivic analysis.

Shrine: British and American Wagnerians”⁴ concentrate on Wagner’s influence among a group of English intelligentsia from the late nineteenth century to World War I. There are a number of studies of Wagner’s influence on English literature: namely, Raymond Furness’s *Wagner and Literature* (1982); Stoddard Martin’s *Wagner to **The Waste Land**: A Study of the Relationship of Wagner to English Literature* (1982); William Blissett’s “Wagnerian Fiction in English” (1963), “D. H. Lawrence, D’Annunzio, Wagner” (1966), and “Wagner in *The Waste Land*” (1978);⁵ Timothy Martin’s *Joyce and Wagner: A Study of Influence* (1991); and John di Gaetani’s *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel* (1978).⁶ At the present time there seems to be no systematic study of Wagner’s musical influence among English composers, nor any full-length study of critical reception, programming and audiences, or performance traditions in England.

There are a number of reasons for this situation. One of them is simply the

⁴ Anne Dzamba Sessa, “At Wagner’s Shrine: British and American Wagnerians,” in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. David Large and William Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 246-77.

⁵ William Blissett, “Wagnerian Fiction in English,” *Criticism* 5 (1963), 239-60; “D. H. Lawrence, D’Annunzio, Wagner,” *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 7 (1966), 21-46; “Wagner and *The Waste Land*,” in *The Practical Vision: Essays in English Literature in Honour of Flora Roy*, ed. Jane Campbell and James Doyle (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978), 71-85.

⁶ T. S. Eliot’s use of quotations and imagery from *Tristan und Isolde*, the *Ring*, and *Parsifal* in *The Waste Land* has provoked much commentary. In addition to the above-named studies, there are also: Jonathan A. Bates, “Berlioz in *The Waste Land* (and *Tristan* beside It)?” *Notes and Queries* (August 30, 1983), 4, 331; Raymond J. S. Grant, “On *The Waste Land*, Line 8: ‘Coming over the Starnbergersee’,” *Yeats-Eliot Review* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1988), 93-105; Philip Waldron, “The Music of Poetry: Wagner in *The Waste Land*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 18 (Fall 1983), 421-34; Sarah Wintle, “Wagner and *The Waste Land* - Again,” *English: The Journal of the English Association* 38, no. 162 (Autumn, 1989), 227-50.

enormous size of the field of Wagner reception. While the bibliography is already imposing, there are still many areas of importance which have not yet been addressed. Moreover, the study of Wagner reception is not a post-mortem; Wagner belongs to the class of composers whose public reception is continuing and developing in our own time.

Another reason, having nothing to do with Wagner *per se*, is musicology's reluctance to confront Victorian England as a musical culture. Leanne Langley writes:

Music historians have traditionally avoided Victorian England, that dark and weedy patch in the garden of European music. Other historians – of literature, politics, economics, religion, and society – have embraced it as one of the richest, most exciting (and self-contradictory) periods any scholar could desire. They have explored with profit the Victorian's vitality and confusion, while we in music have been content to accept, naively, that little of interest happened in England between 1837 and 1901.⁷

It is indisputable that virtually every other discipline descends eagerly on Victorian England for its wealth of social, economic, and artistic activity. Langley writes that musicology is “a discipline that still prefers music monuments for study and classification of ideas to the less certain – more worldly – synthesis of music and ideas.” In *Wagner Nights*, Joseph Horowitz's study of Wagner reception in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the author also suggests that musicology has historically been a composer-centered discipline, and that cultures without a dominant composer are generally neglected.⁸ The English themselves betray a certain

⁷ Leanne Langley, “The Musical Press in Nineteenth-Century England,” *Notes* 46 (March 1990), 583-92.

⁸ Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 3.

sheepishness about this aspect of their culture; William Ashton Ellis called his country “the Cinderella of musical nations.”⁹

Yet without a commanding composer until Elgar (1857-1934), the Victorians had a thriving musical culture. They were great critics, teachers, choral singers, orchestral players, publishers – possibly the most avid society of musical consumers ever known.¹⁰

We often need to be reminded that, without television and other electronic media, the prosperous classes relied on reading and music-making to pass their hours of leisure. Ambitious publishers and new, “cheap” printing methods made a far larger repertory available to more people than ever before.¹¹ This was the great age of the musical amateur. It was also the great age of the magazine, serial, and newspaper – general, or dedicated to virtually every aspect of life and culture. The “action” is in this immense serial press, for the study of practically any aspect of Victorian society. Just as novels appeared serialized in quarterly, monthly, or weekly journals, serials also furnished piano music, songs, and chamber music. Journals such as the *Musical Times*,¹² the *Musical Examiner*, the *Musical World*, the *Musical Monthly Review*, and the *New Quarterly*

⁹ William Ashton Ellis, “The Eighties,” *The Meister* 3 (February 13, 1890), 3.

¹⁰ “. . . in some ways London’s concert life was more advanced than that of either Paris or Vienna.” Langley, “The Musical Press in Nineteenth-Century England,” 584.

¹¹ Joseph Bennett, *A Short History of Cheap Music* (London: Novello, Ewer, 1887). For the Victorians, “cheap” was a term of praise.

¹² The *Musical Times*, originally the *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, was founded in 1842, and is the oldest continuously published music journal now extant. It was established as a journal for choral singing teachers. After the Novellos purchased it in 1844, they gradually converted it to a more general format, with reports and commentary on contemporary musical events and developments.

Musical Review (and literally dozens more) featured performance reviews and serialized extensive articles and essays.

Complicating the situation is the great number of general art and culture magazines such as the *Athenaeum*, the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Examiner*, and the *Nineteenth Century*. These often carried sophisticated and professional musical essays. Langley writes of the “serious articles on Beethoven, Wagner, Italian opera and national music alongside articles in history and political economy, literary criticism, and fiction.”¹³ Newspapers often had regular musical columns along with their performance reviews. Moreover, the English have never considered the reading of print media to be a spectator sport. The inevitable columns of Letters to the Editor were filled with various and spirited responses from professionals and amateurs alike, and debate between correspondents often continued for several issues. In these columns, the reader can often find the most pressing concerns of the musicians and musical public of the time. All of this valuable material is often hidden from the music scholar, as it lies outside the range of our usual bibliographic resources.¹⁴

¹³ Langley, “The Musical Press in Nineteenth-Century England,” 587.

¹⁴ A select bibliography for nineteenth-century English periodicals and musical culture: Richard A. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 318-47; *The British Union Catalogue of Music Periodicals*, comp. Anthony Hodges and ed. Raymond McGill (London: Library Association, 1985); Leanne Langley, *The English Musical Journal in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1983); “The Musical Press in Nineteenth-Century England,” *Notes* 46 (March 1990), 583-92; Nicholas Temperley, “The Lost Chord,” in *The Lost Chord: Essays on Victorian Music*, ed. Nicholas Temperley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 7-23; *Union List of Victorian Serials: A Union List of Selected Nineteenth-Century British Serials Available in United States and Canadian Libraries*, ed. Richard D. Fulton and C.

The sheer volume of writing over so wide and scattered an area is a challenge, to say the least, to bibliographic control. Although the *RIPM* project is providing scholars with tools for easing access to this mountain of source material, it is still in a relatively early stage.¹⁵ In the meantime, Langley suggests, “. . . far from avoiding this patch of the garden, we ought to get in the middle and dig.”¹⁶ Limiting one’s field, as I have in this study, somewhat ameliorates the challenge.

Sources and Method

The primary sources for this project are a selection of writings on Wagner by James W. Davison, Joseph Bennett, Francis Hueffer, and William Ashton Ellis, largely drawn from periodical literature, including newspapers, and general culture and musical journals. These writings, which are cited in the bibliography, extend from 1855, the year of Wagner’s first conducting engagement in England, to the mid 1890s.

The selection of Davison’s writings includes his *Times* and *Musical World* reviews of Wagner’s 1855 London concerts, as well as his writings in both venues about

M. Cole (New York: Garland, 1985); *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society*, ed. J. Donn Vann and Rosemary Van Arsdel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); *Victorian Periodicals Review* (journal); *The Waterloo Directory of Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*: Phase I, ed. Michael Wolff *et al* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1976); *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*, 5 vols., ed. Walter E. Houghton. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966-89).

¹⁵ Of the English musical journals that fall into, or border, the period of this study, *RIPM* has so far indexed the complete runs of the *Musical Examiner* (1842-44), the *Musical Standard* (1862-71), and the *Musical Times* (1844-1900).

¹⁶ Langley, “The Musical Press in Nineteenth-Century England,” 584.

the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876 and the London Wagner Festival in 1877.

Of Bennett's writings, I examine his *Letters from Bayreuth*, a collection of essays and his reviews of the 1876 Bayreuth *Ring*; excerpts from his memoirs; reviews of Wagner performances in London in the 1870s and '80s from the *Daily Telegraph* and *Musical World*; and his 1883 obituary of Wagner in the *Musical World*.

Hueffer is represented here by essays on Wagner that were originally published in the 1870s in the *Fortnightly Review* and the *New Quarterly Review*; his reviews of the 1876 Bayreuth *Ring* in the *Examiner* and extracts from his book *Half a Century of Music in England* (1889).

Ellis's journal *The Meister* (1888-95) is the main source for his writings, specifically his essays on selected music dramas. I also draw upon a *Meister* article by another author, William C. Ward. This article is particularly revealing, both of Ellis's editorial "personality," and his attitude toward Wagner.

For the writers' biographies, I have relied on primary source material whenever available. Bennett wrote his own memoirs. Davison was the subject of a thick biography by his son, and Hueffer's son, the novelist Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939), wrote about his father in his own autobiographical works. Ellis's life had remained obscure until the publication of a pair of articles by David Cormack in the English journal *Wagner* (1993-94).¹⁷

Each of these four writers occupies an entire chapter, and I have sought to

¹⁷ David Cormack, "Faithful, All Too Faithful: A Study of William Ashton Ellis," *Wagner* 14 (September 1993), 104-37; "William Aston Ellis: Completing the Picture," *Wagner* 15 (May 1994), 62-68.

maintain a consistency of presentation in order to concentrate fully upon the distinct personality and critical approach of each writer. When appropriate, I invoke contemporary writers, and supplement my commentary with such modern secondary literature as may provide historical and critical context or orient the reader with reference to Wagner's biography.

Goals for Future Studies

While circumscribed, the study suggests extensive possibilities for further research. As noted above, the relationship of the English to Wagner has been a particularly fruitful one, producing a wealth of modern commentary and scholarship; the roots of this relationship are well worth exploring. Victorian England was the world's wealthiest, most powerful society, an engine of enormous creative energy. Such a society's encounter with the late nineteenth century's dominant musical artist cannot fail to be of interest. Indeed, during the period delineated in this study, discussion of Wagner was rife in the musical journals. Increased access to this source material should enable us to trace trends and developments in reception, and identify more of the personalities who took part in the discussion.

For example, I have addressed only a specific type of the material contained in *The Meister*: articles that demonstrate Ellis's interpretations of the operas, and his editorial practices in connection with essays by other writers. A comprehensive study of *The Meister* and the attitudes it communicated would be a welcome addition to Wagner studies, as Ellis intended *The Meister* as a virtual Bible or handbook of English Wagner-

ism. As such, the journal transmits a number of the movement's "articles of faith": the view of Wagner as a philosopher, poet, teacher, and interpreter of the world's store of metaphysical wisdom; the importance of Wagner's relationship to Schopenhauer; the defense of Wagner from charges of immorality, irresponsibility, and lawlessness; and the "mission" of translating all of Wagner's prose into English. All of this is filtered through a peculiarly English sensibility that might be characterized as "literary."

Returning to the wider subject of nineteenth-century print journals, both musical and general, one learns that they provide an extremely sensitive barometer of attitudes toward Wagner. In fact, they give the most immediate evidence of the English attitudes toward any major musical figure of the period: who was in or out of vogue, who was creating a sensation, and why. Further, they afford minute access to the concerns and interests of musicians and the musical public. Wagner may have seized the music world's imagination to an unusual degree, but he -- and other composers -- shared space with such issues as whether there was a native English school of composing; whether or not English musicians were superior to others (particularly Germans); and a vastly overriding discussion of the merits of German music and musicians, and whether attention to them was deleterious to the development of native English music and musicians. Sociologists of music would be gratified by the wealth of discussion of concert life and practices, as well as of such debates as the ongoing one over the merits of "lady" musicians and composers.

In all, studies of the reception of any major composer by a society as vital as Victorian England is of considerable significance. They augment our understanding of

the reception of great art in the nineteenth century, and involve the rediscovery of a dynamic and neglected culture – or a neglected facet of a much studied one – in which people participated in musical life with enviable energy and passion.

The Beginning: Wagner in England 1855 - ca. 1890

Wagner's first appearance in the British press occurred as early as May 1833, in the *Harmonicon's* "News from Leipzig": "A symphony of Richard Wagner, scarcely twenty years of age, which was much and deservedly applauded." In 1842, Wagner's name appeared once again, in the *Musical World* and the newly founded *Musical Examiner*, with reports from Dresden on *Rienzi* (based on a novel by the English writer Bulwer-Lytton); the *Examiner* reported that the opera "played twice a week to crowded houses."¹⁸

In 1855, a peculiar chain of circumstances led to Wagner's engagement as conductor for the season of the Philharmonic Society. He was little known except by the international community of musicians who had settled in London; and even then, he was better known for confused, second-hand aphorisms from his polemical writings than for any of his music.

The Society hired Wagner almost blindly, assured by several musicians that he would be a competent conductor. Moreover, they hoped that the controversy trailing him would add an agreeable *frisson* of publicity to the season. There were eight concerts,

¹⁸ All cited in Percy Scholes, *The Mirror of Music: The Story of The Musical Times 1844-1954*, 1 (London: A. Novello, 1947), 251-52.

featuring Mozart and Beethoven symphonies, opera arias, Mendelssohn's "Hebrides" Overture, and, to honor his hosts, some English works. There were also excerpts from *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*.

Wagner's season with the Philharmonic was almost universally dismissed by the London press, which followed the lead of J. W. Davison, the powerful music critic of the *Times* and editor of the popular *Musical World*. Wagner's written treatment of Mendelssohn, and his proposals for reforming the operatic stage, had already sent this critic into transports of outrage. He witnessed Wagner's well-known removal of his gloves following the performance of the "Hebrides," and he heard little to relish in Wagner's own music. Davison even took offense at Wagner conducting from memory, dismissing it as mere arrogance.

In June 1855, Wagner made another in a seemingly endless chain of welcome escapes. Although he had acquired a few supporters, enjoyed some conversations with Berlioz (who was also in London, conducting the New Philharmonic), and accomplished important work on *Die Walküre*; he was nevertheless relieved to get away. Speaking no English, he had a difficult time with the orchestra, and was frustrated and disappointed by the press. Wagner bitterly suggested that the problem was that he had neglected to pay Davison – literally – the proper "respects." No Wagner opera was performed in England until 1870.

In the meantime, August Manns,¹⁹ who conducted the Crystal Palace Orchestra

¹⁹ August Manns (1825-1907), German-born conductor, established and conducted the "Saturday Concerts" at the Crystal Palace (1855-1901). Manns used his concerts to introduce works of Wagner, Liszt, Schumann, Schubert, and Berlioz.

beginning in October 1855, included excerpts from *Lohengrin* and *Rienzi* from the first weeks of his tenure. He would program “The Entry of the Master Singers” in 1868.

It was during 1868 that a group of musicians began meeting to play and discuss music that was considered *avant-garde* and rarely performed in England. They called themselves “The Working Men’s Society,” and included Karl Klindworth (1830-1916), Edward Dannreuther (1844-1905), Walter Bache (1842-1888), who was considered the foremost English authority on Liszt, and Alfred Hipkins (1826-1903). They championed late Beethoven (which still did not have a wide audience), Schumann, Liszt, and Berlioz. The “Working Men’s Society” formed the core of what later became the largest and most active Wagner Society outside of Germany. Dannreuther was its first president.

The year 1870 saw the first complete performance of a Wagner opera in England: *Der fliegende Holländer*, sung in Italian as “L’Olandese Dannato,” at Drury Lane. In 1873, the first public concert sponsored by the London Wagner Society presented the *Tristan* prelude. That same year, Henry Wylde’s (1822-1890) New Philharmonic presented the first complete performance of *Lohengrin* in concert form. Finally, 1875 saw the first complete *Lohengrin* at Covent Garden in Italian; Emma Albani sang Elsa before the Prince and Princess of Wales, among others. *Lohengrin* had first been performed under Liszt in Weimar in 1850. *Lohengrin* thus reached London twenty years later.

In 1876, Covent Garden put on *Tannhäuser* in Italian, with Albani as Elisabeth. This was also the year of the much-anticipated premiere of the complete *Ring des Nibelungen* at Bayreuth. A full complement of Britons made the pilgrimage:

Wagner partisans, the critics, and the curious.

In 1877, Wagner returned to England in triumph, and conducted a series of acclaimed concerts at the Albert Hall. This was quickly followed by English premieres of the *Siegfried Idyll* (1879), *Rienzi* (1879), the *Ring*, *Tristan und Isolde*, and *Die Meistersinger* (all 1882). A concert version of *Parsifal* (staging the work outside Bayreuth was forbidden) was presented at the Albert Hall in 1884. With the 1880s, Wagner was firmly established in the London concert and opera repertories.

This, then, was the position of Wagner in England. It was to this series of events that Davison, Bennett, Hueffer, and Ellis responded. At the same time, these four writers influenced attitudes and events. In the succeeding chapters, they shall speak for themselves.



CHAPTER TWO
JAMES W. DAVISON



Illus. 1.
"Mumbo" and "Jumbo." Davison used these engravings of two apes to mock modern music and its proponents.

CHAPTER TWO

JAMES W. DAVISON

What, asks my final chapter, has the Englishman got which nobody else has got – or conversely, does he lack which everybody else possesses? . . . What then distinguishes Britain from the rest of the world on the psychological surface? A sense of humour which defends against emotionalism, and generally, against the primitive unconscious, as well as a high level of spontaneous morality, of elementary decency. Our musical anti-Wagnerian is beginning to make sense: Wagner's discoveries include that repressed, unconscious "evil" (in our conscious's language) whose existence in himself one type of characteristic Englishman wishes to deny, and against which he humourously defends himself, as Britten does in *Albert Herring*. In order to understand Wagner's music, we have to submit to his skilful, often downright magical attempt to make us identify, for the duration of the performance, with the very unconscious evil whose nature he shows us – identify with the support of the intense emotion needed for an identification if it is to prove psychological reality. This many an English musician is simply not prepared to do: he defends himself against the emotional onslaught, against the threat of the repressed unconscious – often with the help of his indispensable sense of humour, whose victim Wagner tends to be in countless English texts.¹

James William Davison (1813-85) [Illus. 2] was a public man, comfortable on a public stage. As the only music writer for the *Times of London*, and as the editor of the *Musical World*, he was the most powerful music critic in England for more than forty

¹ Hans Keller, "Wagner and England," *Opera* (1983), 1292.



Illus. 2.
James W. Davison in 1871.

years. He used *The Musical World* as his personal bailiwick in which to indulge his playful, undergraduate humor. If the *Times* was Davison's sounding board for his more serious critical statements, the *Musical World* was his playground.

The primary account of Davison's life, a good-humored biography written by his son, Henry Davison, is sketchy with regard to dates; the exact dates of some important occurrences in Davison's life remain vague, and there are no footnotes for many of the quotations.² The younger Davison's approach is expansive, filled with anecdotes, letters, and undated excerpts from his father's writings, which tend to overwhelm the narration of the facts of Davison's life. The son's portrait is predictably affectionate, but he distances himself from some of his father's more dogmatic pronouncements and peculiarities. Moreover, although he gives the impression that Davison was utterly converted to Wagner after Bayreuth, Davison's own writings tell a more complex story.

A more recent and less sympathetic work, *The Music Monster* by Charles Reid,³ takes a cynical view of Davison and highlights his character flaws. This book was written as an entertainment, and although its bibliography is useful, many assertions go undocumented. The author puts the worst possible construction on certain events and issues in Davison's life, such as the latter's reputation for taking bribes. Reid also puts forward a theory that Davison deliberately interfered in the developing friendship of Wagner and Berlioz when both composers were in England in 1855.

² Henry Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner, being the Memoirs of J. W. Davison, Forty Years Music Critic of the Times* (London: Wm. Reeves, 1912).

³ Charles Reid, *The Music Monster: A Biography of James William Davison, Music Critic of The Times of London, 1846-78* (London: Quartet Books, 1984).

Davison was a vigorous supporter of native English composers such as William Sterndale Bennett (1816-75) and George Alexander Macfarren (1813-87), and frequently railed at the British public's preference for foreign-born musicians. Yet he loved Handel, Beethoven, Mozart, and Gluck. He had a special affection for Dussek, for him a badge of exceptional connoisseurship. Living (and some dead) composers who were not English often had a harder time with him. He worshipped Mendelssohn, loved Rossini, disliked Schumann, Liszt, Verdi, and even Brahms. He alternately loved and scorned Meyerbeer, and attacked Berlioz despite their friendship. His favorite performer (besides his wife, see below) was probably the violinist Joseph Joachim (1831-1907), who was his lifelong friend, and over whom he gushed endlessly in the *Musical World*. He was responsible for the long-lived damage to the English perception of Schubert and Chopin⁴ that has only recently been undone; and, of course, he was merciless to Wagner.

Davison's lifespan (1813-85) paralleled Wagner's. He was born on October 5, in Bloomsbury. He had a club foot (which caused him particular problems at Bayreuth). His mother, Maria Duncan Davison, was a noted actress. Little is known of James Davison, his father. Miss Duncan was well known for playing trouser roles, and for decorating the trousers to mixed adulation and scandal. She retired from the stage when she married, but imbued her two sons with a love of the theater and music.

Davison met the composers Bennett and Macfarren while they were all still

⁴ Davison's dislike of Chopin also had to do with Mendelssohn. When Mendelssohn died in 1847, an invitation to pay him tribute was passed among "les musiciens allemandes de Paris," and went to Chopin. The extremely touchy and proud Chopin was insulted at being taken for German, and responded to that effect. The almost equally touchy Davison perceived an insult to Mendelssohn, and never forgave Chopin.

schoolboys, and they remained lifelong friends. Davison never attended a conservatory or earned a university degree. He began piano lessons with his mother, then excelled in intensive private studies of piano, harmony, and composition. As a young man, he composed so many overtures that it became a joke among his circle of friends, who called him “Overture Jim.” He composed songs throughout his life.

In 1833, his first essays and reports appeared in the *Musical Examiner*, where he quickly became a regular writer. In 1836, he and Sterndale Bennett met Mendelssohn in Düsseldorf, where the older composer received them warmly. The two young men were star-struck, and remained devout Mendelssohnians ever after. Back in London, in 1842, they received unwelcome attention for rowdily hissing a Thalberg solo which followed Mendelssohn on a Philharmonic programme.⁵ Not long afterward, Davison attacked Thalberg in print in the *Musical Examiner*.⁶ Ironically, the pianist Arabella Goddard (1838-1922), whom he later married, studied with Thalberg before becoming Davison’s *protégée*. When she made her world tour in 1873-76, she featured a group of Thalberg’s fantasias on the program.

In 1842, Davison joined the *Musical World*, which had been founded in 1836 by Alfred Novello.⁷ It was a weekly “sheet,” with a mix of reviews, articles, and lighter

⁵ *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 41-2; *The Music Monster*, 15. The plot thickened: On the following morning, the papers were full of denunciations of the two insolent young composers. Mendelssohn was rehearsing his D minor piano concerto, when the two hoodlums were spotted by the orchestra, who angrily hissed and shouted “Toss ‘em out!”

⁶ J. W. Davison, *Musical Examiner* (December 18, 1842), 15-16.

⁷ Alfred Novello (1810-96): son of Vincent Novello (see chapter 3); second generation of great English music-publishing family.

material on music, a format that suited Davison well. He became editor of the serial in 1843, and remained there for the rest of his life. He joined the staff of the *Times* in 1846. Over the years, Davison also contributed to the *Graphic*, the *Telegraph*, the *Musical Times*, and other papers and journals.

Perhaps the greatest of Davison's idols and causes was his own wife, the pianist Arabella Goddard [Illus. 3], whom he married in 1859, after many years of overseeing her development. He was forty-five; she was twenty-one. Goddard was a fearless and formidable pianist, having introduced the late Beethoven sonatas to the English public while still in her teens.⁸ She was the most widely traveled English musician of her day; Joseph Bennett (1831-1911) called her "our leading English pianist" and an artist "at whose hands, nothing taken into them ever suffered."⁹ Before their marriage, Davison touted his *protégée* at every opportunity. After their marriage, Davison continued reviewing her concerts, and awarding them raves.¹⁰

Davison was touchy about Goddard's reception by other critics, often challenging reviews that were not as enthusiastic as his always were:

⁸ According to Reid, Davison encouraged his pupil to master the five last sonatas, which had never been heard publicly in England before, with the exception of a single performance of the *Hammerklavier*. *The Music Monster*, 49-50. Reid is partially confirmed in *Grove's Dictionary* (1966), which states that in 1857-58 Goddard played Beethoven's opp. 101, 106, 109, and 110.

⁹ Joseph Bennett, *Forty Years of Music 1865-1905* (London: Methuen & Co., 1908), 149, 348.

¹⁰ Bennett reports that when Bülow was in England, he did not call upon Davison, as was customary, because he had heard that "Davison never praised any pianist except his own wife." *Forty Years of Music, 1865-1905*, 25.



Illus. 3.

a) *Above*, Arabella Goddard as a young woman.

b) *Below*, Goddard in later life.

Will you kindly let me know what would be your terms to give Mrs. Davison instruction as to how Schubert's Fantaisie-Sonate in G should be played? I see you admit that the "execution" is good, but of course a mere mechanist ("merus mechanus") would be only too glad to know how to add to her mechanism something of the *souffle* of poetical inspiration. Would you, like a good soul, inform Mrs. D. of the true "reading" (a capital word) and make her happy, as well as
 Yours faithfully,
 HER HUSBAND

PS I am really distressed that, at her age, and with such long experience, she has not yet found out how to "read" in the proper sense, a work of the great masters. Do give us your invaluable counsel, because, perhaps then, when she has reached the age of eighty, she may be able to "read" a phrase in such a manner that will please you. She would then be able to die peacefully and with no great weight upon her conscience. If Tausig weren't dead, and if Rubinstein and Bülow were not such formidable key-splitters, and if Abbé Liszt hadn't composed "Elizabeth," I would write to one of *them*. Wagner, we know, looks upon the piano as "hammermusik" (a compliment to his friend Liszt), but under the circumstances, I entreat you of your artistic nobility, to say -- "how much a lesson?"¹¹

Goddard traveled widely during her career. She even undertook a three-year world tour in 1873-76, which included Australia, New Zealand, and the Americas. Despite Davison's enthusiastic advocacy of her career, and two children, they do not seem to have had a day-in-day-out marriage. He lived in rented rooms in London for most of his married life, while she toured more frequently than she was at home.

Davison was the first *Times* music critic to have been trained for a musical career, rather than a well-versed amateur. For most of his years at the *Times*, his editor, John T.

¹¹ *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 258-59.

Delane, exercised a restraining hand with dry humor:

My dear Sir,
Don't you think you abuse the practice of writing in parentheses? You make of them, as it were, so many a-sides to your readers, and it gives me the idea that you are perpetually winking at them. A wink now and then is all very well, but it is an artifice that should only be resorted to sparingly.

Yours faithfully, John T. Delane¹²

My dear Sir,
It makes my head swim to try to follow your involutions in the enclosed item, and as I don't want to drive the musical public more mad than they already are, I beg you to simplify it and oblige-

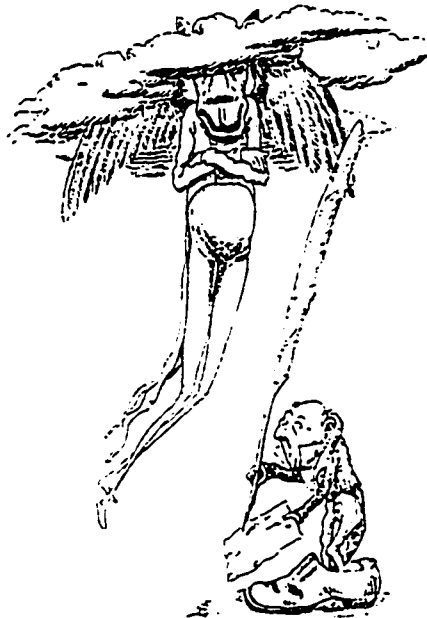
Yours ever faithfully, John T. Delane¹³

If Davison restrained his sense of mischief in the *Times*, he let it run wild in the *Musical World*, along with the occasional opinion piece on this or that musical development (usually one of which he disapproved). Davison filled the *Musical World* with inside jokes, incomprehensible to any but his staff or cronies, and sometimes incomprehensible to anyone but himself; there were also wild caricatures by his friend Charles Lyall [Illus. 4], and the abstruse ramblings of a group of characters with peculiar names, called the "Old Muttonian Society."¹³ The Muttonians usually served as mouthpieces for

¹² *Ibid.*, 325.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹³ The Muttonians, who were depicted by Charles Lyall's cartoons, bore such Davisonian names as Owain Ap Mutton, Otto Beard, Drinkwater Hard, Major Tempest, Theophilus Queer, Abraham Sadoke Silent, Lady Fitzbattleaxe, Septimus Wind, Professor Fourlegs, and Dr. Chidley Pidding. The leader, Owain Ap Mutton, Davison's own favorite mouthpiece, appeared in Lyall's drawings as a long-legged individual with the head of a sheep. Most of the Muttonians spoke for Davison himself. A few concealed other



Illus. 4.

a) *Above*, Davison in two moods by Charles Lyall.

b) *Below*, "Owain Ap Mutton." Davison's alter-ego, by Charles Lyall.

this or that opinion, idle thought, or exotic witticism of the editor himself, and few people actually found them charming besides Davison himself. The level-headed Joseph Bennett often begged Davison to ditch the Muttonians. Many correspondents were frustrated when their earnest inquiries were answered with a facetious or cryptic Muttonian reply; or if not actually Muttonian, then in a decidedly Muttonian spirit.¹⁴

Davison also frequently reprinted essays by other writers in the *Musical World* when he felt that a subject demanded attention, but not necessarily his own effort. This would often be the case with Wagner. Instead of wasting time writing on Wagner himself, when he felt that he had long since made himself clear, he would publish Hanslick, under the peremptory title “Eduard Hanslick Speaks,” as if the Austrian’s utterances were carved in stone tablets (particularly when they agreed with Davison’s own opinions).

writers, such as Flamborough Head, who was the Muttonian alter ego of George Grove (1820-1900).

¹⁴ Ferdinand Praeger (1815-91); the unreliable Wagner biographer (see chapter 5 below) had such a frustrating experience with the *Musical World*’s editor; in March 1855, he wrote furiously to the *Musical World*: “Sir – Several times of late you have done me the distinguished honour of mentioning my name in connection with that of Richard Wagner and that of his ‘books.’ It is the fact of having read those books that convinces me that Wagner himself is entirely a stranger to . . . that busy set of people living at and near Leipzig, who put the oddest notions down to, and draw all kinds of conclusions from those books – of which Wagner did not even dream whilst writing them.”

To which Davison replied: “Our correspondent lies under a misconception. The allusions were to Professor Praeger, of Hamm, who composed a treatise called ‘Parallax,’ and a metrical fable entitled ‘Cowfinch and her Mother.’ It is well known to friends of the learned gentleman that he has been recently employed in translating the three great ‘books’ of Richard Wagner into the Turkish language.– ED.” *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 165-66.

Davison was the *Times* critic until 1878, when he was succeeded by Francis Hueffer (1843-89), but continued to contribute. After Davison was asked to retire by the *Times*, he remained active and frequently saw old friends. He also continued to run the *World* (!), although in a more limited capacity. He reviewed the English premiere of Berlioz's *Grande Messe des morts* in 1883, labeling it both "eccentric and ugly" and "original and grand."¹⁵ Much of his dislike of Wagner appeared to have softened after he attended the premiere of the *Ring* at Bayreuth in 1876, but this *rapprochement* did not last. Davison did not go to Bayreuth in 1882 for *Parsifal*, having seen the score and disliking the music. There is a considerable quantity of *Parsifal* satire in the *Musical World* in the late 1870's and 1880's.

Davison traveled and contributed articles to various papers. Eventually, he retired to Margate, where, regularly sending items to the *Times* and *The Musical World*, he died on March 24, 1885.¹⁶ In Henry Davison's biography, one reads nothing of Arabella Goddard during this period.

His friend Joseph Bennett wrote of him:

¹⁵ Davison, *The Musical World* (August 25, 1883), 490.

¹⁶ Joseph Bennett, Davison's loyal friend, is critical of the *Times* and, indirectly, of Hueffer, in telling of Davison's retirement: "... Hueffer gained a footing in the *Times* office, the editor gradually took Davison's work away and gave it to the German assistant, while the old hand went down to Margate, there to live the rest of his days, and there to die.

That Davison deeply felt his supersession, I know full well, but his work was done before he laid down his pen, and though the *Times* might have secured his withdrawal in better form, it must be said to the praise of Printing House Square that the famous critic's working salary was paid up to the date of his death. That salary, it is true, did not float poor Davison beyond the dreams of avarice." *Forty Years of Music*, 287.

Few, perhaps none, of the critics who have arisen since . . . can form any adequate idea of the power exercised by that remarkable man. It was often said that in respect of music he held the London press in the hollow of his hand . . . Davison's influence was commanding. Where he led they followed more or less closely . . . submitting to guidance, the secret of which lay not only in superior knowledge and literary skill, but also, to a remarkable extent, in personal charm . . . Complex and uncertain as were the manifestations of his nature, the man himself was no riddle. He was the servant of his emotions. I have never known a man whose emotions were so powerful . . . No man was ever more devoted to those whom he loved for themselves or admired for their gifts and graces. Against these he would hear nothing; in support of them he would fight to the bitter end. . . his heart, it is true, was not open to everybody, and there were many who deemed him cynical and wanting in sensibility . . . But this was to judge him mistakenly. . . his friends thought so much of him as a man that they often hesitated to differ from him as a critic. They seemed to be shielded from responsibility under the shadow of a powerful, as well as sympathetic, personality.¹⁷

1855: Wagner and Berlioz

In 1855, the Philharmonic Society engaged Wagner, and the *New Philharmonic Society* engaged Berlioz, each to conduct a series of concerts. The two composers had met in Paris, many years before, and also in Dresden, where Berlioz had heard *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Rienzi*. Sensing each other's outsized talents, if not outsized ambitions, each was wary of the other. Wagner wrote, with uncharacteristic frankness, to Liszt, their mutual friend, "I am afraid of Berlioz."¹⁸ Liszt encouraged each of them to

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹⁸ "Paris beginnt mir in der Vorstellung fast unangenehm zu werden; ich fürchte mich vor Berlioz, mit meinem schlechten Französisch bin ich verloren." Richard Wagner to Franz

seek out the other. When Berlioz arrived in London for his concert series, Wagner was almost finished with his. It was thought that their first London meeting was at the home of the violinist Prospère Sainton (1813-90), but Berlioz's and Wagner's letters refute this supposition; Wagner mentions that the dinner at Sainton's happened a few days after the New Philharmonic concert of June 13, and his June 15 letter to Minna mentions that Berlioz visited him on the previous day.¹⁹

Berlioz and Wagner did have an extended conversation at the home of Sainton before Wagner took his leave. Wagner wrote enthusiastically about the occasion (without resisting the temptation to be critical of Berlioz's conducting):

Einen wahren Gewinn bringe ich aus England mit: eine herrliche und innige Freundschaft, die ich für Berlioz gefasst, und die wir beide geschlossen. Ich hörte ein Concert der New Philharmonic unter seiner Leitung, und war allerdings wenig von seiner Aufführung der Mozart'schen G-moll Symphonie erbaut, und hatte ihn wegen der Execution seiner Romeo u. Julie-Symph. die sehr ungenügend war, zu bedauern.²⁰

Berlioz wrote his friends with similar enthusiasm about Wagner, but thought that

Liszt, Zurich, September 12, 1853. Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Briefe* 5, ed. Gertrud Strobel and Werner Wolf (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1993), 425.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 7, 225.

²⁰ "I bring one real gain from England, a deep and heartfelt friendship . . . for Berlioz, which he returns. I heard a concert of the New Philharmonic conducted by him, and I must admit I was unimpressed with his performance of Mozart's symphony in G minor, and his execution of his "Romeo and Juliet" symphony, which was very inadequate, filled me with pity for him." *Ibid.* 7, 240.

he conducted “just as Klindworth²¹ plays the piano,” with a degree of *rubato* and rhythmic freedom that was irritating to Berlioz. Berlioz remained agreeable toward Wagner, and wrote to Liszt:

Tres cher ami,
 . . . Nous avons beaucoup parlé de toi avec Wagner ces jours-ci, et tu peux penser avec quelle affection, car, ma parole d'honneur, je crois qu'il t'aime autant que je t'aime moi-même.
 Il te racontera sans doute son séjour à Londres et tout ce qu'il a eu à souffrir d'une hostilité de parti-pris. Il est superbe d'ardeur, de chaleur de cœur, et j'avoue que ses violences même me transportent. Il semble qu'une fatalité m'empêche d'entendre rien de ses dernières compositions! le jour où sur la demande de Prince Albert il a dirigé son ouverture de Tanhauser [*sic*] à Hanover Square Rooms, j'étais, à la même heure, forcé d'assister à une affreuse répétition de chœurs pour la concert de la New Philharmonic, que j'avais à diriger deux jours après . . . Wagner finit demain Lundi avec ceux de Hanover Square et se hâtera de partir le lendemain. Nous dînons ensemble avant son concert. Il y'a quelque chose de singulièrement attractif, et si nous avons des aspérités tous les deux à moins nos aspérités s'emboîtent:

Explique cela à Cornelius . . .

Lundi Matin

. . . Wagner s'est perdu dans l'esprit du public de Londres en paraissant faire peu de cas de Mendelssohn. Or Mendelssohn, pour beaucoup de gens, est un Handel et demi . . . ! ! ! . . . D'un autre côté, si je n'avais pas la même défaut pour d'autres maîtres que j'exècre avec une violence de canon de 120, je dirais que Wagner a tort de ne pas considérer comme une riche et belle

²¹ Karl Klindworth (1830-1916): German pianist and conductor, who befriended Wagner in 1855. He lived in London until 1868, then was engaged at the Moscow Conservatory, Berlin Philharmonic; established conservatory at Berlin, and retired to Potsdam. Klindworth was the adoptive father of Winifred Williams (1897-1980), who later married Siegfried Wagner (1869-1930).

individualité le puritain Mendelssohn.²²

Davison enters the picture in his capacity as editor of the *Musical World*. A

translation of *Opera and Drama* had been appearing serially in the *Musical World*.

Davison had satirized Wagner as “Musician of the Future,” and was, at this time, more familiar with European reactionary gossip about Wagner than with any of the music. He had read *Opera and Drama* and *A Communication to My Friends* and was impressed by Wagner as a writer, but he deplored many of Wagner’s revolutionary artistic ideas.

Davison felt that Wagner insulted the memory of the great masters and sought to replace

²² London, June 25, 1855

“Dearest friend,

. . . We talked a lot about you with Wagner, and you can imagine how affectionately, for on my honour, I think he loves you as much as I do myself.

No doubt he will tell you all about his stay in London and all the prejudice and hostility he has had to suffer. He is full of ardor and depth of feeling, and I admit that I am carried away by his outbursts. It seems that fate is against my hearing his last compositions! The day when, at Prince Albert’s command, he conducted his *Tannhäuser* overture at Hanover Square Rooms, I was forced to attend a horrible choir rehearsal for the New Philharmonic concert which I had to conduct later

Wagner finishes with those at Hanover Square tomorrow, Monday, and he will be in a hurry to get away the next day. We are to dine together before the concert. There is something peculiarly attractive about him, and if we both have our rough edges, those rough edges are compatible.

Explain this to Cornelius . . .

Monday Morning

. . . Wagner has lost the good will of the London public by appearing to make little of Mendelssohn. And Mendelssohn, for a good many people, is Handel and a half!!! . . . On the other hand, if I didn’t have the same problem with other masters whom I hate with a cannon’s force, I would say that Wagner is wrong in not considering the puritan Mendelssohn as a richly endowed personality.”

Hector Berlioz, *Correspondance général* 5, ed. Pierre Citron (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), 115-17.

them with himself. He was angriest about Wagner's dismissals of Mendelssohn, the most egregious sin Wagner could have committed.

Although not always the staunchest supporter of Berlioz's music, Davison found him personally agreeable, and appointed himself one of Berlioz's protectors during his London visits. Unfortunately, the installment of *Opera and Drama* containing Wagner's sternest condemnations of Berlioz appeared in the *Musical World* promptly after Wagner and Berlioz met and cemented their new friendship. It is probable that Davison, already uncomfortable with what he saw as an unjustified clamor over Wagner, and angered by Wagner's treatment of Mendelssohn, published the essay in the hope that it would reveal Wagner as a charlatan.

In a letter to Théodore Ritter,²³ Berlioz wrote:

... mais il est très attachant par ses idées et sa conversation, nous allons boire du punch chez lui après la concert, il me renouvelle ses amitiés, il m'embrasse avec fureur, disant qu'il avait eu sur moi une foule de préjugé, il pleure, il trépigne, à peine est-il parti que la *Musical World* publie le passage de son livre où il m'éreinte de la façon la plus comique et la plus spirituelle, joie délirante de Davison, en me traduisant cela. . . .²⁴

²³ Théodore Ritter (1841-86), French pianist and composer.

²⁴ London, Tuesday morning, July 3, 1855

"... he (Wagner) is very charming with his ideas and conversation, we go and drink punch at his place after the concert, he declares his friendship, he kisses me most affectionately, saying he used to be full of prejudice against me, he weeps, he prances, and no sooner is he gone than 'The Musical World' publishes the passage in his book where he cuts me up in the most spirited and witty fashion, frantic joy of Davison when he translates it for my benefit."

New Letters of Berlioz, 1830-1868, ed. Jacques Barzun (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 144-45.

Charles Reid suggests that Davison hoped to interfere in the developing friendship of the two composers, but Berlioz's letter indicates that he saw the entire incident rather humorously. Berlioz, in his letters, is well aware that Davison's animus had much to do with Wagner's contemptuous treatment of Mendelssohn. Further, the passages in question came as no great shock to Berlioz, as the above letter indicates. Liszt asked him about it in 1853, and Berlioz replied:

Je suis persuadé comme toi de la facilité de l'engrenage entre Wagner et moi, si toute fois il met en peu d'huile dans ses roues. Quant aux quelques lignes dont tu parles, je ne les ai jamais lues, je n'en ai pas le moindre ressentiment et j'ai assez tiré moi-même de coups de pistolets dans les jambes des gens qui marchent, pour ne pas m'étonner de recevoir quelques chevrotines à mon tour.²⁵

Whether or not Davison deliberately intended to cause a rift between the two men, it seems that he did take a certain pleasure in imparting the bad news to Berlioz; this may have been no more than one of the undergraduate pranks to which he remained addicted throughout his life. No actual harm seems to have been done by Davison. Berlioz shortly sent Wagner copies of *Les Soirées de l'Orchestre* and three of his scores. The two composers' relationship eventually deteriorated without any outside assistance.

²⁵ Paris, July 1853

"... I quite agree with you that Wagner and I might get along, if only he would grease the wheels a bit. As for the few lines you mention, I have never read them, and don't feel the slightest resentment on their account; I have so often had a shot at others that I am not in the least surprised at being someone else's target."

Berlioz, *Correspondance général* 5, 351.

1855: Reception in the *Times* and the *Musical World*

The first Philharmonic Concert took place on March 12. On the next day, most of the daily papers came out with a shower of abuse, which was echoed in the weeklies, notably in *The Athenaeum*, and continued without abatement during the entire stay of Wagner in London . . . We have been informed on the best authority that Wagner, when he had to conduct a work by Mendelssohn, deliberately and slowly put on a pair of white kid gloves to indicate the formal, or, one might say, fashionable character of the music; and this piece of bad taste naturally roused the ire of Mendelssohn's admirers in the press and elsewhere . . . it remains a matter of regret that the influence which a man of Wagner's genius and high artistic aims might have had on English music, was thus almost literally "snuffed out by an article." That article, perhaps I should say that series of articles, appeared in *The Times* newspaper. Mr. J. W. Davison, at that time the musical representative of the great English organ, was, like all good critics, not a mere reasoner, but a man of imagination, and, like all imaginative men, a good hater as well as a good lover. To dislike Wagner he had more than one reason, amongst which his passion for Mendelssohn was the first and foremost.²⁶

In his *Times* notices on Wagner's Philharmonic concerts, Davison concentrated, for the most part, upon what he felt to be the peculiarities of Wagner's conducting technique, and interpretation of the works of other composers.

Herr Wagner's method of using the baton (like that of some other German musicians) must be very perplexing at first to those unacquainted with it, and the confusion between the up and down beat, which he appears to employ indiscriminately . . . requires a long time to get accus-

²⁶ Francis Hueffer, *Half a Century of Music in England* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1889), 50-52. The text immediately following this extract is quoted in chapter 4.

tomed to. Moreover, Herr Wagner conducts without a score before him, which says more, we think, for his memory than for his judgment. Such precedents are dangerous.

Supposing a leading instrument, entrusted with an important passage, were to be found “ napping ” (which is possible), and that Herr Wagner’s memory should fail him at a pitch (which is possible – for if Homer nods, why not the author of *Lohengrin*?), what would be the consequence?

. . . his readings are in many places new and strange, his changes perpetual and fidgety, his indications of tempo sometimes quicker (as in the first movement of the “Eroica” and the coda of the “Isles”), sometimes slower (as in Beethoven’s slow movement and the opening of Mendelssohn’s overture) than we have been accustomed to; and although, for these and other reasons too numerous to mention, the band did not go so smoothly or pointedly. . . .²⁷

Of the overture to *Tannhäuser* we have already spoken, and the execution last night gave us no cause to modify our first impression. A more inflated display of extravagance and noise has rarely been submitted to an audience; and it was a pity to hear so magnificent an orchestra engaged in almost fruitless attempts at accomplishing things which, even if really practicable, would lead to nothing.²⁸

Spohr’s third symphony and Beethoven’s fourth were not well played, indeed, it would scarcely be possible for a symphony so well known as Beethoven’s B flat to go worse . . . The fact is that the author of *Lohengrin* knows better how to theorise fancifully than to reduce his theories to practice. His conducting shows as great a lack of the requisite science as his music . . . Herr Wagner has cut a sorry figure in this country, where plain common sense goes for something . . . We believe him to be a very clever man, one of the most subtle and specious indeed of a race of modern German systemmakers; but his works present irrefutable proofs that his organisation is not musical, and a musician, like a poet, is born, not made. Another such set of concerts

²⁷ Davison, *Times* (London) (March 14, 1855); reprinted in Hueffer, *Half a Century of Music in England*, 53-54. The page references in this and the succeeding citations refer to Hueffer’s book.

²⁸ *Ibid.* (May 16, 1855), 55.

would go far to annihilate the Philharmonic Society.²⁹

Of Wagner's series of eight concerts, Davison attended and reviewed six. He missed Wagner's performances of excerpts from *Lohengrin*, and of Beethoven's ninth symphony.

The overall effect of Davison's disapproval was chilling, reported Hueffer:

The historic importance of this indictment . . . is increased by the fact that it seems to have served as a watchword to the remainder of the press. The opinion of *The Times* was echoed by the other papers, as far as I have thought it necessary to consult them.³⁰

As dismissive and damaging as were Davison's *Times* notices, they were mild compared to his essays in the *Musical World*. In these essays, Davison vented the full force of his rage and indignation at what he took to be Wagner's pretensions, his insults of great musical masters, and his iconoclasm, which Davison saw in its most negative and destructive sense.

One essay begins with Davison's opinion that Wagner was musically incompetent and an intellectual charlatan, pulling the wool over the public's eyes:

. . . Of his compositions, we can only repeat what we have said in other records, namely that they are the clever and dashing *shame* of a well-read and ambitious man, wholly ungifted with the faculty of developing beauty -- having, in plain phrase, not a particle of music in his nature -- who would fain persuade the world to mistake his idea-less and amorphous ravings for the utterances of a Heaven-descended originality and thought too profound for ordinary penetration.

²⁹ *Ibid.* (June 13, 1855), 56.

³⁰ Hueffer, *Half a Century of Music in England*, 56-57.

As a conductor, it is a matter of notoriety that, with a band containing some of the finest existing elements . . . he has merely succeeded in producing a series of performances much inferior in general view, on the whole, to those with which the society was chargeable . . .

How comes it then that in 1855, since the band must have improved greatly at all points, since the knowledge of all the great music habitually performed must be deepened and strengthened in spite of three years drilling -- that the performances of this season have been so markedly worse than usual? How comes it especially that all the music of the last concert sounded little better than if the band were rehearsing it for the first time? . . . There can be but one answer, and that answer points to the incompetence of the conductor.³¹

In the same issue, Davison moves on to criticize Wagner in a wider context. The following extracts more than suggest the savage anger and acid scorn of the complete essay:

Let us not lose sight for a moment of who Richard Wagner is and what are his pretensions. He is . . . the assumptive leader of a new musical sect which publicly threatens its determination to overrun and convert the whole of Europe . . . throughout his writings on art, we find either expressed or implied an unwavering current of assertion that all other musicians are in error . . . he alone in his own creations can exhibit their remedy. Throughout we perceive the stubborn resolution to cast down the idols of this world and build himself a shrine from their ruins.

This man, this Wagner, this author of . . . so many hideous things . . . this preacher of the "Future" was born to feed spiders with flies, not to make happy the heart of man with music, with beautiful melody and harmony. What is music to him, or he to music?

. . . These musicians of young Germany are mag-gots that quicken for corruption. They have nor bone nor

³¹ Davison, "FAILURE, SHAME," *Musical World* (June 30, 1855), 464.

flesh nor blood nor marrow. The end of their being is to prey on the ailing trunk until it becomes putrid and rotten. Instead of life they would present us with dust, instead of bread, with a stone. There is as much difference between *Guillaume Tell* and *Lohengrin* as between the sun and ashes.³²

Once the reader recovers from the fury of Davison's language, it may be noted that Davison was confronting Wagner's *revolutionary* significance; such reactionary passion is merited by nothing less. In fact, Davison clearly shows that he identified Wagner's musical innovations with *social* revolution, in such statements as "Throughout we perceive the stubborn resolution to cast the down the idols of this world and build himself a shrine from their ruins," and:

Let us turn to some of the promised fruits in the shape of Wagnerian "Art-Drama." What do we find there? So far as music is concerned, nothing better than chaos – absolute chaos; consistency of keys and their relations overthrown, condemned, demolished; the charm of rhythmic measure destroyed; symmetry of form ignored or else abandoned; the true basis of harmony cast away for a reckless, wild, extravagant and demagogic cacophony, the symbol of profligate libertinage.³³

Bribery?

It was typical of Wagner to see some sort of foul play or conspiracy behind his less-than-glowing press reception in England; in fact, he arrived already braced for trouble, particularly from Davison.

London, 5 April 1855

³² *Ibid.*, 465.

³³ *Ibid.*

To Otto Wesendonck

... A few other critics find the tone of Messrs Dawison [sic] and Chorley³⁴ over-impertinent, and so they write conciliatory reports ... but it is the two gentlemen named above who know best what they want; they are paid to keep me in my place, and in this way they earn their daily bread. ... Everyone who lives here is so deeply convinced of the worthlessness, insolence, venality, and vulgarity of the local press that to be honest, I prefer not to dirty my hands by so much as touching a newspaper. Anyone who understands anything and has a really independent opinion does not mix with this Jewish rabble. Indeed, I have been assured that after the second concert, it was possible to predict a certain change of bias on the part of the reporter of the *Morning Post*, because the *Times* had attacked me so mercilessly that the former was forced to be more cautious ... Only the editorship of the *Times* itself seems to have found Dawison's invective too strong and coarse ... Mendelssohn is to the English what Jehovah is to the Jews. And Jehovah's wrath now strikes me down for being one of the unbelievers; for you know that among the qualities attributed to the dear God of the Jews is a very real thirst for vengeance: Dawison is the high priest of this divine wrath.³⁵

Davison was aware of Wagner's suspicions, and responded in the *Musical World* of September 22, 1855:

The most extraordinary thing is – taking into account an author's natural longing to have his works praised, and his full knowledge of journalistic venality – that he should have omitted to bribe music critics in the first place ... We do not exactly know the price at which each individual critic can be bought – our own terms can be known from private inquiry at the printing office – but we have no

³⁴ Henry Fothergill Chorley (1808-72), music critic of the *Athenaeum*, who detested Wagner as much as did Davison, but who also detested Davison as much as he did Wagner.

³⁵ *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, transl. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 335.

doubt that a few thalers tendered out of hearing of the editor (*entre nous*, the editor sometimes goes “snacks” with the critic) – would have made the writer place *Lohengrin* beside *Fidelio* and have rated *Tannhäuser* with *Don Giovanni*. Would that have satisfied Herr Wagner? Never was money more foolishly kept in pocket! . . . The next time Herr Wagner comes to London, we strongly recommend him to bring with him a little money or a little better music . . . Should the critics refuse the money, as there’s no knowing what these obstinate and malignant dogs may do especially if they fancy they have been cheated out of their lawful due, we advise him to try a dose of real good music . . . Herr Richard Wagner may even now buy them. We only fear he has got neither the music nor the money.³⁶

The question of Davison’s venality cropped up occasionally during his career, and evidently had been enough of an issue that Henry Davison found it necessary to confront the matter in his biography.³⁷ Charles Reid reports that after Davison’s death Francis Hueffer’s wife gathered up his belongings from the *Times* and found a cache of small, valuable articles, such as stick pins, studs, and snuff boxes, which were probably gifts from various parties. When Hueffer became critic of the *Times*, he engaged a cab to return the gifts that came his way as “tribute” to Davison’s successor. While Davison’s acceptance of such gifts cannot be said to be entirely ethical, it is my impression that

³⁶ *The Musical World* (September 22, 1855), 574.

³⁷ In 1877, Davison was accused in *Truth*, a “society journal,” of “damning with faint praise” a debutante soprano named Gerster. The article accused Davison of “writing down” musicians who were not represented by Davison’s landlord, Jarrett, who was what we would now call an “artist’s representative.” The article, which appeared under the pseudonym “Scrutator,” alleged that Davison “wrote up” his wife, Arabella Goddard, at the expense of her rivals. Davison took action against *Truth*; he and Jarrett denied all charges by affidavit. The judges ruled against Davison on a technicality, but the affidavits served to clear Davison’s name. *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 330-31; *The Music Monster*, 121-26.

Davison enjoyed such tributes as a perquisite of his position, and did not consider them to be bribes in the way that cash would have been. I believe that Davison's feelings about Wagner's music, poetry, and prose were so complex and ambivalent that the intensity of his printed condemnations had deeper sources than his pockets. It is possible that some of his reviews of *performers* may have been influenced by other-than-artistic considerations. So stubborn and deeply felt were his opinions on music, and so exuberantly or acidly expressed, that one cannot imagine these having been bought.

1876: Davison and The Ring

And now that the *Ring des Nibelungen* is an accomplished fact, that before the third series of performances are over it will have been heard by some thousands of more or less intelligent people, and that it must fairly be pronounced an incontestable success, the question arises as to what may be the future result of such an unprecedented amount of preparation, such singular exhibition of intelligence combined with hard labour.³⁸

Davison was quirky, capricious, partisan, a show-off, a prankster, whose humor often crossed the boundary of sarcasm. He was thin-skinned, reactionary, and could be downright unfair in his assessments and journalistic practices. Why, then, is he "the great critic" for one commentator after another? The answer, as in the case of Hanslick, is in Davison's innate musicality, which sets him above and apart from most other journalistic writers on music of his time. He was the first music critic for the *Times* who

³⁸ "The Wagner Festival," *The Times* (August 26, 1876); reprinted in *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 523. Davison's *Times* reviews of the 1876 *Ring* are reprinted in full in *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*. The page numbers in the citations here refer to this reprint.

was trained as a musician, not to mention his extensive experience as pianist, composer and teacher.

On August 4, 1876, Davison received the following note from Delane:

My dear Davison,
Would you not like a little run in Germany? And would not the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth serve you as an excuse? If so, you only have to go to Macdonald and tell him you will write pleasant letters on Wagner and Wagnerism and Wagner-worship and pack your portmanteau.³⁹

Some months before, Davison had written:

We are tired of the rant, the fustian, the bombast which we have so long heard concerning the wonders in store for the fortunate possessors of Patron's Tickets; we feel wearied and dinned by the noise of the very loud trumpet which Wagner has blown so perseveringly and vigorously for many years that we have had more than enough of the pretensions of this Musical Claimant, and we would give him all the rope he can possibly require . . . Of these bubbles, the so-called Music of the Future is, in our eyes or ears, one of the greatest. When Father Time shall touch it with his finger we feel convinced that it will burst and be forgotten.⁴⁰

Davison gamely undertook the journey to Bayreuth for the first performance of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. He was sixty-three years old (as was Wagner). His club foot troubled him a great deal, and the summer heat of Bayreuth, terrible for nearly any Englishman, was especially agonizing for him. Despite his great discomfort and his long-held animus toward Wagner's music and ideas, he approached Bayreuth as a professional, with a reporter's eye for a story and musicianly acumen. If, by the end of

³⁹ *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 317.

⁴⁰ *The Musical World* (March 18, 1876), 121.

the festival, he had not done a complete about-face, he had acquired a sympathy toward the entire effort and its artistic merits that can only be called astonishing in light of the harshness of his earlier writings.

Davison's dispatches from Bayreuth reveal a strikingly quick grasp of Wagner's musical and dramatic purposes and innovations. Davison's overall consideration of the venture is not without some skepticism, and even some mild derision, but, for the most part, it is quite respectful of Wagner's mammoth undertaking. It is also clearly informed by Davison's familiarity with Wagner's earlier music and theoretical writings; Davison did his homework, as he had done for the previous twenty years, despite his distaste for Wagner. One has the impression that he greatly enjoyed both the occasion and much of the work. The vitriol of his earlier pieces is entirely abandoned and gives way to fair-minded objectivity. The temperance of these reports is probably connected with their venue; in his *Times* pieces, Davison rarely used his razorlike sarcasm or indulged himself in gushing (such as that over Mendelssohn, certain opera singers, and Joseph Joachim), as he often did in *The Musical World*.

Among the other working English critics present at the 1876 *Ring* were Davison's younger colleagues Joseph Bennett and Francis Hueffer. Their reactions to the event will be discussed in the next chapters.

Bennett, in his memoir, remembers that Hueffer "had charge" of the elder Davison, and loyally shepherded him around Bayreuth.⁴¹ Certain benefits came with attaching oneself to Davison, as Bennett and his colleagues observed:

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

On the *Siegfried* day, as Watson and I were wending our dusty, sun-ried way along the road between the town and the theatre, my companion cried "Look out!" and an hotel carriage dashed past, bearing Davison and Hueffer triumphantly to the place which we strove to attain on foot, with much expenditure of sudorific moisture. Here was a striking example of *les extremes se touchent*, for the two men in the carriage were on all Wagnerian fronts far as the poles asunder.⁴²

Other Englishmen who later became significant as musicians and as commentators on Wagner were quite young at the time (Fuller Maitland was twenty; Shaw was twenty; Elgar nineteen, Hadow only seventeen, and William Roberts, later known as Ernest Newman, was a child of eight⁴³), and so the rather elderly Davison was something of a pioneer. Reid suggests that Davison's Bayreuth trip and his subsequent partial conversion "jeopardized his wits, even his soul."⁴⁴ I could not find evidence of the reaction of Davison's very conservative friend Macfarren to the Bayreuth visit, but Macfarren wrote to Hubert Parry, then his student,⁴⁵

I am sorry you are going to Bayreuth, for every presence there gives countenance to the monstrous self-inflation. The principle of the thing is bad, the means for its realization preposterous. An earthquake would be good that would swallow up the spot and everybody on it, so I wish

⁴² *Ibid.*, 286-87.

⁴³ John Alexander Fuller Maitland (1856-1936); George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950); Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934); Sir William Henry Hadow (1859-1937); Ernest Newman (1868-1959).

⁴⁴ *The Music Monster*, 111.

⁴⁵ Sir Charles Hubert Parry (1848-1918), composer and educator, was a student of both Macfarren and Sterndale Bennett, Davison's close friends.

you were away.⁴⁶

Davison sent four dispatches to the *Times* from Bayreuth in which he covered virtually every aspect of the mounting of the *Ring*, from the performances themselves to the difficult conditions at Bayreuth for both attendees and performers. His first report tells of the conditions in the town of Bayreuth itself and its unreadiness to be flooded with the visitors who came for the *Ring*. There is also a detailed synopsis of the plot (Davison arrived for the end of the first cycle and stayed on to view the entire second cycle).

The second report, dated August 20, is of particular interest, because of Davison's detailed consideration of the music, text, and drama. Davison often admitted that he admired Wagner as a poet and dramatist, and he was generally enthusiastic about the *Ring* as a drama or literary work (although objecting to the incestuous relationship). The main target of Davison's objections remained the music itself.

Davison's problem with Wagner's music may be summed up in the word "chaos." Davison was perplexed by Wagner's "endless melody." The fluid forward motion, chromaticism, color, seemingly without traditional musical punctuation marks of regular phrase lengths and cadences, wedded to continuous dramatic action, was entirely foreign to Davison's experience. Davison quickly grasped Wagner's manipulation of motives with more sophistication than many of his contemporaries who merely noted them as signposts as they flew by. He noted their combinations, transformations, and

⁴⁶ Cited in Percy Scholes, *The Mirror of Music* 1, 254.

aesthetic and dramatic effect. In Davison's view, the "principal charm" of the music was Wagner's use of the orchestra, which he did not at all times understand, or like, but it seemed to exercise a persistent fascination upon him.

The third report, of August 23, reviews the performance of the singers and orchestra. In his critique of the singers, Davison also transmits his reactions to the characters they portrayed. Of the characters, it is somewhat telling that Davison liked the villains and the heroines, Brünnhilde and Sieglinde, most of all. Of Wotan, he wrote:

. . . so conspicuously prosy, sententiously lackadaisical (for a god, be it understood), and so perversely addicted to talking about himself, that, when his once-omnipotent spear is shivered in pieces by Siegfried's sword, "Nothung," and we are thus rid of it, not many are likely to complain. . . .⁴⁷

The final report, dated August 26, deals with the scenery and stagecraft, and ends with an overall consideration of the work of art and its possible future. He also turns briefly back to the music, reflecting upon Wagner's methods, particularly what he (and others) perceived as the lack of melody in the work overall. He mentions instances of melodious writing (such as the songs of the Rhinedaughters, which he earlier called a "Mendelssohnian bit of vocal writing"⁴⁸) throughout the reports. He complains that Wagner, although melodically gifted, suppressed melody in accordance with his musical-dramatic theories, and that the "national art" that Wagner aimed to create should not de-

⁴⁷ Davison, "The Wagner Festival" (August 23, 1876), 517.

⁴⁸ High praise from Davison. *Ibid.* (August 20, 1876), 514.

emphasize music's "most abiding charm." ⁴⁹

I have extracted several of Davison's comments on a number of aspects of the festival and reproduced them below. Davison comments upon the relationship of the poetry and the drama, salient points of the musical style, the difficulties for the singers, the orchestra, the staging, and, finally, an overall assessment of the event, its significance and possible future. The critic also pointed out many of the immense difficulties and discomforts of staging the tetralogy: the bad location of Bayreuth itself, poor stage effects, the sweltering heat in the theatre, and, most particularly, the unfortunate orchestra players, perspiring in their shirtsleeves in Wagner's pit. ⁵⁰

Davison's *Times* critiques were straightforward and elegantly written, with touches of humor. He and his editors do not appear to have believed in paragraphs, which make the articles daunting to the eye, and frustrating for the reader who wants to search for this or that particular; and Davison is scrupulously thorough. The flow and momentum of Davison's writing style makes extraction a difficult task, and interruption with commentary would destroy the effect of this flow. Ironically, I have found Davison's writing style to be similar to the flow of an act of a Wagner music-drama: one idea leads seamlessly to another, drawing the attention along throughout but providing few, if any, logical resting places within the structure.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* (August 26, 1876), 524.

⁵⁰ "... but the employment of the new steam apparatus in the transformation scenes was at the outset found excessive --somewhat of a nuisance, moreover, to the audience, not to speak of those unhappy dwellers in the orchestra who had to play like demons in a cavern choked with vaporous exhalations." *Ibid.*, 520-21.

Poetry and Drama

That a dramatic poem like the *Ring des Nibelungen* could not possibly be set to music in the received operatic fashion will be apparent to anyone who has attentively perused the three dramas with their prologue. Every word placed in the mouth of every character must be distinctly conveyed, while the dramatic action is carried on from end to end without interruption. Thus, it may be argued, the thing itself is complete without music; and the argument would hold good for ordinary intelligences. Wagner's, however, is not an ordinary intelligence; and his scheme for making the drama a combination of the arts includes music as a very essential element. True, it is the poet -- the "all-poet" -- who rules; and from what the poet thinks and speaks the musician must obediently take his cue. Happily, Wagner, in his dramas, plays the part both of poet and musician; and while composing his music he is in much the same position as an accompanist following a singer whom he cannot naturally control. We consider it barely practicable for any musician except Wagner himself to furnish music for one of Wagner's dramas that is, of course, in the perfected shape revealed, as he insists, in *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Ring des Nibelungen*.⁵¹

Music: Orchestra

It is hardly too much to say that, apart from the drama to which it is allied, the orchestral music of the *Ring* would signify little more at the best than a succession of chords, scale (not infrequently chromatic) figures and snatches of tune distributed capriciously among the instruments, "tremolandos" (*ad infinitum*), strange and unheard of combinations, perpetual changes of key, etc. -- a chaos of sound, in short, now more or less agreeable, now more or less the opposite, and, deprived of the weird and singular fascination that attends it when obviously explained by what is being said and done upon the stage, almost unmeaning. Wagner's symphony may be likened to an omni-coloured

⁵¹ *Ibid.* (August 20, 1876), 510.

kaleidoscope, where the same bits of painted glass incessantly appear and disappear, yielding prominence to others that have been seen before, and puzzling the eye of the examiner, as the Wagner orchestra puzzles, while it frequently enchants the ear.⁵² Without being distinguished by anything according evidence of uncommon contrapuntal skill, it is crowded with details, many of which, till after repeated hearings, would elude detection, however closely scrutinised.⁵³

Leitmotiv

Taking his system for what is intended, nothing can be more logical, nothing more consistently exemplified. With each separate personage of the drama Wagner connects a musical phrase, which identically, or modified according to circumstances, recurs whenever that personage comes back to us, or is even passingly alluded to by others. Each incident, moreover, and each conflicting emotion is endowed with individuality by the same process, and illustrated accordingly, are the personages, when reference is made to them. With the working out of this theory the orchestra has much more to do than the singers on the stage; for it is the orchestra, rather than the voices, which chiefly stamps each special identity. As not seldom, too, in the course of a single scene, more than one personage, incident, or emotion is brought back to mind, at times almost simultaneously, the themes, or fragments of themes as may be suitable, are interwoven. This is accomplished by the poet-musician with consummate artistic propriety,

⁵² Davison's "kaleidoscope" image prefigures Debussy's famous comment on the orchestration of *Parsifal*: "I'm thinking of that orchestral colour which seems to be lit from behind, of which there are such wonderful examples in *Parsifal*." Debussy to André Caplet, August 25, 1912. *Debussy Letters*, ed. François Lesure and Roger Nichols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 261-62.

⁵³ "The Wagner Festival" (August 20, 1876), 511.

and often produces an indescribably beautiful effect.⁵⁴

Melody

In his anxious desire to exhibit the musician as the poet's humble slave, Wagner not only prevents him from soaring to the highest regions of fancy, but by crushing the buds of melody as they spring up, buds that might blossom into seemingly flowers, cramps the manifold resources of expression which are the golden heritage of his art . . . [Wagner] practices this to his own self-detriment; for he too, possesses abundant melody . . . Wagner allows his melody to awaken expectation by an opening phrase, but seldom or never rounds off or finishes that phrase, so as at once to satisfy the ear. His principal charm, in fact, is the unexampld, almost magical colouring of his orchestra, which enthralled and spell-bound to the last – though speculating rather than understanding, disposed to marvel rather than to sympathise.⁵⁵

The Difficulties for the Singers

The one day's interval of repose, due to the illness of Herr Betz,⁵⁶ and consequent postponement of *Siegfried*, was a great relief. It can hardly be said that anyone felt pleased to hear of the eminent bass being indisposed; but when it was learned that his ailment at the worst was over-fatigue, we are inclined to think the news must have been rather welcome than otherwise. In the music assigned to him- or more strictly speaking, musical declamation, for it would be somewhat undignified in a god of Wotan's stature to sing a tune – Herr Betz has arduous work to accom-

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 512.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*(August 26, 1876), 524.

⁵⁶ Franz Betz (1835-1900), German bass-baritone; he created the roles of Hans Sachs at Munich (1868) and Wotan at Bayreuth (1876).

plish, and he had already been overtaxed in *Rheingold* and the *Walküre*.⁵⁷

The heroic Brunnhilde would be a trying ordeal for any dramatic singer, no matter how exceptionally endowed . . . [Materna⁵⁸] has great power and goes through the terrible last act with intense passion, reaching climax after climax with stamina unimpaired. At the same time how often, and within what intervals of time, Mme. Materna could brave such a labour with impunity, is a question worth her grave consideration. Many a singer would come away from it with an extinction of voice, perhaps never to be remedied.⁵⁹

The Orchestra

About one feature only is opinion quite unanimous. That feature is the orchestra. A company of executive musicians . . . more admirably balanced, or in every respect more competent, in all probability never before assembled together. Their playing from first to last has been little short of marvellous -- as marvellous, indeed, as the task set before them by the uncompromising master, who allows but few intervals for rest, and those intervals are as brief as they are rare.

. . . Too much stress cannot be laid upon the invaluable co-operation of Herr Hans Richter,⁶⁰ Dr. von Bülow's succes-

⁵⁷ "The Wagner Festival" (August 19, 1876), 503.

⁵⁸ Amalie Materna (1844-1918), Austrian soprano, became the archetypical Wagnerian soprano by singing Brunnhilde at the first Bayreuth Festival, and then the first Kundry in 1882. In 1877, she accompanied Wagner to London for the Wagner Festival at the Royal Albert Hall.

⁵⁹ "The Wagner Festival" (August 23, 1876), 518.

⁶⁰ Hans Richter (1843-1916), Bülow's successor as Wagner's favored conductor. Not only did he conduct the first *Ring* cycle in Bayreuth in 1876, but he also brought Wagner performances to London, Vienna, and Budapest. In London, his very successful Orchestral Festival concerts, known as the "Richter Concerts," (1879-97) featured Wagner and other new music. Richter promoted Brahms (and later, Elgar and Bruckner) with equal fervor, and introduced most of his major orchestral works in England.

sor as Wagner's artistic alter ego . . . Herr Richter was formerly horn-player in the orchestra of the Opera house at Vienna; he now presides at the head of perhaps the finest orchestra ever heard. Wagner is quick at discovering those best able to serve his purpose. Himself a nervous, though an emphatic conductor, as he proved some twenty years since, when engaged to direct the concerts of our own Philharmonic Society, he is wise in allowing another to take the baton from his hand when works of his own are in question. More admirably represented than by Herr Richter he could not have been.⁶¹

Stagecraft

As for the long-bodied snake into which Alberich transforms himself, in order to show off the power of the Tarnhelm (the toad is barely discoverable), the bear through means of which Siegfried delights in terrifying Mime, and the dragon which he kills, if it be true (as is affirmed) that they came from London they can only have been selected from among the useless lumber of some forgotten Christmas pantomime. The most charming and impressive scene in the *Siegfried* drama is very nearly endangered by the unwieldy proportions and sepulchral utterances of that hybrid nondescript – the giant Fafner, who according to Wagner's own stage direction, crawls forth “in der Gestalt eines ungeheuren, eidechsenartigen Schlangen-wurmes” (in the form of a monstrous lizard-shaped serpent-worm), though he is far more like a hippopotamus than a lizard. The Drury Lane and Covent Garden “gods” who have little in common with the gods of Walhalla, would have roared at him, especially when, in the voice, or voices, of Herr von Reichenberg,⁶² he discourses sententiously with Siegfried, after the hero “who knows not fear” has pierced him through the heart with his dragon's-hide-defying weapon,

⁶¹ “The Wagner Festival” (August 23, 1876), 522-23.

⁶² Franz von Reichenberg (1855-1905): Austrian *basso profondo*, a famous Sarastro and Mephistopheles.

“Nothung.”⁶³

Conditions

... With regard to those who daily wend their way to the theatre, which is little less than half a mile to that outskirt of town lying nearest to it, a good part of the way uphill, none but themselves know what they have to suffer, the vast majority being compelled to go on foot. The carriage accommodation, besides being charged for exorbitantly, is nothing like in proportion to the demand; and as all the hotels are full, the proprietors are by no means eager in dispatching their omnibuses to the station. The heat all the week has been scorching, the dust intolerable, and the closer we approach the theatre the worse is the nuisance. There is plenty of water in Bayreuth, but it never seems to have crossed the minds of those in authority to put their ample supply to some good uses. The dust is nowhere laid; while the rows of dwarf trees on each side of the road, which usurp the functions of an umbrageous avenue, may probably serve that purpose when the “art-drama of the future” is accepted as the art-drama of the present; but just now, only that they look pretty, they might be spared without inconvenience.⁶⁴

... the great Wagnerian undertaking, which in most respects mingled surprise and entertainment so agreeably, that with a lower temperature, and its accompanying conditions, a large number of visitors who have quitted Bayreuth would have been likely enough to stay another week.⁶⁵

⁶³ “The Wagner Festival” (August 26, 1876), 522.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* (August 19, 1876), 502-03.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 504.

Assessment

The second series of representations, if judge we may from the three that have already been seems likely to form a fairer opportunity of estimating what Wagner has accomplished in the *Ring des Nibelungen* than the first. It serves also, to confirm general impression that the work can never again be seen and heard under similarly favourable conditions. The bringing together of an orchestra one hundred and thirty in number, composed of the most eminent performers from all parts of Germany, who, without remuneration and for simple love of the task, all cheerfully undertook the indispensable toil and trouble attendant on rehearsals, to be followed up by twelve grand performances, the latter extending over three weeks, was a feat to be achieved by no other man than Wagner and of no other means than those he found it expedient to adopt. Still more surprising is the magnetic influence he must have exercised over the highly-paid singers whom he compelled to serve his purpose, and with whose proverbial jealousies and consequent squabbles he had to deal, and dealt successfully, in the matter of the distribution of parts.⁶⁶

About the wonderful things contained in the *Ring des Nibelungen*, its unique poem derived from sources hitherto unexplored by dramatist or musician, and the many strikingly magnificent passages – sometimes, indeed, entire pieces that cannot fail to interest, and in a great degree to edify, enough has been written. Those who were absent from the performance missed an opportunity which may never again present itself under similar conditions; for neither the earnest discourses of Wagner's disciples, nor the personal authority which the chief has learnt by incessant practice to assume, as, in a certain way, the pleading energetic spirit of his period, can, except in the opinion of blind enthusiasm help much towards again bringing together such a company of able and devoted artists, or such a host of visitors, in the majority of instances of more or less distinction, from all parts of Europe and America, curious to witness the result of an undertaking which has been incessantly talked about for upwards of a quarter of a

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* (August 23, 1876), 514-15.

century.⁶⁷

After the *Ring*: The 1877 Wagner Festival and *Parsifal*

Davison admired many things about the *Ring*, and went home to spend a brief time as an enthusiastic, converted Wagnerian. Never one merely to jump on a bandwagon, Davison had to push the driver out of the driver's seat and sit there himself.⁶⁸ He made himself gleefully obvious at the London Wagner Festival of 1877, when Wagner made a triumphant return to London to almost universal acclaim as the cultural hero of the day.⁶⁹ Davison extolled this or that aspect of the *Ring* in print, and met Wagner himself in the Albert Hall (they were introduced by their mutual friend, Edward Dannreuther⁷⁰), briefly conversing in French. He also accompanied the entourage that saw Wagner off at Victoria Station.

The May 1877 issues of *The Musical World* are fascinating for their revelation of Davison's conflicts about Wagner.⁷¹ There is glowing coverage of the Wagner concerts

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* (August 26, 1876), 524-25.

⁶⁸ "The *Times* articles on the festival concerts show that their writer had not been unaffected by the prevailing enthusiasm, but had been carried some way by it." *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 318.

⁶⁹ And also to recover his great financial losses from the *Ring*, but this series actually increased Wagner's debt rather than reducing it.

⁷⁰ Edward Dannreuther (1844-1905), pianist and writer on music, and founder of the London Wagner Society.

⁷¹ Davison's conflicts were often displayed in "debates" or dialogues between the absurdly named "Muttonians" in the *Musical World*. More often than not, each of the

(reprinted from his *Times* pieces of the month):

... The conspicuous feature in the programme of the second concert (Wednesday) was the superlatively magnificent opening scene of the *Walküre*, in which the music attains its very highest flight as poetical illustrator of human emotion. . . .

It was a mistake, at any rate, to put the Bayreuth music, which as Herr Eduard Hanslick says, is, compared with any preceding composition of Wagner's, like the Falls of Niagara to a glass of water, at the end, instead of at the beginning of the programme. After the first part of a concert, the attention flags; and while the most extraordinary things are going on, the audience are leisurely departing. Thus many lost one of the most magnificent performances ever listened to of a truly magnificent piece of orchestral music.⁷²

Davison even praised the extracts from *Tristan*, that paradigm of the new art:

... the marvellous duet, which on Saturday, was the chief feature of the selection from *Tristan und Isolde* Here the melody never ceases, the orchestra playing a most eloquent part throughout, involved, it may be, but always in perfect keeping with the sentiment to be expressed As occurring in the opera, the situation is scarcely to be tolerated on the boards of an English theatre, but as presented at the Albert Hall by *Tristan and Isolde*, book in hand (the watchful Brangäne may as well be omitted) the supreme beauty of the music was appreciated on its own account.⁷³

Besides all this, Davison printed a piece entitled "Our Amateur Madman at Bayreuth," which he pretended to have received from the well-known asylum across the road from the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth (a feature frequently pointed out by jocular anti-pseudonyms concealed Davison himself.

⁷² *The Musical World* (May 12, 1877), 208; reprinted from the *Times* (May 9, 1877).

⁷³ *Ibid.* (May 26, 1877), 223.

Wagnerians). It was signed “Thersitis Grumpus Wizell,” a transparently Davisonian pseudonym. In the heading, there appeared an engraving of two apes, labeled “Mumbo” and “Jumbo,” which expressed Davison’s sentiments about Wagnerian artistic writings, his followers, and some of the music. Far from being ravings, these are sharp journalistic pencil sketches, more spontaneous than the elegant *Times* articles, and seem to have been, in fact, what Davison scribbled during intermissions. They appear to reflect Davison’s first chaotic impressions of the musical language, and the challenge and frustrations it must have posed at first hearing. Davison was clearly stirred by the grandeur of Wagner’s conception and the drama (and by Wagner’s colorful and creative use of the orchestra), but he still saw in them lost “opportunities” for traditional operatic treatment:

E flat, Rhine bottom -- fifths ensuing -- restless modulation, keys everywhere and nowhere, fifths, diminished sevenths!!! - orchestra (under) wonderful effect -- of hearing music *somewhere* -- now near, now far -- now loud now soft- now ‘twixt the two . . . strings restless and rambling about -- basses queerly used . . . form none, proportion, completion [ending or beginning] none -- more than rainbow colours -- switches of melody always streaming about reminding of *Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* -- all a dream, in fact, every melody belongs to somebody and comes in somehow or other unexpectedly whenever that somebody is alluded to - two or three notes [only] sometimes constitute the reminder. This all through the four dramas . . . Pity no continued music -- no chorus. Gods’ ensemble? Never! Giants *a due?*- NEVER!- Nibelungs, although all under the same tyranny never in chorus. . . .

August 1876 (resumed). Stage management unparalleled -- all *act*, down to the smallest Nibelung, and with significant meaning. Name the character. Wagner stamps each indelibly with its melody, beautiful or queerish, unmistakeable . . . when themes come together one above another, etc., this *tremolando* shift occurs - this in oppressive excess, and one gets tired of it [anvil motif]. Orches-

tra superb -- nevertheless should like to hear it once above the ground. Wilhelmj's⁷⁴ solos *ravishing!* . . . But all sounds wonderful! Are there no angels or something of the sort in Walhalla and thereabouts to welcome Wotan and lead them, followed by the discarded Loge, to the huge battlemented castle? Opportunity [here] for grand chorus of invisibles lost. Duet in form for Alberich and Mime would have been welcome -- surely they may repeat their sentiments. Wagner always goes on, spinning out, referring and re-referring to the same figure for his gathering intensity. . . .⁷⁵

Charles Reid sees these scribblings as derogatory of the *Ring*; I see them, on the contrary, as an interesting record of Davison's cognitive processes as the music of the *Ring* went to work upon his sensibilities, and as musical comprehension began to dawn. The "Bayreuth Madman" returned from time to time as the author of such little informal sketches as Davison cared to print in the *Musical World*.

Davison's Wagnerian honeymoon came to a predictable end. By the late 1870s the *Musical World* was already evincing impatience with Wagner's followers, fundraising, theories, pretensions, and more. There was abundant twitting of Wagner and his establishment, but never again would the editorial tone be so intemperate and venomous as it was before the *Ring*.

Despite Davison's "conversion" experience, before the end of the 1870s, the following motto appeared on the masthead of the *Musical World*:

⁷⁴ August Wilhelmj (1845-1908): Brilliant German violinist. He served as concertmaster at the first Festival, but was a famous soloist. Before 1876, he had toured throughout Europe, including Russia and Great Britain. Afterwards, he toured the world, including North and South America, and Australia.

⁷⁵ "Our Amateur Madman at Bayreuth," *Musical World* (May 26, 1877), 223.

The worth of art appears most eminent in music, since it requires no material, no subject-matter, whose effect must be deduced: it is wholly form and power, and it raises and ennobles whatever it expresses - GOETHE ⁷⁶

This passage appears to be a re-declaration of faith in “absolute music.” In the years after Wagner’s 1877 London visit, there appeared many essays by Hanslick on Wagner, but few more extended statements by Davison himself, as if he had said all that he desired to say in seriousness, and he intended to let other voices speak for him, while he would indulge in play from there on. Wagner’s *Judaism in Music* had become of enough concern to appear translated and serialized in the *Musical World*. Davison appeared from time to time behind the screen of his cryptic “Muttonian” debates and dialogues; and in his faithful, rather *schadenfreudlich* collection of Wagnerian disasters.

On 27th June, storms decapitated the Wagner Theatre in Bayreuth. At present the building is roofless
(Who was the aggressor? ‘All Father’ Wotan, or Alberich the Niblung?) -Dr. Blidge [Davison]⁷⁷

Davison took a lively interest in European musical politics, and was careful to inform his readers of the controversy between the Wagnerians and the Brahms circle (which included Davison’s friend Joachim). By the end of the 1870s, when Wagner was, if not the cultural hero of all Europe, then at least a name on every cultured person’s tongue, Davison, like many others, appears to have cherished a hope that *someone* would knock Wagner off his throne, and it seemed that the most likely candidate was Johannes

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* (January 4, 1879), 8.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* (August 14, 1880), 396.

Brahms.⁷⁸

A Fair Estimate of Wagner

We read the following in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (all hail!):--

Wagner is not only the greatest musician but likewise the greatest poet, and as such the greatest master of language. In him, the German language, and with it, human utterance, have attained the last step towards perfection . . . Wagner exists in the world above the world and beyond time. But since the word "god" is out of fashion, and as the gods of Northern myth, like Wotan, the greatest of them, are still too insignificant, we cannot call Wagner a god!

[*The Musical World* replies:]

Why not! He might be called "Pan" -- for is he not Daedal? Moreover, he has long been a demigod, and will in the course of time be made into a constellation, wearing the belt and brandishing the sword of Orion, who would be forced to move eccentrically and hide himself in the nether side of his far distant *Nebulae*. If Hercules was a demigod, why not Wagner? whose labours, when Parsifal and Merlin⁷⁹ come to light, will at least equal the Twelve achieved by the son of Jupiter and Alcmena. But let Richard ware Johannes. Brahms is a great matter, backed up by Hanslick, who would make no more ado of slaughtering Wolzogen and Rubinstein at a breath than the wing-horsed Perseus of severing the head from the body of Medusa--

⁷⁸ Davison may have wished the presumptive savior was someone other than Brahms; he pointedly ignored the London premiere of *Ein deutsches Requiem* (April 2, 1875) in both the *Times* and the *Musical World*. The *Requiem*, a favorite target of Shaw, became very popular with the choir-loving English.

⁷⁹ "Merlin" was an abortive project, originally one of Cosima's. Before her elopement with Wagner, she had been a busy writer, and published several book reviews and literary essays. With the satirist Ernest Dohm, she wrote a libretto based on Arthurian legend, and gave it as a gift to Bülow. He liked the libretto but never found time to set it. She and Wagner later discussed completing the project, but it never had a high priority with either of them.

“truncating,” as it were, the fleshly substance of that Gorgon.

Abraham Sadoke Silent⁸⁰

After Davison’s death, this mischievous spirit lived on; the *Musical World* of July 18, 1885, reported a bad performance of *Lohengrin* in Amsterdam, enlivened by a diverting fight in the orchestra. When one violinist struck another with his bow, the victim kicked his aggressor downstairs. Onstage, the singer in the role of Henry the Fowler burst into “immoderate laughter” at the sight, whereupon his crown fell from his head “with a crash like a tea-tray.”

In January 1883, Davison wrote:

The music of *Parsifal* is simply execrable . . . Gurnemann is a bore and Parsifal an insipid donkey – not the Parsifal of genuine romance. Kundry alone redeems the entire thing.⁸¹

Davison had made no effort to attend when *Parsifal* first appeared at Bayreuth in the summer of 1882 (he was then sixty-nine years of age, as was Wagner himself), but he was sufficiently piqued to look at the music (no doubt the vocal score, since the full score was not published until 1883).

Davison was always offended by the cultish metaphysical bent of many Wagnerians (the “Mumbo Jumbo” he scorned, and would have been well typified by William Ashton Ellis, *q.v.*), although his own love of Mendelssohn bordered on idolatry. He and

⁸⁰ *The Musical World* (December 25, 1880), 612.

⁸¹ Letter, January 16, 1883, to an unnamed correspondent. Davison’s attraction to Wagner’s strong female characters is noted above. *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 340.

his cohorts at the *Musical World* detected more “Mumbo Jumbo” in the air surrounding the premiere of *Parsifal* than they could reasonably tolerate, and they struck back with plentiful satire, parody and caricatures [Illus. 5].

He never changed his mind about Wagner’s early works, especially *Lohengrin*. They were associated for him with those doctrines of Wagner’s which he most detested, possibly because he experienced both of them at the same time of his life. All of Davison’s deprecations and ridicule (Wagner’s knights seeming particularly to provoke him [Illus. 6]), however, could not prevent *Lohengrin* from becoming a beloved favorite of English opera audiences.

Despite Davison’s efforts, his long career, the far reach of his influence, and his success in greatly affecting the English reception of such Romantic composers as Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, and Berlioz – despite all this, he could do nothing to impede the inexorable progress of Wagner in England. With his 1876-77 essays, he contributed to this progress – perhaps more than he would have liked.

The Musical World.

LONDON, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1880.

Kundry and Parsifal.



The Parsifal Sickness.



The Parsifal Sickness
Mr. Stephen Mr. Mildew

Illus. 5.

a) Above, "Kundry and Parsifal," Charles Lyall, *Musical World*, October 2, 1880.

b) Below, "The Parsifal Sickness," Charles Lyall, *Musical World*, August 18, 1883. The patient has heard *Parsifal* six times; the physician recommends *Iolanthe* as an antidote.

A Knight of the Holy Graal.



Illus. 6.

"A Knight of the Holy Graal." Charles Lyall, *The Musical World*, December 6, 1879. At this Lohengrin's entrance, the chorus exclaims, "Seht! Welch ein seltsam Wunder!" Opera singers were ridiculed for their size in the nineteenth century as well as in the twentieth.

CHAPTER THREE

JOSEPH BENNETT



Joseph Bennett

Illus. 7.
Caricature of Joseph Bennett by Charles Lyall.

CHAPTER THREE

JOSEPH BENNETT

Despite a decided lack of sympathy with -- and a deep emotional aversion to -- Wagner's aims and musical innovations, Davison's sophisticated musical ear effected a partial conversion to Wagner. Davison was an emotional critic, whose writings were chiefly subjective. Davison used his journalism to declare his admiration, indignation, passions, loathing, and amusement. Joseph Bennett (1831-1906), his younger colleague and close friend, affords an interesting contrast with the dean of British music critics. Aspiring to fairness and moderation, Bennett was a placid critic, who resisted Davison's passionate loves and hatreds. Bennett earnestly desired to be fully informed of all sides of a controversy before making up his mind, and wished that others would follow his example.

He approached Wagner in a conscientious spirit, making careful readings of *Opera and Drama* and *A Communication to My Friends*, and thoroughly acquainting himself with writings on Wagner's musical procedures. In his *Letters from Bayreuth*, Bennett gives a brief, interesting account of his own experiences at the first performance of the complete *Ring* cycle. His critiques of both the performances and the works reveal his conflicting impulses. He intended to meet Wagner on his own terms, but continued to hold rigid preconceptions about opera, drama, and music.

Joseph Bennett was born in Berkeley, Gloucestershire, on November 21, 1831, and had a very thorough early musical education. He began as a choirboy, and later studied organ, violin, viola, and cello. He became a professional church musician in London, and eventually held such positions as precentor at Weigh House Chapel and organist at Westminster Chapel.

Bennett was a regular contributor of articles and reviews to the *Sunday Times*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the *Graphic*, and assisted the *Sunday Times* music critic, H. Coleman. In 1865, he succeeded Coleman at the *Sunday Times* and then in 1870, moved on to become the music critic of the *Daily Telegraph*. He remained there until retirement in 1906. Bennett also served on the staff of the *Musical Times*, as the editor of Vincent Novello's¹ short-lived *Concordia*, and abetted his friend Davison at the *Musical World*. Though without Davison's Jovian thunderbolt, Bennett still had a good deal of influence in his own right. He could moderate the turbulent Davison, and Davison trusted Bennett's perceptions. Davison frequently reprinted Bennett's articles in the *Musical World*.

Bennett, along with Davison and Francis Hueffer, made the trek to Bayreuth in the summer of 1876, for the first festival, and the first complete *Ring des Nibelungen*. He reviewed the work in a series of articles in the *Daily Telegraph*, which were published in book form in 1877 as *Letters from Bayreuth*. A more compact version of his Bayreuth impressions and conclusions appeared in two installments in the *Musical Times* in September and October 1876. Some personal reminiscences of the occasion,

¹ Vincent Novello (1781-1861): English music publisher, founder of Novello & Co.

with anecdotes, descriptions of physical conditions, and Bennett's work habits, were published in his memoir, *Forty Years of Music*, which appeared in 1908. This genial, but voluminous, book is the primary source of Bennett's biography.²

The year of Wagner's death, 1883, was a busy one for Bennett. He became the first editor of *The Lute*, and a judge at the Welsh National Eisteddfod. His writings of that year were collected in a volume titled *The Musical Year 1883*. For the purpose of this study, the most interesting article in the volume is Bennett's valediction to Wagner. Bennett reveals many of his own attitudes toward Wagner, and toward the general music scene in England, and on the Continent (this will be discussed later).

Bennett was a well-traveled critic. He made a trip to the USA in 1884, where, among other things, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir impressed him. He was present at the premiere of *Otello* at La Scala in 1887. Bennett retired in 1906, wrote his memoirs, and died in 1911.

Bennett at *Der fliegende Holländer*, 1870

In *Forty Years of Music*, Bennett recalls his presence at the first fully staged, complete production of a Wagner opera in England. This was the performance of *Der fliegende Holländer* at the Drury Lane Theatre in August 1870. Bennett does not mention that this first performance was sung in Italian, or that the opera was presented as *L'Olandese dannato*. The account gives an intriguing glimpse of the *audience's* reaction to their first exposure to *Holländer*.

² Joseph Bennett, *Forty Years of Music* (London: Methuen & Co., 1908).

The greatest event of the Drury Lane season was undoubtedly the production of Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer* with Ilma di Murska³ as Senta, Charles Santley⁴ as the unhappy Dutchman, Foli⁵ as Daland, Perotti as Erik, and Rinaldini as the Helmsman. It is distinctly worth while to mention these names in connection with the parts played, because none of Wagner's operas had been heard in England, and the names are therefore historic. As to the manner of the opera's reception, I most distinctly recall the bearing of the audience during the long and curious scene in which Senta and the Dutchman look upon each other for the first time. The Londoners were held fast and as motionless as the hero and heroine, save that a few laughed and were hushed down. There was more mirth when the contrast between the more eminently commonplace Daland, with his explanatory superfluities, and the still, contemplative figures of the hero and heroine was set before the public eye.⁶

Bennett tells us that, except for some giggles, the first Senta-Dutchman encounter absorbed the audience, despite the scene's "curious" nature.

The following extract is interesting in light of more fully developed criticisms Bennett would make about *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at its Bayreuth premiere in 1876.

I have just read my notice of the performance in the *Daily Telegraph*, and found that I took special care as to the scene just indicated. I then said:

We cannot deny to all this business an impressive character, nor to some of the accompanying music a charm which may arise, however, from contrast with much more

³ Ilma di Murska (1836-89): Croatian soprano with a three-octave voice, known for her Queen of the Night.

⁴ Charles Santley (1834-1922): English baritone, known for his Mozart and, later, Verdi roles. He was knighted in 1907.

⁵ Allan James Foley (1835-99): Irish bass, sang as "Signor Foli."

⁶ Bennett, *Forty Years of Music*, 252.

that is lugubrious and dreary to the last degree. For example, the Helmsman's song, "Mit Gewitter und Sturm" seems to light up the Act, and, with its themes treated chorally as a finale, does further efficient service. But the Hollander's soliloquy, and the Captain's duet, call for a large stock of endurance in the hearing.

Six years later, upon hearing the *Ring*, Bennett had the same complaint about the long stretches of narration and dialogue. Finally, Bennett informs us that in the end the occasion was a great success:

Nothing could have been more favourable than the reception of the work. The overture was encored, and most of the principal numbers were loudly applauded; the artists had to appear after each Act, and an extra "call" endorsed the success of Act 2. Such was the result of the first performance in England of a Wagnerian opera.⁷

Bennett and The *Ring*: Letters from Bayreuth

In 1876, I went to Bayreuth by way of Salzburg, Vienna and Dresden; by no means the nearest way . . . A great many people know Bayreuth now, but thirty years ago, the familiars were few and . . . there was much anxiety on the point of hotels, private lodging, food, drink.⁸

Bennett reminisces about his 1876 trip to Bayreuth in *Forty Years of Music*. Although the account of his personal experiences in his memoir is too brief and broadly sketched to provide more than a teasing glimpse, he does give us his schedule, which was rigorous:

⁷ *Ibid.*, 253-54.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 284.

4 AM- Rise; writing notice of previous day
 10:30 AM- Post article to London, breakfast
 12:-5:00 PM- performance; notes, supper, sending
 telegraphic report to London; then bed. ⁹

He amusingly describes Davison's adjustment to the uncomfortable conditions (see chapter 2 above), and tells a not very funny anecdote about a dispute over his room,¹⁰ but:

Were I to deal even lightly with the details of all the interesting and amusing events of Bayreuth in '76, an inordinate amount of space would be taken up, and this section would give serious offence by its lack of proportion.¹¹

Had Bennett had the inclination to write a small memoir dedicated to his experiences at Bayreuth, we might have had more than a mere glimpse of the activities of the English critics there, but it is difficult for the researcher to forgive the above teasing paragraph!

⁹ *Ibid.*, 287. This schedule conflicts with the story told by Bennett on 74 below; there he states that the performances, except *Das Rheingold*, began at 4 o'clock in the afternoon (which they did, and have, since 1876, with *Rheingold* starting at 5 o'clock). Perhaps, since the schedule appeared in his 1908 memoir, Bennett suffered from a memory lapse; but the actual performance schedule at Bayreuth makes his account of the hours between 12 noon and 5 PM very confusing.

¹⁰ . . . I found my apartment quite beery as to odour, but it was evidently the best room in the house . . . I was therefore content, but not so the lady on the other side of the thin partition. One day her husband came to me with information that his wife found living in a bed-sittingroom excessively inconvenient, and thought it possible that, on being acquainted with the fact, I would give up my room and find another elsewhere . . . I am sure that I looked more than a little surprised, but not knowing the customs of the country, I refrained from British expletives, and quite gently informed my applicant that, having come to Bayreuth in discharge of an important duty, I could not think of wasting my time perambulating the town with an eye to lodgings, and I assured him, also sweetly, that if I gave up my room under such conditions I should certainly not deserve to find any other. Whereupon he went away. When I desire to tell a "cheek" story, I tell this one. *Ibid.*, 284.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 291.

In the shorter article on the Festival published in the *Musical Times*, Bennett does (with mild derision) proffer more of the “interesting and amusing”:

As the performances -- save that of *Das Rheingold* -- began at 4 o'clock, there was, first of all, a hot walk to the building along an unwatered road, then a lounge in the shade, or a “restorer” in the refreshment booth, or an amusing inspection of the very remarkable-looking people who by means of long, unkempt hair, *à la* Liszt, proclaim themselves devotees of modern German art. These mustered in strong force, and vied with each other in eccentricity, the palm of strangeness being unanimously accorded to a brother and sister (both, it is said, pupils of Liszt), who wandered about “looking mysteriously nowhere,” the gentleman in an odd be-feathered hat, from under which streamed black straight locks, the lady in no hat at all, and with her tresses waving wildly. While these and such as these passed in review, a little procession of royal carriages ascended the hill; and if Emperor William were there, as on the first two days, the Germans gathered round the state entrance to greet him with the dismal, long-drawn, “Hoch!” which does duty for our more exciting and vigorous “Hurrah!”¹²

Although Bennett would always declare himself an admirer of Wagner’s genius, he had little taste for either the Wagner cult of personality or Wagner’s own eccentricities. He firmly dissociated himself from the inner circle of Wagner’s English supporters.¹³ In Bayreuth, Edward Dannreuther attempted to make an introduction between Wagner and Bennett. When Dannreuther returned with the announcement, “The

¹² Bennett, “The *Nibelungen* Trilogy at Bayreuth,” *The Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular* (September 1, 1876), 584.

¹³ Bennett’s writings about Davison’s replacement at the *Times* by Hueffer are grudging in tone; perhaps this is one reason.

Master does not receive,” Bennett replied acidly, “The outsider does not visit.”¹⁴

As correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, Bennett sent a report on each performance. A general introduction preceded the reports, which were themselves followed by two articles on his further travels to Nuremberg and Salzburg. Finally, he wrote a reflection on the *Ring*, called “Conclusions,” and published in two parts, dated September 21 and October 7. These articles were collected and published as *Letters from Bayreuth, Descriptive and Critical, on Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

A more concise version of Bennett's impressions was published in two parts in the September 1 and November 1, 1876, numbers of the *Musical Times*.

The introductory essay of *Letters*, dated July 21, gives a brief history of the *Ring* undertaking and summarizes Wagner's writings that accompanied his work on the *Ring*. Bennett recounts Wagner's financial desperation, the intervention of King Ludwig II of Bavaria, and the history of the *Patronatsverein*. He describes the *Festspielhaus*, and explains Wagner's purposes in building it. Bennett carefully bases his explanation of Wagner's purposes upon his reading of *A Communication to My Friends* and *Opera and Drama*.

Priding himself on his objectivity, Bennett considers himself a dispeller of controversy and misconceptions. He expects that direct reference to Wagner's own writings should be sufficient to settle any strife. A cogent distillation of Wagner's own

¹⁴Bennett, *Forty Years of Music*, 283. Professor Robert Bailey has pointed out to me that Dannreuther, a native German speaker, may have offended Bennett unintentionally. He may have mistakenly used the present tense of the verb “to receive,” when he actually meant to say, “The Master *is not receiving now*.”

concepts, he assumes, should be sufficient to remove the threat to operatic traditions perceived by many critics:

On the strength of his own words, then, let me take Wagner out of the false light which gives him an unreal hue, and truthfully formulate him thus:

1. He is not a writer of operas, but of dramas, to which music is subordinately allied for particular purposes and under special conditions.
2. He is not the active enemy of musical forms, but simply one who cannot use them in the task upon which he is engaged.

Now we are on firm ground, and see clearly what is before us. We approach, untroubled by lines of communication with extraneous matters, Wagner's finished work, and regard him not as a destroyer to be assailed for doing violence to things consecrated by great genius and universal worship, but as a creator, who invites our suffrages to place that which he has made upon some vacant pedestal in the Walhalla of art.¹⁵

He allows that some resistance to Wagner was probably well deserved.

Nevertheless, this resistance is probably due not only to a misunderstanding of Wagner's artistic purposes but also to Wagner's arrogance and tactlessness.

At the same time, none of us can forget that Wagner, if not as he declares, an iconoclast, the distinction is sometimes hard to draw, and the fact that most people think otherwise arises from his own behaviour. Bitter words, the pouring out of contempt and scorn, may result from an irascible turn of mind, but the world cannot always discern between the consequences of momentary weakness and the expression of deliberate conviction.¹⁶

¹⁵ Bennett, *Letters from Bayreuth: Descriptive and Critical of Wagner's **Der Ring des Nibelungen** with an appendix* (London: Novello, Ewer and Co., 1877) (July 21, 1876), 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Wagner starts with the idea that the object of dramatic representation is to excite the imagination and arouse emotion. To this end, musical language, directly the language of sensation is the direct means. But music is incapable of going beyond purport. It cannot precisely define the object of the sensation . . . the words and music appear as the complement of the other.¹⁷

We have now arrived at the main bases of Wagner's theory, and may define them in set words, as thus:

1. An intimate union of poetry and music for the production of an effect which neither can create alone, and for the purposes of which each is subjected to a condition, viz., the poetry must be that only which "yearns" for musical expression, while on its side, the music must unreservedly adapt itself to the requirements of the poetry. But inasmuch as in this union the generative power belongs exclusively to poetry, then --
2. There can be no question of submission to arbitrary musical forms, which indeed, lie outside of the matter altogether, and possess no title to recognition.¹⁸

Bennett then addresses Wagner's choice of myth as subject matter, and his use of alliterative verse.

The Bayreuth performances illustrate:

- I. The excellence of the myth as subject matter, because dealing with a humanity evolved, so to speak, from the national life, and free from all entangling associations;
- II. The spontaneous melody growing out of a feeling delivery of the words.
- III. The value of the ancient alliterative verse as lending itself to the purposes for which music and poetry are associated.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

Das Rheingold

The August 12 dispatch describes the logistics and conditions of Bayreuth, and is candid about its discomforts. Finally, on August 13, Bennett saw *Das Rheingold*. He describes the fuss surrounding the arrival of the Kaiser, and slyly depicts the Kaiser's and King Ludwig's mutual avoidance. He also communicates the excitement and anticipation of the audience assembled in the theater:

What an audience is gathered in front of that mysterious curtain!

. . . Yonder is Liszt, as the representative of modern German music, and around him are hundreds of his fellow-countrymen who are also his fellow-artists. It is true we do not see Hiller or Brahms or Raff, or Volckmann [*sic*] or Joachim;²⁰ but German art is here in mass, if some of its heads are wanting. America has sent Laing from cultivated Boston. Yonder is Hanslick of Vienna, most terrible of musical thrusters at the joints in Wagner's harness. Filippi of Milan is not far off; Albert Wolf of Paris sharpens his pencil above us; from England have come Benedict, Randegger, Davison and a score others But we do not want to be told this. We are assured, without such details, that Wagner is now to be tried by a very special jury indeed -- men of eminence gathered from every land, to command whose notice is itself an honour.²¹

²⁰ In his *Musical Times* account, Bennett wrote: "Brahms, Hiller, Volckmann [*sic*], Joachim, Rubinstein, Raff -- none of these put in an appearance, for reasons about which it would be impertinent to speculate." One might speculate about the conflict between the Brahms and Wagner musical "camps," but conflict was trumped up by the press. The two composers actually had many common friends and supporters, including the conductor Richter. Brahms himself had already seen *Die Walküre* at Munich.

A more impertinent speculation would be that each man named was a friend of Hans von Bülow, who had been devastated by Cosima's abandonment. In addition, Hiller, Joachim, Rubinstein, and Volkmann were of Jewish origin, and had been insulted by Wagner. Joachim and Hiller had formerly been friendly with Wagner, who alienated both of them with his anti-Semitic cant.

²¹ *Letters from Bayreuth* (August 13, 1876), 35.

Bennett's reviews of the performances cover the same ground as Davison's. Each begins with a synopsis of the plot, followed by a critique of the drama, assessments of the music and the performance, and brief remarks on the stage craft.

Despite Bennett's self-declared open-mindedness, he found much in his first hearing of *Das Rheingold* that did not meet with his approval. He is uncomfortable with the "continuous flow of formless music" which "streams over the mind, so to speak, without passing into it. Speaking generally, we are not drawn to a consciousness of its presence, since it offers little of an intelligible character to lay hold of."²² Bennett admits "that it works upon the emotions in harmony with the drama -- assuming that such a fantastic story touches us at all -- cannot be denied. Wagner's music intensifies the poetic beauty of the dramatic subject when it is beautiful, and also makes its ugliness more pronounced when it is ugly."²³ In the latter remark, the critic concedes that Wagner did achieve one of his goals, but he cannot approve the achievement.

Bennett's musical aesthetic, unavoidably conditioned by more traditional approaches, remained closed to many of Wagner's innovations. Throughout his reviews of the *Ring* dramas, he complains of the unmelodiousness of Wagner's vocal declamation. "Rarely, indeed," he writes, "do we come upon a passage which can strictly be called melodious, and for the most part, one has to endure the musical

²² *Ibid.*, 40.

²³ *Ibid.*, 41.

equivalent of ‘bald, disjointed chat.’”²⁴ The problem of “unmelodiousness” also figures in Bennett’s reception of Wagner’s “flow of formless music.”²⁵

Bennett had studied the idea of *Leitmotiv*, but his first hearing of the technique in *Das Rheingold* did not engage him. “As to the characteristic motivi, ingeniously varied though the manner of presentation may be, they soon become wearisome. The trick is not an exalted one, and Wagner works it without mercy.”²⁶

Much like Davison, Bennett loses his reservations when writing of Wagner’s orchestration and of the quality of the Bayreuth orchestra. Of the orchestration in *Das Rheingold*, he writes:

His redeeming point lies in the orchestration, which, from first to last, is marvellous in its skilful use of every resource. It requires some resolution to turn from the drama to music having no meaning by itself; but limiting attention to Wagner’s orchestra, the connoisseur enjoys a rich treat. Beautiful ideas, ingenious devices, and constant variety are found there in phenomenal abundance ²⁷

Of the Bayreuth orchestra:

As may be imagined by connoisseurs, this orchestra is, above all, rich in the volume and majesty of its bass, the “sixteen-feet tone” brass and wood instruments helping to produce effects of the highest grandeur; but at the same time the balance is as perfect as anything can be. As for the unity, precision, and delicacy of its playing, one can

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 40–41.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

easily imagine that the finest artists of Germany, under such a conductor as Hans Richter, and with unlimited opportunities for rehearsal, leave nothing to desire. But, as a matter of fact, the Wagner orchestra does more than meet bare requirements; it oppresses the ear and mind, so to say, with a sense of full and ripe perfection. Difficult though the music be, the tide of sound rolls on with unbroken smoothness, reflecting lights and shades with infinite delicacy from its surface; while the fact that it streams upwards from a hidden source impresses the imagination to an extent not dreamed of, perhaps, either by Wagner or by Grétry before him. Whatever may come of the festival in other respects, we now know fully what an orchestra can do, and where in a theatre it should be placed.²⁸

Interestingly, Bennett's remark upon the "reflecting lights and shades" echoes Davison's comparison of Wagner's orchestration to an "omni-coloured kaleidoscope (see chapter 2)," which also foreshadowed Debussy's well-known remark on *Parsifal*. One wonders why neither Davison nor Bennett mentions the transition between scenes 2 and 3, when Wotan and Loge journey down to visit Alberich in Nibelheim, and the orchestra drops out, leaving the sound of sixteen anvils -- a moment of particular orchestral audacity. Davison and Bennett seldom record reactions to music that one might imagine was downright startling.

The singers, especially their dramatic abilities, impressed Bennett:

Nothing was done on the stage without a purpose; and the bearing of each god or goddess had a distinctiveness as marked in its way as the theme which represented him or her in the musical department of the work.²⁹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

He was continually jarred, however, by the emphasis on declamation.

The one drawback associated with all this excellence lay in the fact that very few of the artists could be called singers. Much of whatever vocalism once existed on the lyric stage in Germany has disappeared before the advance of mere declamation . . . But as Wagner's phrases are more often declamatory recitative than melodies, the want of vocalism cannot be looked upon as at all a fatal effect.³⁰

Bennett ended his report on *Das Rheingold* with the curt observation: "Regarding the scenery itself, I cannot say that anything astonishing was presented to the English eye." We may assume from this that Bennett was unimpressed with the staging of such scenic highlights as the Rhine Daughters swimming in the Rhine, Valhalla, the descent to Nibelheim, and the Rainbow Bridge.

Die Walküre

Die Walküre was more impressive to Bennett in all respects.

. . . who cannot see at a glance that it [the story] compares most favourably, in point of strong human interest, and even in circumstances and action, with the fantastic *Das Rheingold*? Who, moreover, cannot trace the influence of this fact in the music?³¹

Bennett felt that the action of *Das Rheingold*, concerned as it was with the activities of gods and other immortals, was outlandish, and lacked "human interest." He welcomed the shift in focus to the mortal children of Wotan. Qualities that left him cold and

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

³¹ *Ibid.* (August 14, 1876), 50.

uncomprehending in *Rheingold* came together with greater effect in *Die Walküre*:

... The whole of the first act is charming, simply because the *motivi* upon which it is built, even that representing Hunding, are true melodies. To these, though they are repeated incessantly, the ear turns with pleasure, above all throughout the long love scene for the brother and sister. We may be disgusted with impending incest; but when the door of the house flies open, revealing the silver moonlight beyond, and Siegmund begins, "Look how the spring laughs in the hall," we are carried along by a stream of sensuous music, glowing with luxurious colour, instinct with living melody, and in harmony with truest poetry, which takes possession of us, and leads us we care not whither. Here, at least, is a proof that when Wagner pleases, he can produce that which is musically beautiful. If he would only remember that music, to be dramatic, need never be ugly, and that, for the sake of beauty, some departure may be made from the hard-and-fast lines of a theory, for how much more than now the world would have to thank him! ³²

What is musical beauty? For Bennett, it appears to be well-arched, singable melody, and perhaps some chromatic flavoring, but little dissonance. Bennett's comments here echo Mozart's well-known remarks about dramatic music:

... For just as someone in such a violent rage oversteps all order, moderation, and limits, so that he doesn't even know himself, so must the music also not know itself -- but since passions, whether violent or not, must never be expressed to the point of revulsion, and music, even in the most horrible situation, must never offend the ear, but must be enjoyed, must always remain music. ³³

³² *Ibid.*, 50-51.

³³ ... denn, ein Mensch der sich in einem so heftigen zorn befindet, überschreitet alle ordnung, Maas und Ziel, er kennt sich nicht -- so muß sich auch die Musick nicht mehr kennen -- weil aber die leidenschaften, heftig oder nicht, niemals bis zum Eckel ausgedrückt seyn müssen, und die Musick, auch in der schaudervollsten lage, das Ohr

The qualities of musical beauty that Bennett prizes are so important to him that they override dramatic considerations, such as the musical characterization of a villainous character, and even such moral considerations as “impending incest.” The echo of Mozart in this passage (whether conscious or unconscious) indicates that Bennett’s personal musical aesthetic is in a very well-established tradition, and he rigidly resists the kind of musical-dramatic relationships that Wagner was trying to introduce in the *Ring*. For Bennett, dramatic musical characterization does not justify “ugliness,” even when depicting a villain.

Bennett’s choice of words to describe the music he likes is also interesting: “. . . we are carried along by a stream of sensuous music, glowing with luxurious colour, instinct with living melody that takes possession of us, and leads us, we care not whither.” He uses language that is reminiscent of his description of the music in *Das Rheingold* (“formless,” “streams over the mind”), but there is a disapproving implication to the critique in the *Rheingold* review. Here, a similar view is expressed positively. He wrote, grudgingly, about the *Rheingold* music, “[the fact] that it works upon the emotions in harmony with the drama . . . cannot be denied,” which seems to be an unenthusiastic way of expressing a very similar reaction to the music of *Die Walküre*, which “takes possession of us, and leads us, we care not whither.” We might compare this statement to those of later, committed Wagnerians, quoted in the concluding chapter

niemalen beleidigen, sondern doch dabey vergnügen muß, folglich allzeit Musick bleiben muß [*sic*]. Mozart, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen* 3: 1780-86, ed. Wilhelm A. Bauer and Otto Erich Deutsch (Kassel, Bärenreiter, 1963), 161-62. *N.B.*: I have preserved Mozart’s spelling and capitalization.

below.

Here Bennett admonishes Wagner that more of such “beauty” would certainly be worth more departures from his “theory.” In fact, as will become clear, many of Bennett’s problems with the *Ring* are directly related to Wagner’s elevation of drama above values (Bennett’s) of musical beauty.

After Bennett’s rapturous reception of Act I, he is disappointed by the first scenes of Act II. The confrontation between Wotan and Fricka imparts information that is crucial to the drama’s development, and a pair of accomplished singing actors can generate a good deal of dramatic tension in this scene. Bennett finds the scene not only not “beautiful” but also difficult or impossible to describe as *music*:

In the second act, Wagner falls back on the hard-and-fast lines in question, setting the dialogues of Wotan with Fricka and Brünnhilde to most wearisome and painful sounds – for music it may hardly be called. The poor god drones on, and the orchestra drones with him, till the ear rebels, and excites the mind to a state of intense irritation. Happily, relief comes when Siegmund and Sieglinde enter, and the entire of the act is redeemed by the solemnly beautiful music of the scene in which Brünnhilde warns Siegmund of his fate . . . Nothing could exceed the richness of the orchestration in this scene, or the perfect harmony between the musical and dramatic spirit.³⁴

The second act is inconsistently rewarding for Bennett, but the third act is an unambiguous success. Bennett is especially struck by the opening “Ride of the Valkyries” and by Wotan’s moving farewell to Brünnhilde. Bennett attributes the Valkyrie scene’s success to the use of an ensemble of voices, in contrast to the dominance of one

³⁴ *Letters from Bayreuth* (August 14, 1876), 51.

single voice at a time.

But the last act is the most remarkable of all. It opens with a chorus for the Valkyrie maidens which certainly has not its equal anywhere as an embodiment of wild, vigorous, rejoicing life. The music tells its own story, and as the voices rise one above another in strange exulting phrases, supported by the surging orchestra, we want no interpreter of feeling or intention. This chorus was greeted with a peal of spontaneous applause³⁵; and it would be interesting to know how much of the tribute arose from a sense of contrast to the monotony of a single voice.³⁶

. . . I might dwell long upon the beauty of the scene which embodies Wotan's farewell to Brünnhilde, and discuss the tender expression of music, the effect of which is heightened by picturesque and ingenious suggestiveness wholly beyond praise. But enough that the drama closes in a manner worthy of its opening, and which leaves an impression not readily to be effaced. A word for the orchestral writing must be added, because in it lay the greatest source of pleasure. So rich and satisfying were the instrumental passages in the scenes where Wagner's theory allowed him to produce beauty that the ear resented the intrusion of the voices as an offence. "Let the orchestra alone," was the instinctive command to the actors. Need this have been the case? Is the negation of vocal charm a necessity of the system?³⁷

There is a very wide gap between Bennett's pleasure in the orchestral writing and his lack of pleasure in the vocal style -- even in the scene of Wotan's Farewell, which

³⁵ Not everyone was as taken with the opening of Act III. Bennett recorded the following incident in London in 1882: "Although warned of what was coming, at the first performance of *Die Walküre*, a lady in my box, frightened by the appearance of so many enormous German women, and shaken like a leaf when they were in full cry, exclaimed: 'Take me out, take me out, or I shall scream with them.'" *Forty Years of Music*, 281.

³⁶ *Letters from Bayreuth* (August 14, 1876), 54-55.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

many listeners would consider to be “sung” by the bass, rather than declaimed (or shouted, or barked).³⁸ Bennett is so disturbed by the vocal production he hears, even in this scene, that he wishes that the voices would disappear, and leave the orchestra to carry on by itself.

In reviewing the quality of performance, Bennett once again hands the palm to the orchestra. Among the singers, he most admired the Brünnhilde, Amalie Materna .

... the chief honours fall to Frau Materna, whose Brünnhilde could hardly have been surpassed for gentleness and dignity. Of all the characters in the entire drama, Brünnhilde is the noblest, and of all the artists here present the one was chosen to play it who could best do it justice.³⁹

[Materna's] vocal skill would appear to better advantage in opera, but the power and quality of her tones, as well as the impressiveness of her acting, could have had no finer demonstration.⁴⁰

Throughout the review, Amalie Materna is singled out for praise more than any other member of the cast. He considers that her voice would be good for “opera” -- which, according to Wagner, the *Ring* is not.

³⁸ The history of Wagner performance practice, particularly of singing, has recently been examined by several scholars. See David Breckbill, “Singing,” in *The Wagner Compendium: A Guide to Wagner's Life and Music*, ed. Barry Millington (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 362-67, and Jens Mahalte Fischer, “*Sprechgesang* or *Bel Canto*: Toward a History of Singing Wagner,” in *The Wagner Handbook*, ed. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski; translation ed. John Deathridge (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 524-46.

³⁹ *Letters from Bayreuth* (August 14, 1876), 53.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

Siegfried

Bennett also enjoyed *Siegfried*. Although *Siegfried* has an abundance of the declamatory dialogue which Bennett so disliked in *Die Walküre*, he does not mention this “defect” in his *Siegfried* review. Nor does Bennett mention that *Siegfried* is teeming with precisely the nonhuman creatures that he so disliked in *Das Rheingold* (including a non-singing bear, and a singing dragon). As might be expected, Bennett is thrilled with the long orchestral interludes, particularly the forest music of Act II, scene 2. He likes the Wotan/Erda confrontation of Act Three, scene 1, which he does not find excessively chatty. Finally, he is impressed with the love duet of Siegfried and Brünnhilde.

In the third act the music to the interview between Wotan and Erda contains some impressive passages, and more than ever excites admiration of the skill with which Wagner interweaves the large number of motivi he has now accumulated. But the interest grows when Siegfried is brought face to face with Brünnhilde, and a dialogue begins destined to end with a love duet unexampled in its stress of passion. . . . The Siegfried and Brünnhilde duet is a striking example of intense musical expression. As regards the relative merits of *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*, the general opinion is in favour of the first, on account of more absolute beauty, springing from poetic suggestiveness and strong human interest. All the same, however, will *Siegfried* stand among Wagnerian dramas as a stupendous work. So it was regarded last night, and after each act, shouts of applause filled the theatre. ⁴¹

After having seen three of the *Ring* dramas, Bennett is sufficiently confident to rank them in order of preference, giving *Die Walküre* first place, and *Siegfried* second-- but calling *Siegfried* a “stupendous” work -- and not mentioning *Das Rheingold* at all.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* (August 16, 1876), 64.

His comment on Act Three, scene 2 of *Siegfried* seems to indicate that after his disparaging remarks on the *Leitmotive* in *Das Rheingold*, he is beginning to appreciate the technique, expressing “admiration” for the skill with which Wagner “interweaves” motives. Yet he does not really demonstrate that he appreciates the dramatic or psychological significance of that interweaving, or that the mastery might go beyond the contrapuntal.

Götterdämmerung

Götterdämmerung poses problems of music, drama, and definition for Bennett.

The story of the *Götterdämmerung* is one that Verdi might have set to music, so rapidly do the situations follow each other, so intense is their dramatic interest, and so great are the opportunities for the effects which modern opera loves . . . This being so, the result of its combination with Wagner’s system -- above all in the matter of the concerted music -- is curious to note.⁴²

After his immersion in Wagner’s theories of music drama, Bennett is surprised to see (and hear) the chorus in Act II, scenes 3 and 4, and the concerted singing in scene 4.⁴³ Once Wagner has broken his own rule, and introduced concerted singing, Bennett cannot understand why Wagner then remains faithful to his rule in Brünnhilde’s immolation scene. Bennett writes that the scene cries out for the full operatic finale treatment, *à la* Verdi.

⁴² *Ibid.* (August 18, 1876), 75-76.

⁴³ These scenes have often been noted for their inconsistency with Wagner’s theories. Shaw wrote that *Götterdämmerung* was an old-fashioned grand opera.

Above all, why is the stage filled with a crowd of dummies during the magnificent and moving last scene? The absence of a chorus here is the very wantonness of whim. It excites an annoying sense of incompleteness, and makes us cry even beneath the roof of Wagner's theatre, "Oh, for a Verdi!" But had the master here employed ever so freely the splendid resources that lay ready to his hand, it is doubtful that the dramatic power of *Götterdämmerung* would not have put the music in a secondary place. Whatever may be said of other sections of the work, here the story and the poetry well-nigh absorb attention . . . As a whole, the drama fascinates us, and that most where most appears to be wanting in its musical treatment. This is fortunate, because a good deal is wanting -- so much that I have no hesitation in giving *Götterdämmerung* the third place in regard to music, ranking after *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*, *Das Rheingold* coming last of all. The result may be in a measure due to the fact that it presents very little of novelty. According to a careful study by Herr von Wolzogen there are in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ninety five distinct motivi, of which thirty-five belong to *Das Rheingold*, twenty-two to *Die Walküre*, twenty to *Siegfried*, and only thirteen to *Götterdämmerung*, which thus has, with small relief, to bear the burden of constantly repeating themes already heard over and over again. But apart from this . . . *Götterdämmerung* disappoints, the more keenly because of the magnificent opportunities supplied by its situations for really sublime musical effect . . . ⁴⁴

For Bennett, the drama of *Götterdämmerung* is good -- too good for the music.

He feels that Wagner does not make the most of the drama, or of the superior musical forces he has available. Bennett finds *Götterdämmerung* to be dramatically impressive, and expects a finale with all stops pulled out. He does not perceive that in this last part of the *Ring* cycle, the focus becomes progressively smaller. The other forces have disappeared, either through renunciation (e.g. Wotan), or through destiny (e.g. Siegfried),

⁴⁴ *Letters from Bayreuth* (August 18, 1876), 76-78.

and in the last scene Brünnhilde is left to bear the entire weight. The outcome will be decided by her actions, and the last scene necessarily focuses upon her in close-up fashion. A chorus might be *musically* impressive, which would please Bennett, but it would be dramatically inappropriate.

Bennett dashes the modern reader's hopes that he might have been beginning to appreciate Wagner's *Leitmotive* when he writes that *Götterdämmerung* re-uses too much older material. Unlike Davison, who seemed to have an almost immediate grasp of the musical-psychological connections in the *Leitmotive*, Bennett still hears the motives as simple musical themes. He admits their mixture and interplay is clever, but their entire dramatic and psychological "associative magic" (Thomas Mann) entirely escapes him. It has been written that Wagner's mastery of *Leitmotiv* was not fully developed before Act III of *Siegfried*, and that the last drama of the *Ring* is most dazzling in its virtuosic manipulation of motivic material.⁴⁵ By contrast with Bennett, Wagner's great English opponent wrote enthusiastically:

As not seldom, too, in the course of a single scene, more than one personage, incident, or emotion is brought back to the mind, at times almost simultaneously, the themes, or such fragments of themes as may be suitable, are ingeniously interwoven. This is accomplished by the poet-musician with consummate artistic propriety, and often produces an indescribably beautiful effect . . . The themes belonging to *Das Rheingold*, the prologue, are similarly reproduced in the course of the three dramas of the trilogy wherever occasion may demand, and this confers a new and powerful sense of unity.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Barry Millington, *Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 211.

⁴⁶ Davison, "The Wagner Festival" (August 20, 1876), 512-13.

Although respectful and well-read, Bennett is unprepared for the *Ring* in many other ways, for some of which he cannot really be blamed. Bennett's critiques are immediate, broadly sketched, and more impressionistic than detailed. Seldom does he refer to specific, striking moments in the dramas; it is rather surprising that he does not express reactions to certain scenic features, or parts of the score that might particularly strike a first-time hearer. Although Bennett and Davison probably discussed the work between themselves, and although there are similarities in format and organization, and in the spontaneity of their reviews, each man's impression is distinct. Davison reacts emotionally and musically, and is surprised by his enjoyment. Bennett listens rationally, in the contexts of both his own musical tastes and of Wagner's writings, and is often disappointed. His impressions of the music are not profound. They are sketchy, as might be expected of a first hearing of such a massive work, but this also indicates that he may have lacked preparation. In fact, neither Davison nor Bennett mentions examining the scores of the operas at any point in the reviews, or at any time before or during the *Festspiel*. With the exception of *Götterdämmerung*, the full scores of all the *Ring* operas were available before 1876. By 1875, all of the vocal scores were available. The vocal score of *Das Rheingold* had been in print since 1861.

Assessing the *Ring*: "... thirty-four gods, giants, imps and mortals ..."

The final installment of Bennett's *Letters* is dated September 21, and titled "Conclusions." Bennett intended it both as an evaluation of the *Ring*'s success in fulfilling Wagner's artistic aspirations and as an assessment of the theories themselves.

By then, Bennett apparently felt that he had sufficient distance to formulate such an assessment. We may attribute Bennett's misapprehensions of Wagner's musical style in the *Ring* to lack of familiarity and to thorough conditioning in traditional operatic style. The "Conclusions" are almost exclusively concerned with the general artistic issues posed by the *Ring*, and have little review, or reassessment, of the music. There is no further indication that Bennett ever examined the *Ring* scores after his first hearing in Bayreuth. He appeared not to consider that his initial reaction required any reexamination or revision.

In the Introduction to "Conclusions," Bennett first chides ill-wishers who went to Bayreuth merely to sneer. He considers the *Ring* premiere an important cultural event and Wagner a major artistic personality, one who has suffered public opprobrium to an unusual extent:

Depend on it that neither Wagner nor Wagnerian theories are to be put down by such means. The man is probably unconquerable anyhow; and his theories, so gravely and powerfully advanced, so unreservedly accepted by thousands whose judgement commands respect, and so important that their formal illustration occupies the mind of the civilised world, are at least entitled to serious treatment.⁴⁷

Bennett then proposes to examine the merits of the work, "motivated by a desire . . . to discover that which may be accepted as an addition to the resources of art."⁴⁸ Examining several of Wagner's claims for the ideal work of art, Bennett evaluates the

⁴⁷ *Letters from Bayreuth*, "Conclusions" (September 21, 1876), 81.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

ideas themselves, and weighs different aspects of the *Ring* against Wagner's own theories.

Wagner's Use of His Sources

Bennett begins with Wagner's claims for myth as subject. He approves Wagner's combination of several different mythic traditions – "Teutonic, Scandinavian and Icelandic sources alike." He believes that the entire drama derives from the figure of Siegfried,⁴⁹ and quotes approvingly from William Morris's famous translation of the *Volsunga Saga*:⁵⁰

[Siegfried] was far above other men in courtesy and goodly manners, and well-nigh in all things else; and when folks tell of all the mightiest champions and the noblest chiefs, then ever is he named the foremost . . . Wise he was to know things as yet undone, and the voice of all fowls he knew, wherefore few things fell on him unawares. Of many words he was, and so fair of speech withal that, whensoever he made it his business to speak, he never left speaking before, that to all men it seemed full sure that no otherwise must the matter be than as he said . . . Never did he lose heart, and of nought was he adread.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Bennett's misinterpretations are understandable, as will be shown below.

⁵⁰ William Morris (1833-1896), English socialist, designer, and poet. Morris is now probably best known for wallpaper and textile designs (they appear, for instance, on the covers of the journal *Nineteenth-Century Music*), but he was a mighty intellect, and one of the most influential men of late-nineteenth-century England. Along with his other literary achievements, Morris introduced Icelandic saga to the English public by producing the first English translation of the *Volsunga Saga*, one of Wagner's major sources for the *Ring*. A recent major biography: Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1995).

⁵¹ *Volsunga Saga: Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs*, trans. William Morris, with an introduction and glossary by Robert Gutman (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 181-82.

Bennett remarks that Wagner was not likely to turn away from such a hero.⁵²

Addressing Wagner's claim that myth and legend are the only fitting subject for drama, Bennett says that few would dispute that myths and legends provide good dramatic material; however, "there are myths and myths." Some myths are "big with human interest" (Bennett's major criterion for effective drama); others are distant, populated with cold, unsympathetic characters. The latter refers to the gods and goddesses of Valhalla and the other immortals with whom the *Ring* is inhabited. Bennett argues that the presence of so many Nordic immortals cripples Wagner's drama by diverting the audience's attention from the "human interest" of the story.⁵³ He points out that Wagner's mythic sources were concerned more with human beings than with gods. Wagner manipulated his sources to present far more gods than appear in the original versions, which Bennett views as weakening the dramatic appeal of the *Ring*. Bennett speculates that Wagner intended that the Teutonic gods would function as had the Hellenic gods in the classical Greek drama: to "secure . . . the dignity, impressiveness and 'removedness' which distinguish the tragedies of antiquity."⁵⁴ Bennett points out, however, that the Greek tragedies were religious in function, and had immediate spiritual significance to their original audience. The Nordic gods were of no relevance to the audience of the late nineteenth century. "The pagan myth is as dead as the dodo as far as

⁵² There are some glaring differences between Wagner's character and the Icelandic hero; Wagner's Siegfried is not notably clever, and even when he is lent Brünnhilde's wisdom, he does not make use of it.

⁵³ Bennett's "allegory detector" apparently was not operating.

⁵⁴ *Letters from Bayreuth*, "Conclusions" (September 21, 1876), 95.

its power over the popular mind,”⁵⁵ declares Bennett, and he finds the presence of no fewer than thirty-four immortal characters disruptive and alienating. For Bennett, Wagner also stripped the legends of their simple dignity. Wotan’s verbosity particularly annoyed Bennett (see also chapter 2, above). In the original legends, says Bennett, the god Odin rarely mixed in mortal affairs, and “awe and mystery” attended his appearances.

Wagner makes such large use of this chief of the Northern deities, and places him in such positions, that, quite apart from his terribly long-winded utterances, we soon begin to regard him with contempt, and resent his presence as that of a bore. On the other hand, the legend shows him rapidly flitting across the stage in mysterious guise, bent on purposes at which the myth-maker never ventures to guess . . . Even when Odin enters the story, it is for such a brief moment, attended by circumstances which invest him with awe and mystery.⁵⁶

To show Odin’s “awe and mystery” in the *Saga*, Bennett quotes the description of the disguised god thrusting the sword into the tree at Signy’s wedding.⁵⁷ In Act I of *Die Walküre* Wagner puts this description, almost verbatim, into the mouth of Sieglinde, when she is showing the sword to Siegmund.⁵⁸ As Sieglinde sings, “an old man, in grey,

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁷ In the *Volsunga Saga*, Signy is a forerunner of Wagner’s Sieglinde.

⁵⁸ Francis Hueffer, in his article “Richard Wagner and his *Ring of the Nibelung*,” notes the near-identity of Sieglinde’s narration and the passage from the *Saga*. See chapter 4 below.

his hat pulled down low,”⁵⁹ in her lower register, the brass and bassoons quietly sound the *Walhall* motif.

In Bennett’s view, this scene may not have “awe and mystery,” but it does possess a moving dignity. Wagner preserves “awe and mystery” for the exits and entrances of another character, Erda. Both her appearances, in *Das Rheingold* and in *Siegfried*, were conceived as *coups de théâtre*. The Norns’ scene also suggests considerable “awe and mystery,” with its trenchant reminiscences of important motives within a highly formalized musical structure.⁶⁰

Misunderstanding Brünnhilde

Bennett again claims to find the *Saga* superior to Wagner’s adaptation in the episode of Brünnhilde’s betrayal (*Götterdämmerung*, Act II).

In the *Saga*, when Brynhild discovers that Sigurd has given the ring to Gudrun, she is silent in her sorrow.⁶¹ The chronicle continues with touching simplicity: “Then Brynhild saw the ring, and knew it, and waxed as wan as a dead woman, and she went home and spake no word the evening long.” Thenceforth Brynhild is majestic in her anger and grief, bearing no resemblance to the ranting madwoman of Wagner’s play.⁶²

⁵⁹ “Ein Greis, in grauem Gewand; tief hing ihm der Hut . . .” *Die Walküre*, Act I.

⁶⁰ See Patrick McCreless, “Schenker and the Norns,” in *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*, Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, eds. (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989), 276-97.

⁶¹ In the Icelandic *Saga*, Brynhild is the forerunner of Wagner’s Brünnhilde, Sigurd of Siegfried, and Gudrun of Gutrune.

⁶² Bennett, *Letters from Bayreuth*, “Conclusions” (September 21, 1876), 93

Bennett is not correct about Brynhild's conduct in the *Saga*. In the *Saga*, Brynhild is an imposing figure, who is most unrestrained in her loves and hatreds. Immediately following her confrontation with Gudrun (Gutrune) over the ring, Brynhild is silent. Later that evening, however, she scolds her husband Gunnar (Gunther) with a tirade worthy of any operatic diva, even threatening to kill him:

Thou, Gunnar, didst thou naught; as pale as a dead man
thou didst wax, and no king thou art, and no champion; so
whereas I made a vow unto my father, that him alone
would I love who was the noblest man alive, and this is
none save Sigurd; lo, now I have broken my oath and
brought it to naught, since he is none of mine, and for this
cause shall I compass thy death . . . Never have I dwelt with
evil things privily, or done loathsome deeds; -- yet most
fain am I to slay thee.⁶³

Brynhild attacks her husband, but is restrained. She tears up her embroidery and throws it away; then "set open her bower doors, that far away might the wailing of her sorrow be heard."⁶⁴ Wild with grief and rage, Brynhild disrupts the extended family's life until nobody can bear it any longer. A brother of Gunnar is tricked into killing Sigurd. When Gudrun moans over her husband's death, "Brynhild heard it, and laughed when she heard her moaning."⁶⁵

⁶³ *Volsunga Saga*, 181-82.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 190. This is probably the source for Brünnhilde's mysterious laughter in *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, scene 3:

Gutrune: War das sein Horn?

Nein! Noch

kehrt er nicht heim.

Schlimme Träume

störten mir den Schlaf!

This Brynhild might be judged to be much more awful than Wagner's Brünnhilde, who, after all, is cruelly manipulated and deceived. How did Bennett miss what he would undoubtedly call the primitive savagery of the Valkyrie's prototype? Perhaps to prove a point, he read less than carefully.

Bennett's preference for a silent Brynhild may be surprising, considering that Bennett was discussing a *music* drama. Although he gamely accepted the *Ring* on Wagner's terms, he might have seen that Wagner's "new art" still had strong ties to the world of opera. Opera or music drama, there is no place here for a silent heroine! One detects a hint of Victorian priggishness in Bennett's preference for a silently suffering Brynhild. He may be echoing Mrs. Ellis's advice: "Suffer and be still."⁶⁶

Wagner's powerfully emotive Brünnhilde stands as the then-latest development in a long tradition of vocal virtuosity used to represent superhuman qualities or extreme emotional intensity. For much of the history of opera, virtuosity resided in intricate coloratura, and high notes. Wagner's "superwomen" (Brünnhilde, Isolde, Kundry) required a different vocal technique, though the depiction of larger-than-life qualities remained the same. Rather than fleetness and agility, Wagner's heroines needed exceptional power and stamina to project through the great Wagner orchestra, and to sing their long monologues and narrations. Instead of the ability to hit exceptionally high

Wild wiehrte sein Ross;
Lachen Brünnhildes
weckte mich auf.

⁶⁶ Mrs. Sarah Stickney Ellis, popular etiquette author, *Daughters of England* (1845), 73: "[A woman's] highest duty is to suffer and be still."

notes, they needed the strength to sustain an exhaustingly high tessitura for long periods. In addition, they required the wide, smooth range and accurate pitch of the best opera divas.⁶⁷ It was also necessary that they project emotion through their voices.

Bennett is not really seeking a silent Brünnhilde. After *Die Walküre*, he writes that Materna's Brünnhilde "could hardly have been surpassed for gentleness and dignity. Of all the characters in the entire drama, Brünnhilde is the noblest,"⁶⁸ despite the fact that she first appears in Act II, "jauchzend von Fels zu Fels die Höhe rechts hinaufspringend" (leaping joyously from rock to rock), armed, and singing high B naturals and a C – not the most ladylike deportment. Bennett seems content enough with Brünnhilde's conduct in *Die Walküre*; but the awakened – "grownup" – Brünnhilde of *Götterdämmerung* is repugnant when she expresses rage.

When Brünnhilde is betrayed to the Gibichungs by Siegfried, she is at her most vulnerable. Not only has Wotan taken away her divinity, she has also given her wisdom to Siegfried. When she discovers her betrayal, she reacts in a conventional way. Because she has lost her wisdom, Hagen is able to manipulate her into the conspiracy against Siegfried.

Misinterpreting Wotan

Wotan, in Bennett's view, is a nuisance. He sacrifices his dignity, and talks too much. Bennett objects to so much Wotan because he views the *Ring* as Siegfried's

⁶⁷ See Note 38 on singing Wagner.

⁶⁸ *Letters from Bayreuth* (August 14, 1876), 53.

drama, and Wotan as a subsidiary character. The *Ring*, however, has not one but two parallel plots, a “foreground” and a “background.” While Siegfried is the “foreground” hero, Wotan is the protagonist of the “background.” The two plots conclude in Brünnhilde’s peroration, when she addresses Wotan (“Ruhe, ruhe du Gott”) and then Siegfried (“Siegfried! Sieh! Selig grüss dich dein Weib!”).

Bennett’s confusion is understandable, even if he read the history of the *Ring* provided by Wagner himself. In the pair of articles in the *Musical Times*, Bennett shows that he was aware that the cycle originated in a single work that was to be called *Siegfried’s Tod*, and that Wagner conceived the other operas to fill in important background details:

Looking at the technical completeness of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, it is easy to assume that the plan was carefully defined from the outset. Not so, however. It grew under the author’s hands till that which once was a single drama became four. Curiously enough, it stretched backwards in time. Dealing at first with results arising from hidden causes, Wagner felt the necessity of revealing those causes, and so was led to the source from whence all the effects arose. We have his own authority for believing this; moreover, he has told us exactly where and under what circumstances he began the work . . . But as the limits of a single drama would not admit even the chief events of Siegfried’s life, Wagner chose those immediately preceding his death, and based upon them that poem now known as *Götterdämmerung* – fourth and last section of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* – but then entitled *Siegfried’s Tod*. The story of this drama is highly exciting, and its outlines show that the author had in view an impressive stage spectacle analogous to that of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* . . . How much *Götterdämmerung* differs from *Siegfried’s Tod* the author has not revealed . . . Having completed the poem of *Siegfried’s Tod* (*Götterdämmerung*), Wagner, enamoured of his subject, and necessitated to show much that else had to be

intellectually perceived, took up the earlier life of his hero. From this sprang *Der junge Siegfried*, and now as *Siegfried* forming the third section of the great work. There is reason to assume that here the whole scheme of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* dawned upon the author's mind. The force of circumstances carried him, almost despite his will further and further back to the origin of that which had previously occupied his thoughts, and from the working of this necessity arose *Die Walküre* and *Das Rheingold*, connecting ultimate effect with remotest cause.⁶⁹

Wagner's attitude changed several times during the years in which he composed the *Ring*. Expansion of the story into a tetralogy was not motivated, as Bennett believed, only by Wagner's need to relate Siegfried's origins, but by a desire to examine fully Wotan's tragedy.⁷⁰ Despite Bennett's awareness of the drama's construction, he had little way of knowing about Wagner's changes of attitude. Bennett makes some educated guesses regarding the differences in musical style, but he lacks insight into Wagner's personal and philosophical adjustments.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Bennett, "The *Nibelungen* Trilogy at Bayreuth," *The Musical Times* (September 1, 1876), 585.

⁷⁰ Detailed accounts of the changes in Wagner's perspective, and the contradictions they caused in the completed *Ring* cycle, may be found in: Warren Darcy, *Wagner's "Das Rheingold,"* Studies in Musical Genesis and Structure (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) and Barry Millington, *Wagner*.

⁷¹ "It is not difficult to see that . . . Wagner had passed completely under the dominion of a theory that the poem ought to make no concession for the sake of musical effect. He had laid out *Götterdämmerung* with a view to the usual mingling of solo and concerted piece (though in setting it to music at a later time he refused the opportunities his own hand had prepared, and crowded the stage with dummies), but its successors became, more and more rigidly, dramas . . ." *Ibid.*, 286.

The *Ring* and Classical Drama

Approaching his final conclusions, Bennett asks if Wagner succeeds in investing his drama with the impressive qualities of the classical tragedies. He posits two criteria that will settle the matter. First, "Have the incidents in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* the necessary breadth and importance?" Second, "Has the drama a sufficiently high and obvious moral purport?"⁷² Bennett has ready answers to both questions.

In response to the first question, Bennett compares the *Ring* to the *Oresteia*. He claims that the events of the Aeschylean tragedy "belong to the highest order of tragedy," while the *Ring* is but "vulgar bustle and glare . . ."; and once again, "the stage swarms with gods, monsters and humans, all playing at more or less undignified cross-purposes."⁷³ Bennett goes on to reemphasize that the Greek theater had a religious function: "A truly national drama must exist for higher purposes."⁷⁴ On the contrary, in the *Ring*, "scenes of murder, incest, theft and vulgar trickery abound" (Bennett might be describing the *Oedipus* cycle). "The presentation of crime on the stage is only justified by strong reasons."⁷⁵ What, asks Bennett, is Wagner's purpose in depicting all this nastiness?

But what is the lofty moral purpose of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* to us who live in the nineteenth century? What does it teach us? What matter does it give us for profitable

⁷² Bennett, *Letters from Bayreuth*, "Conclusions" (September 21, 1876), 95.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

thought? . . . that the rule of love is stronger than that of force, or that the pursuit of power leads through devious and dirty ways? If so, the lesson is almost lost in the complexity of the fable. Surely it was not needful to take up four evenings, and parade thirty-four gods, giants, imps, and mortals, for such an elementary purpose. We lose the moral in the machinery which works it out, and when it is considered that almost all the *dramatis personae* are to us abstractions, while the conditions under which they exist are beyond our realisation, the fact may even be that we remain insensible to the presence of any moral at all. The conclusion is unavoidable that Wagner's drama lacks the most essential qualities of its order. It neither impresses us by its breadth, nor conveys eternal truths to our minds with the directness and simplicity of which the stage is capable in a degree elsewhere unknown.⁷⁶

This ends the first part of Bennett's conclusions. The second part, dated October 7, turns to the evaluation of the *Ring* as a drama "intended for association with music."

Words and Music

Bennett opens this second part by announcing his intention to

. . . examine Wagner's drama to see how it carries out his cardinal doctrine that poetry must yield nothing to music, and apart from a necessary "yearning" for musical expression, is independent of it.⁷⁷

He continues:

Here . . . it is easy to imagine that Wagner the poet must have been opposed by Wagner the musician, since the first

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* (October 7, 1876), 100.

so disregarded the second as to lay on him a task obviously more than even his gigantic strength and indomitable resolution could achieve.

Under ordinary circumstances, the poet arranges his drama with at least provision for the orderly and effective sequence of recitative, solo and concerted piece, and orchestral interlude. Till Wagner proclaimed his theories, this concession of one art to another was looked upon as a matter of course, involving no loss of dignity to the conceder, who simply met one of the requirements of an honourable alliance . . . Here the question arises: Is the poet's absolute disregard of the musician an essential demand of perfected music-drama? If so, there is no more to be said, because the most rabid opponent of Wagner must acknowledge that the thing illustrated is superior to its illustration, just as a thing shadowed is superior to its shadow.⁷⁸

Bennett finds that Wagner himself followed a more moderate course, with happier results in *Der fliegende Holländer*.

. . .the excellence of *Der fliegende Holländer* as a play appears in conjunction with due provision for the essential requirements of music. It allows of song, duet, trio and chorus, almost as readily as the absurd concoctions of men who have written with an eye to music alone; and thus, while the mind is gratified by the presentation of a complete drama on the one hand, it derives pleasure from music based upon true and acknowledged artistic principles.⁷⁹

Bennett goes on to examine whether the *Ring* has "well-marked and important advantages" over more traditionally constructed works. He first finds that the "elaboration of dialogue and scene" is resistant to the application of music; for Bennett the work is a drama to be read. "The necessities of Wagner's system," he writes,

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

“compel a fulness of verbal utterance which sets the musician at defiance.”⁸⁰ To demonstrate the characters’ extraordinary prolixity, he examines the first meeting of Siegmund and Sieglinde, and counts the number of lines assigned to each character. Siegmund introduces himself with no fewer than 108 lines. He also presents the Act II argument between Wotan and Fricka as an example of unbearable, unmusical long-windedness.

Bennett’s second objection is to Wagner’s prosody and use of alliterative verse. He mentions that Wagner’s condition for words to be set musically is that they “yearn for musical expression.” He (rather triumphantly) reproduces (in English) the following speech of Alberich’s from *Das Rheingold*:

Alberich: Sleek as slime
The slope of the slate is!
I slant and slide
With foot and with fist
I can fix myself not
on the slippery surface.
Floods of wet
flow in my nostrils!
The cursed coughing!
(*Das Rheingold* I)⁸¹

Does the dialogue [writes Bennett] of which this is a fair specimen yearn after musical expression? . . . these are fair

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Garstig glatter glitschriger Glimmer!
Wie gleit’ ich aus!
Mit Händen und Füßen fasse noch
halt’ ich schlecke Geschlüpfer!
Feuchtes Nass füllt mir die Nase!
Verfluchtes Niesen!

selections from a crowd of passages which-- however excellent as belonging to the drama-- that point is not in question -- have scarcely more essential connection with music than a table of logarithms. The objection, be it noted, is not that Wagner introduces such lines into his play . . . It is rather that Wagner insists on their being regarded as suggestive of music, and so endeavours to place the dramatic composer under burdens too grievous to be borne.⁸²

Bennett's final objection to the construction of the *Ring* is to the long narrations by numerous characters, and at various points of the drama, of events already past.

Character after character comes on with a long story of events past, and to those whose vision extends over the whole drama, familiar events . . . [Bennett here lists all the instances of extended narration] There is no getting away from this biographical fever, and at every fresh entrance of a leading character, we wait in dread for a sensation kindred to that which pervades a theatre when chairs are brought down to the lamps, and a voice begins, "It is now some thirty years ago." &c.⁸³

Bennett feels that all these matters, which are tedious from a purely dramatic standpoint, also put "tremendous strain" on "the musician" -- the composer of the drama.

Even the foregoing cursory examination of Wagner's drama as a poem for music gives a sufficiently vivid idea of the manner in which the claims of music are ignored, and it is unnecessary to dwell on such points as its uniformity of rhythm and the frequent harshness of its alliterative

⁸² *Ibid.*, 105. Interestingly, Deryck Cooke uses an example from Wotan's narration to Brunnhilde in Act II of *Die Walküre* in order to illustrate *exactly the opposite* of Bennett's point; a distinct illustration of changing musical taste. Cooke writes: "The English lacks the force of the original, with its crudely effective use of the power of certain German root-words, and those clanging accented alliterations *which are so suited to musical setting* [*italics mine*]." Deryck Cooke, *I Saw the World End*, 66-67.

⁸³ *Letters from Bayreuth*, "Conclusions" (October 7, 1876), 109.

lines.⁸⁴

With a remark on how the best theories may “crumble into dust, at the touch of light and air,” Bennett concludes that Wagner’s theories, put to the test of reality, do not succeed. He ends with a brief paean to the power of music, “the more universal and mightier art.”⁸⁵

In the second part of the *Musical Times* essay, which came out in the issue of November 1, 1876, Bennett’s criticisms of the music and Wagner’s theories are not at all reconsidered, but stated more forcefully:

Looking at Wagner’s theory of the Evolution of the Tone from the Word, and not less on his practice as exemplified by *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, in the light of this unquestionable truth, we see at once the fallacy of both, and understand how both fail on a vital point. Composers, from the earliest years of the lyric drama until now, have had to deal with baseness of character and meanness of sentiment; but they have treated these things under the influence of an idea that their business was not to drag art down to the level of its subject, but always to maintain its dignity and worth. Wagner, on the other hand, sees no dignity or worth in music as such, but hauls it anywhere and everywhere, over flower-decked meadows or through bogs and swamps, tied to the chariot wheels of the Word. Aware of this fact, the reader. . . can form a tolerably accurate idea of the music. Sweet waters do not run from a foul spring, neither do thistles produce figs. Similarly, the scenes in Wagner’s drama where that which is physically and morally repulsive dominates, cannot, according to the theory he sternly practises, be attended by other than repulsive music.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸⁶ Bennett, “The Wagner Festival at Bayreuth,” *The Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular* (November 1, 1876), 647.

There are scenes in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* where the formlessness of the music never occurs to its hearer--where the poetry of the situation inspires so much beauty that mind and sense are "possessed" to the exclusion of consciousness that anything is wanting. Such is the interview of Siegmund and Sieglinde, and of Brünnhilde and Siegmund, in *Die Walküre*, and the awakening of Brünnhilde by her hero. In these instances, as well as in others which might be named, Wagner's system is shown under conditions that make it compatible at once with dramatic truth and musical charm. But how does the result arise? From any excellence in the system itself? By no means; rather is it the consequence of things lying outside the system -- the consequence of situation and poetic thought, the music springing from which is beautiful, without regard to form, like the merry noises of nature on a summer day. Turning from the scenes where this result is produced, we find others in which the composer, having no such help, lies at the mercy of a theory, and is bound down by it, so that he cannot employ the full resources of his art.⁸⁷

In his repeated criticism of Wagner's "system," the conservative Bennett shows himself to be firmly rooted in a long-standing Romantic tradition. A system, theory, or "science" was considered inimical to beauty, which resulted from a spontaneous, "natural" artistic expression.⁸⁸ This tradition actually stems from the beginnings of the Classical period, when "naturalness" was favored over the intellectual procedures of the late Baroque. In our own century, this tradition survived in resistance to dodecaphonic music. Bennett is off the mark, however, in considering Wagner's approach to music

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 648.

⁸⁸ . . . Do not all charms fly/At the mere touch of cold Philosophy?/There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:/We know her woof, her texture; she is given/In the dull catalogue of common things. /Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings/Conquer all mystery by rule and line. John Keats, "Lamia," ll.229-34, *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 431.

drama as a system akin to Aristotle's views on tragedy. First, Wagner's approach (as to *Leitmotiv*) was free and fluid. Second, Bennett may very well not have been sufficiently sophisticated, nor have had sufficient intimacy with the music, to detect all instances when the "system" is working and not. Finally, the "system" was Wagner's game, where Wagner made and unmade the rules as he worked. Wagner exercised control, manipulating the "system" in answer to his needs of the moment, much as all the other components of the music dramas.

Bennett himself nicely encapsulates his overall reaction to the *Ring* in his *Musical Times* review. His evaluation probably would not have been damning enough for ironclad anti-Wagnerians, nor a ringing enough endorsement for the pro-Wagnerians, whom Bennett would eventually grow to resent for their combativeness. However, flattering one faction or the other was not Bennett's aim when he wrote:

No one who has followed me thus far will imagine that I entertain a blind prejudice in favour of Wagner . . . [The *Rings*'s] form may be fantastic and its principles a perversion of that which is musically true, but the underlying power is magnificent and overwhelming.⁸⁹

The 1880's

Younger than Davison, Bennett was in his prime during the waning years of Davison's career. We have Bennett's report on the London premiere of the complete *Ring* in May 1882 (reprinted in the *Musical World*). Bennett does not deal with the

⁸⁹ Bennett, "The Wagner Festival at Bayreuth," *The Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular* (November 1, 1876), 648.

music in great detail, but his accounts of the attendance and the audience's reactions are valuable. He also takes the opportunity to report on the musical politics of the time.

Although Bennett refused to associate himself with any movement or trend, and adopted a stance of objectivity, he intensely disliked unquestioning idolatry of Wagner.

In his memoir, he recalls,

Teutonic art came in a new aspect, offering works, the very names of which are synonymous with a worldwide controversy notorious for uncompromising give-and-take. The Germans, too, conjured with the spell of a man who, be his faults what they may, stands forth as the greatest musical genius of the age, while the advantages enjoyed at the outset were sustained as time went on, by just repute for merit in execution. Against all this, Italian opera, with its stale charms, could do little. The musical world talked of nothing but the *Nibelungen Ring*, the *Meistersanger* [sic], *Tristan and Isolde*, Richter and his orchestra, the German artists, and the German ensemble . . . Who could tell what great things rivalry of German discipline, thoroughness and devotion might do for slipshod Italian opera? It might give new life and new charm to an entertainment which loose and inartistic habits had made vapid and profitless . . .⁹⁰

If anything, Bennett's opinion that the *Ring* was "an unfortunate embodiment of

⁹⁰ Bennett, *Forty Years of Music*, 282. Bennett refers here to a nationalistic debate which sporadically broke out in London musical circles. It reached a height in 1891 when a letter from William John Manners, Lord Dysart (1859-1935), then president of the London Wagner Society, appeared in the *Times*, and was reprinted in the *Musical News*. Dysart asked why English singers were singing Beethoven and Wagner in the Richter concerts, when German singers who were at home in the language, and had better training, were available. The letter provoked heated nationalistic replies, and the debate spilled over into such neighboring territory as the propriety of performing Wagner in concert form; the immorality of Wagner's texts; the relative merits of English and German singers, in whatever repertoire; the existence, or not, of a distinct English vocal "school," or whether English vocal methods were actually borrowed from the Italian; Wagner's "failures" in other musical forms, such as symphony and chamber music. See *Musical News*, June and July, 1891.

Wagner's system"⁹¹ had hardened in the six intervening years. His tone, in his 1882 review, is harsher than before. He dwells more upon the immoralities depicted in the plot, and keeps a running count of the crimes depicted in the drama. Bennett's greatest condemnation is, of course, reserved for the decisive scene of *Die Walküre*, Act I.

It has been contended on behalf of Wagner that this famous scene is in its uncompromising frankness, absolutely chaste, even as were Adam and Eve in Paradise when walking naked and not ashamed. We shall presently be told that every mind so debauched as to have lost all moral perception belongs to a respectable gentleman. Extremes indeed, meet when utter hardihood of guilt touches innocence. But the matter is not for argument. Let us rather ask what is the good of an official guardian of stage morality when an offence shocking to the most shameless is enacted almost before our very eyes. Does the Lord Chamberlain sometimes nod and Mr. Pigot go to sleep? Or has the school of artistic carnality obtained a license to hold a mirror up, not to our nature, but to that of the beasts? Be that as it may, we protest against the incest scene as a disgrace to the stage, and a scandal to those who sanction its representation before the wives and daughters of Englishmen.⁹²

Yet, when Bennett comes to his summation of the work as a whole, and repeats his now-familiar arguments against Wagner's theories and their manifestation in the *Ring*, he writes:

The same public is moved, however, when the music presents a significance other than that arbitrarily imposed upon it – when its emotionalism throws off in time the tyranny of “leit-motives” and, in native freedom, goes straight to the heart. Thus it is as Siegmund sings of Love and Spring; as the slumber music vibrates around the prostrate form of

⁹¹ Bennett, “*The Nibelung's Ring*,” *The Musical World* (June 3, 1882), 322.

⁹² *Ibid.* (May 8, 1882), 299.

Brünnhilde; as young Siegfried rolls out exulting strains at the forge, and as, in the end, the most solemn of marches bewails a hero's death -- who then thinks of a system, and bends his faculties to the distinguishing of meanings? We are possessed by music that shakes itself free from forced alliances, and rejects all meanings save those conveyed in its natural language -- to be felt rather than perceived. Thus Wagner confutes Wagner. Why an elaborate artificial vocabulary, when at the most important moments, its application is unperceived, and the ear drinks in sound regardless of sense? Why too, a waste of power in vain attempts to bind to unnatural purposes a spirit more subtle than Loge himself? The "inarticulate, unfathomable speech" of which Carlyle speaks laughs to scorn all attempts to tabulate its utterances and make them do duty as logarithms.⁹³

Bennett is amplifying his argument against Wagner's elevation of the poetry over the music, and suggesting that Wagner is limiting his own spontaneous gift. An example of the music that he prefers, however, is once again from Act I of *Die Walküre*, in the very scene whose immorality he had earlier denounced in such strong language.

In the final installment of the 1882 series, the critic opened by considering the cycle's failure to draw a large English audience, despite plenty of publicity, and attention in the press.

Last night the original programme of Herr Neumann's⁹⁴ enterprise in this country was completed, and when the *Walkyrie* and *Götterdämmerung* have again been performed at "cheap" prices, the *Nibelung's Ring* will return to the land which produced it. Wagner's Trilogy has not proved a success amongst us. Our public saw its approach without enthusiasm, and will witness its departure with

⁹³ *Ibid.* (June 3, 1882), 331.

⁹⁴ Angelo Neumann (1838-1910): Austrian singer and impresario. Director of the Leipzig Opera (1876-80), he mounted the *Ring* there in 1876. He took the *Ring* on tour with his traveling company in 1882. It was performed throughout Europe in the following years.

indifference. They refused to be stimulated even by the high prices, which suggested expectation of a rush for tickets, nor could the remarkable prominence given to the subject by the metropolitan press save the theatre from a disheartening array of empty seats. In so far as this bespoke lack of healthy interest in musical developments, we unfeignedly regret it. A nation really progressive in art matters is neither prejudiced on one hand, nor indifferent on the other. It condemns nothing without trial, and on nothing turns its back with a yawn. For ourselves, we must confess to a suspicion that England is deficient in musical curiosity. The novelty market here hardly knows what a brisk demand means, and as a rule, sellers realize at a loss. Herr Neumann has found this out, and possibly thinks less of us in consequence.⁹⁵

Bennett at first expresses disappointment in the English musical public for failing to take advantage of its opportunity to view the curiosity. The critic expresses concern for the public as lacking “healthy interest in musical developments.” This judgment, more than one hundred years old, anticipates concern over the shrinking classical concert audience in our own time and, more specifically, contemporary audiences’ resistance to new music.

He continues, however, by mitigating the harshness of his initial judgment on the public:

But here all the blame does not justly lie on one side. The quality of the goods had a great deal to do with the slackness of their sale. Many of us suspected them at first; on trial we did not like them; and in the exercise of our right, we finally rejected them. That action does not want for champions and vindicators. We, for example, are prepared to justify it, out and out, as healthy and wise. More, it is clear that the attitude of English amateurs towards the *Nibelung's Ring* has been worthy of a nation that prides

⁹⁵ Bennett, “*The Nibelung's Ring*,” *The Musical World* (June 3, 1882), 331

itself on a love of fair play. Our public fully recognized the extraordinary talents shown in the work, and did honour to its many masterful pages; they witnessed its performance with profound attention, and when compelled to an adverse opinion, expressed it, on the whole, in a judicial spirit, rather than in the temper of a partizan [*sic*].⁹⁶

Bennett's view is that the English public, rather than judging the *Ring* unfairly or rejecting it out of hand, simply found it not to their taste. He then comments on something which many critics of Wagner had discovered.

Richard Wagner is fond of imagining the existence of cabals. His measureless self-esteem prompts him to dream of unending conspiracies, all designed to lay him in the dust. Now it is an entire people who, though usually given to minding their own business, set in motion against his peace and credit an elaborate and powerful machinery, and now it is his natural enemies the critics who malignantly intrigue against a man by whom their incompetence has been found out. Herr Wagner will be at a loss how to lay the fate of his *Nibelung's Ring*, in London, at the door of a conspiracy. That easy way of explanation barred against him, it is just possible he may condole with Herr Neumann on having mistaken the bounds of civilization. Happily, the sarcasm of Bayreuth is now more known than feared.⁹⁷

Wagner *had* encountered conspiracies in his career, but this did not make him less likely to imagine them. His standard response to poor reception of his works was that there was a critical – or Jewish (or both) – conspiracy at work. This is well documented in his letters during his 1855 London adventure (see chapter 2 above). When he returned to great adulation in 1877, it must have seemed to him that the

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

English had become much more intelligent in twenty years.

Bennett displayed some knowledge of his subject when he speculated upon Wagner's reaction to the London *Ring*'s modest success. The speculation, however, was expressed in an atypically sneering, mean-spirited way. It seems that Wagner's blustering attacks upon entire groups of people, not to mention his vicious denigrations of other composers, had left their impression on the critic.⁹⁸ Years later, in his memoir, he wrote:

I imagine that no reasonable being shuns another because of an honest difference in matters of art. The thing is too absurd for words. It was not Wagner the artist who was a cause of offence to me, but Wagner the man. I disliked him for his personal qualities, which, as he is dead and gone, I would not describe if it were needful to do so. Enough that to me he was "impossible," and there was an end of the whole matter. But that did not hinder me from perceiving his high rank as a musical genius, not from acknowledging it on all fitting occasions.⁹⁹

A Farewell

Upon Wagner's death on February 13, 1883, Bennett predictably obeyed the time-honored injunction against speaking ill of the dead. He composed an elegy for the *Daily Telegraph*, which was reprinted in the *Musical World*, and which he included in his memoir. He writes of Wagner in heroic terms.

⁹⁸ Bennett was also weary of clashing with ardent Wagnerians: "I was very roundly abused by Wagnerian swashbucklers in the press as a virulent enemy of their chief; it being held, apparently, that he who offendeth in one Wagnerian thing is guilty of all." *Forty Years of Music*, 227.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 283.

February 13

Richard Wagner died at Venice.

With the death of Richard Wagner a masterful spirit made its final exit from the stage whereon the drama of life is played. At present those who concern themselves with the things that occupied him are conscious of this and little more. We have an uneasy sense of a great disappearance; of an immense void, such as might be created by the vanishing of a brilliant star, or the downfall in some familiar forest glade of a royal oak. The phenomenon has not yet been comprehended. It belongs to the domain of feeling, and the more completely since it was unexpected. True, Wagner had nearly reached the age beyond which, as a great Scriptural poet has said, man's strengths but labour and sorrow. He could stretch forth his hand and touch the proverbial limit of human life, but to the world's perception, there were no signs of failing power. At Bayreuth, only a few months before, he gave full proof that his strength had not decayed, neither had his natural force abated; while only a few weeks had passed since he was most active in the Italian city where on the 13th he lay dead.¹⁰⁰ The end having come, we can hardly believe that Wagner is no longer with us. He filled so large a space and had filled it so long, he was such a vast and positive personality, that we look and look again at the sudden void as Aladdin might have gazed, incredulous, upon the site of his vanished palace.¹⁰¹

Bennett meditates on the controversy that surrounded Wagner in his life, and suggests that the combatants cease, at least temporarily, in order to pay tribute.

Slow, moreover, are we to associate the idea of peace and rest with one whose life was a storm, and whose name has been until now associated with unceasing conflict. The proud and ardent warrior has, nevertheless, sheathed his

¹⁰⁰ *Parsifal* had been premiered at the 1882 Bayreuth Festival.

¹⁰¹ Bennett, "Richard Wagner (1813-1883)," *The Musical World* (February 17, 1883), 97; reprinted from the *Daily Telegraph*.

redoubtable sword, and put off his armour, dented with many blows. For Wagner there is an end of strife and ambition. These are buried with him, and, even as he is at rest, let us hope, will peace reign for a time around his grave. "Death," says Washington Irving, "extinguishes all animosities." In its presence the noise of discordant voices should be hushed, and a rivalry should prevail only to write, as on monumental brass, a just eulogium. The time for criticism and arguments leading to a final verdict on Wagner will come in due course. When it arrives, those who opposed the master living will not shrink from maintaining their position. Principles are more than persons, and there may be undue sacrifice to sentiment. For the present, let us all cry truce, and together contemplate the fact that "a prince and a great man" has fallen.¹⁰²

Bennett interprets Wagner as the hero of a romantic drama, a view that would have delighted the endlessly self-dramatizing composer, who very much saw himself as the hero of his own life story.

Hereafter, when Richard Wagner's biography has been written with all the fullness of which it is capable, and when men can read it with eyes undimmed by the smoke, and minds unwarped by the passion of controversy, the life just ended will have a supreme fascination. In this the mere lover of romance cannot fail to share with the student of human nature, for the records of artistic men present little that is equal in interest to Wagner's story. It is eminently a touching story, appealing to our sympathies, and absorbing our attention as that only can which tells how, from poverty and obscurity, from out the great mass of indistinguishable human atoms, a bold spirit rose to lofty heights of power and a fame that compasses the world. It is nothing to the purpose that we cannot approve all the means whereby such a hero elevates himself. Even in his weaknesses and sins we recognise the humanity he supremely represents – our own humanity, glorified and abased in the measure of which we feel it to be capable . . .

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Adversity, so often the nurse and friend of genius, took him in hand, and led him by ways strewn with thorns and briers. Suffering developed him. In that hard and stern, yet beneficent school, he became a man, with revenges to take and passions to indulge, it is true; but also with definite and lofty aims which should startle and anger the world that had refused to befriend him. There began a struggle without a parallel in art. For some time it was one man against a host — one voice against the mighty utterance of many nations; a formula promulgated by a teacher without pupils against the universal creed.¹⁰³

Bennett goes on to compare Wagner with Luther. At the time, Bennett had no way of knowing the validity of such a comparison. Each man was a historical marker; the world he came into was utterly changed by his influence. Although Bennett was careful and conservative, he was a man of the nineteenth century. It no doubt struck him as perfectly natural to compare an artist or a musician with a great spiritual leader.

We talk, and that rightly, of the courage of Luther. Let us rank as at least equal there with the courage of Wagner. Both of these crusaders in different fields were fitted for a work impossible to pliable natures and the utterers of soft words. They rode roughshod over beliefs and feelings; they attacked without stopping to discriminate; and fulminated from their respective pulpits without nice distinctions. In the end both commanded universal attention, and lived to reap a harvest of success.¹⁰⁴

Bennett then speculates on Wagner's legacy, and concludes that "Wagnerism" could not survive without Wagner at its head. The critic was partly right, partly wrong. The Wagner cult continued long after Wagner's death, and his artistic and musical

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

influence long survived the excesses of those who most revered him. Among “Wagner’s lieutenants” (most observers never anticipated Cosima’s seizure of the reins) were fanatics at worst, some accomplished men at best, but none willing or able to rescue Bayreuth from becoming a Wagner museum by the end of the century. Bennett correctly perceived that Wagner was large enough to devour his own legacy.

Without entering upon debatable ground, it is possible now to consider what is implied in the sudden extinction of Wagner’s astonishing individuality. Such a man cannot be withdrawn from a militant organisation without grave results. He was not only the head, but the heart and soul of the “ism” called by his name. He not only devised, but executed. The strategy and the tactics were his; his too, was the sword that flashed at the head alone. There have been few similar cases of dependence upon a single person, while it frequently happens that the founder of a “cultus” remains in the background, leaving apostles to represent him before the world. In such a case, the chief may disappear, and his followers maintain an unbroken front. With Wagner, however, it is as though Napoleon had fallen while yet victory trembled in the balance. That there are able men among the master’s lieutenants no one will dispute, but hitherto they have been only instruments in his powerful hand. Briefly, Wagnerism is a personal thing, and we cannot but ask the question, What will happen now that the genius which inspired it has departed? This is certain: the principles and practices of the dead man’s new art have entered into a serener region, illuminated by a purer and steadier light.

... Now, therefore, begins the test of Wagnerism, apart from Wagner, and under conditions more favourable than ever to a just decision. It is proverbially rash to anticipate the judgements of the future, and to do so here might raise points of undesirable controversy. Still no fervid follower of the great departed musician will quarrel with us for saying that in years to come, when the ashes of recent controversy are cold, when the warcries we have heard are forgotten, when the battles we have seen fought belong to legend, and mouldering weapons gathered from the field

are shown in museums, men will assemble round the grave of Richard Wagner to honour one who rendered true service to art. By the time the law ordaining "the survival of the fittest" will have done its kindly work; art will have appropriated whatever in Wagner's teaching was sound and good -- and there was much -- while his errors -- and there were many -- will have fallen, harmless to the earth, as sharing the mortality of him by whom, in human weakness, they were cherished.¹⁰⁵

Finally Bennett concludes on an appropriate note of reconciliation. It was not in him to do otherwise. He was very much aware, however, that the story was far from over. Despite the noble generosity of his valediction, his own ambivalence about Wagner remained unsettled.

Anecdotal Postscript

Several years later, when the *Musical Times* published a series on the lives of great composers, Bennett contributed several biographies, including Wagner's. Bennett was especially critical about Wagner's management of money, and portrayed Wagner as an irresponsible libertine who wasted money on luxuries, then pressured friends for loans and patrons for handouts.¹⁰⁶ An entire chapter (November 1891) was devoted to Wagner's love of fabrics, costumes, and fancy dressing gowns.¹⁰⁷ Bennett reproduced Wagner's notorious letters to Bertha Goldwag, the Viennese seamstress. Since 1877,

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ William Ashton Ellis (*q.v.*) replied to Bennett's criticisms in a spirited essay, "Baying the Moon," which was prominently positioned on the front page of the year's first issue of *The Meister*. *The Meister* 5 (1892), 1-3.

¹⁰⁷ Bennett, "Richard Wagner," *The Musical Times* (November 1, 1891), 651-54.

when they were first “leaked” to the press, they had been a source of anti-Wagnerian merriment.

CHAPTER FOUR
FRANCIS HUEFFER

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FRANCIS HUEFFER

Francis Hueffer (1843-1888) was born Franz Hüffer, in Münster, Westphalia. Born on May 22, Hueffer shared Wagner's birthday. Hueffer was sent by his family to study music and literature in London and Paris, as well as Berlin and Leipzig. In 1869, at the University of Göttingen, he earned a doctorate for a critical edition of the works of the troubadour Guillem de Cabestanh (1190-1212), and shortly afterward he settled in London.

Hueffer's hero was Schopenhauer, and he lost a great deal of his own money in a failed journal, *The New Quarterly Review*, which was quixotically dedicated to "spreading the light of Schopenhauer in England."¹ He was a frequent contributor to the *Fortnightly Review*, *Academy*, and the *Musical World*, and became an editor for the

¹ Ford Madox Ford, "My Father," in *Your Mirror to My Times: The Selected Autobiographies and Impressions of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. Michael Killigrew (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), 36-37. The writer (Hueffer's son) reproduces a limerick by Dante Gabriel Rossetti:

There was a young German called Hueffer,
A hypochondriacal buffer,
To shout "Schopenhauer!"
From the top of a tower
Was the highest enjoyment of Hueffer.

latter two journals.

In 1878, Hueffer succeeded the elderly Davison as music critic of the *Times*. While a music critic, Hueffer continued to write and lecture on the troubadours, and wrote a number of opera libretti, such as those for such forgotten English works as Mackenzie's ² *Columba* (1883) and *The Troubadour* (1886) (based on the life of Guillem de Cabestanh), and Frederic Cowen's cantata *The Sleeping Beauty* (1885).³ He also adapted Boito's libretto for Verdi's *Otello*, restoring much of Shakespeare's text. Hueffer contributed articles to the first *Grove's Dictionary* (1879) and to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. His book (partly reminiscence) *Half a Century of Music in England: 1837-1887* was published in 1888. Because Hueffer thought that Queen Victoria had initiated a musical revival in England with her patronage of Mendelssohn and Liszt, he dated his book from her succession.

Marriage made Hueffer a member of the Pre-Raphaelite artistic circle. In 1872, he married Catherine Madox Brown, daughter of the painter Ford Madox Brown (1821-93)⁴ and a painter herself. The Hueffers had their wedding portraits painted by no less a personage than Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1830-1912). They lived in Hammersmith (where William Morris and his family were among their neighbors) and had two sons, Ford and Oliver, and a daughter, Juliet. Ford Hermann Hueffer, later known as Ford

² Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie (1847-1935), British composer and educator.

³ Sir Frederic Hymen Cowen (1852-1935), British composer and author.

⁴ Brown's best-known paintings are *The Last of England* (1855) and the unfinished *Take Your Son, Sir* (ca. 1857), a feminist work..

Madox Ford (1873-1939), was one of the great novelists of the early twentieth century, but his life was permanently marred by the trauma he suffered in World War One.⁵

There is no formal biography of the senior Hueffer, but he comes arrestingly to life in his son's memoirs. The younger Hueffer (Ford) provides an affectionate, yet scathingly funny portrait of a gifted idealist who had a passionate love of art, music, and literature and who traveled with ease between the Bohemian and bourgeois worlds. He had an exacting code of ethics, and his son paid him tribute as a courageous and incorruptible critic.

In the seventies and eighties there were cries for the imprisonment alike of the critics who upheld and the *artistes* who performed the Music of the Future. The compositions of Wagner were denounced as being atheistic, sexually immoral, and tending to further Socialism and the throwing of bombs. Wagnerites were threatened with assassination, and assaults between critics of the rival schools were things not unknown in the foyer of the opera. I really believe that my father, as the chief exponent of Wagner in these islands, did go in some personal danger. Extraordinary pressures were brought to bear upon the more prominent critics of the day, the pressure coming, as a rule, from the exponents of the school of Italian opera. Thus, at the openings of the opera seasons packing-cases of large dimensions would arrive at the house of the ferocious critic of the chief newspaper of England Thus I remember half a dozen hams, the special product of some north Italian town; six cases of Rhine wine, which were no doubt intended to propitiate the malignant Teuton; a reproduction of the Medici Venus in marble, painted with phosphoric paint, so that it gleamed blue and ghostly in the twilight; a case of Bohemian glass; and several strings of Italian sausage. And these packing-cases, containing no outward sign

⁵ Ford Madox Ford's most famous work is *The Good Soldier* (1927). As the son of a German expatriate, with strong personal ties to Germany, Ford suffered greatly from the war with Germany.

of their senders, would have to be unpacked, and then once more repacked, leaving the servants with fingers damaged by nails, and passages littered with straw. Inside would be found the cards of Italian prime donne, tenors or basses, newly arrived in London, and sending servile homage to the illustrious critic of the "Giornale Times". . . .⁶

Ford recalls another incident when Hueffer was in attendance at an indifferent opera, produced by a foreign dignitary with a great deal of influence at court. In the middle of the performance, Hueffer was summoned to the royal box, where an unspecified member of the Royal Family suggested that the opera was a work of genius. Hueffer, on the spot, replied that he was sorry to differ from such a distinguished connoisseur, but the music was, in his opinion, absolute rubbish -- *lauter Klatsch*.⁷ Later, at the same performance, a small fire broke out onstage, causing a panic in the audience. Though the orchestra continued playing, and one of the singers smothered the fire with his cloak, members of the audience continued to flee. Ford remembered his father and William Michael Rossetti⁸ "standing up and shouting into the stalls, 'Sit down, brutes! Sit down, cowards!'"⁹

When Hueffer died of a sudden heart attack in January 1888, Shaw, a friend and

⁶ Ford, "My Father," 37-38.

⁷ Hueffer spoke several languages fluently, and was entirely at home in English. Although the royal personage is unnamed, Hueffer's choice of words suggests that he was German-speaking.

⁸ William Michael Rossetti (1828-1919): Brother of Dante Gabriel (1828-82) and Christina Rossetti (1830-94), and Hueffer's brother-in-law. Writer, artist, founding member of the "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood."

⁹ Ford, "My Father," 40.

colleague, paid him tribute as a courageous critic and a widely accomplished connoisseur.

The unexpected death of Dr. Hueffer is a loss to the best interests of music in London. Fortunately, his warfare was accomplished before he fell. The critics who formerly opposed him on the grounds that Wagner's music had no form and no melody, that it was noisy and wrong, and never ought to have been written, and could never be popular, came at last to be only too grateful to Hueffer for his willingness to forget their folly. He was a thorough and industrious worker in many departments, and much more equipped for his work than many of his colleagues who were by no means so modest.

Personally, he was an amiable man, shy and even timid; but he did not look so, and he often produced the most erroneous impressions on those who were only slightly acquainted with him. His long golden-red beard, shining forehead, and accentuated nostrils made him a remarkable figure at musical performances His work as a critic was not confined to music; the present writer last met him at the press view of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition at the New Gallery, and at his own request introduced him to Mr. Walter Crane, certainly without the slightest presentiment that the meeting was final.¹⁰

Later, he mentioned Hueffer again, as an open-minded and loyal friend. Hueffer played devil's advocate with Shaw, who was much more comfortable claiming that role for himself.

I remember once coming to loggerheads with the late Dr. Francis Hueffer, about fifteen seconds after the opening of our first conversation, on the subject of musical culture in English society. Whenever the subject arose between us, I declared that English society did not know good music from bad. He replied, with great force, that I knew nothing

¹⁰ George Bernard Shaw, 23 January 1889, in *London Music in 1888-89 as Heard by Corno di Bassetto (Later known as Bernard Shaw) with some further Autobiographical Particulars* (London: Dodd, Mead, 1937; reprint New York: Vienna House, 1973), 55-56.

about it; that I moved amidst cranks, Bohemians, unbelievers, agitators, and generally speaking – riff-raff of all sorts; and that I was theorising emptily about the people whom I called bloated aristocrats. He described, by way of example, an evening at Lord Derby's house, where he had greatly enjoyed some excellent music; and he asked me whether I knew that such music was, in a quiet way, a constant grace of the best sort of English social life. I suggested that he give me an opportunity to judge for myself by introducing me to these circles; but this he entirely declined to do; having no confidence whatever in my power of behaving myself in a seemly manner for five consecutive minutes . . . Hueffer, I fancy, regarded me as an unschooled dangerous character; but once when I was perched on the gunwale of a wagon in Hyde Park, filling up some ten minutes of a "demonstration" with the insufferable oratorizing which is the only sort feasible on such occasions, I was astonished to see his long golden beard and massive brow well to the front among the millions of "friends and fellow citizens."¹¹

Hueffer claimed that a substantial article of his in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1872 "gave the first comprehensive account of the 'music of the future,' which (as far as my knowledge goes) has appeared in the English language."¹² This piece was later published as *Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future*, with additions on Liszt, Schubert, and Robert Franz. Hueffer was probably the first to promote Wagner to the general educated public in England, and to explain in detail Wagner's methods and aesthetic principles. Two years before the Bayreuth Festival, his *Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future* (1874) was one of the very first works in England declaring Wagner's revolutionary

¹¹ 6 December 1889, *Ibid.*, 276-77.

¹² Hueffer, "Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future," in *Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future: History and Aesthetics* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1874; reprint, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 1-122.

artistic genius. Hueffer was also active in the newly formed London Branch of the Wagner Society; and in 1881, he produced a biography of Wagner intended for popular consumption. Finally, his English translation of the Wagner-Liszt correspondence, which appeared in 1888, dealt skillfully with the peculiarities of Wagner's prose style.

Hueffer's perspective on Wagner was historically and aesthetically different from those of his colleagues Bennett and Davison. The two older critics reported on Wagner as someone new on the musical scene. Hueffer, however, was already a Wagner enthusiast. While Bennett hoped to inform the public and to dispel its rancor about Wagner, Hueffer hoped to arouse enthusiasm for a new artistic hero. Davison and Bennett sat in judgment on Wagner, and reported their verdicts. The younger Hueffer, a German immigrant, and more widely educated, was eager to promote Wagner in England. He was a gentle-mannered pedant and rarely attacked Wagner's enemies or his own opponents in print. Rarely did he consider an artistic disagreement as a declaration of war. He believed that gentle persuasion, and the action of Wagner's art on the psyche would slowly but surely win over the opposition.

Davison, 1855

When writing *Half a Century of Music*, Hueffer realized that Wagner's appearances in England would interest his readers, and so he went into considerable detail about the Philharmonic series of 1855. For Hueffer, Davison's outright opposition to Wagner needed discussion. Davison was Hueffer's predecessor at the *Times*, and had shown kindness to the younger man. By 1888, however, fashions had changed, and

Wagner's popularity in England was established. Honesty was required, as was tact.

Hueffer prefaced his quotations of Davison's 1855 reviews with the following statement:

Mr. J. W. Davison, at that time the musical representative of the great English organ, was, like all good critics, not a mere reasoner, but a man of imagination, and, like all imaginative men, a good hater as well as a good lover. To dislike Wagner he had more than one reason, amongst which his passion for Mendelssohn was the first and foremost. Mendelssohn to him was not only the dearest of friends, but the greatest of modern musicians, and any one who had spoken of Mendelssohn with the disrespect that Wagner had shown, was, *a priori*, an object of aversion. In such circumstances, calm criticism was a matter of extreme difficulty, almost of impossibility. One should bear this in mind while reading the following extracts. I need not say that they are quoted with no desire of disparaging the memory of a dear friend and colleague, whose vast knowledge of the literature of music and keen appreciation of its beauties made him an excellent judge, when his judgement was not, as in the present instance, blinded by prejudice. That Mr. Davison, in his treatment of Wagner, both as a conductor and composer, was egregiously mistaken, few impartial judges will deny nowadays. But that mistake did, upon the whole, credit to his heart; and what writer on music or on art is there who can open old volumes of his writings without a certain tremor? Critics are, after all, the children of their time, a little raised perhaps by experience and study above the level of current opinion, but still far from infallible.¹³

¹³ Hueffer, *Half a Century of Music in England* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1889), 50-52. The text immediately following this extract is quoted in chapter 2 above.

Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future

In 1872 Hueffer wrote an article on Wagner which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, and was then printed in an expanded form two years later in *Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future: History and Aesthetics*. The first such study aimed at a general cultured public in England, the essay promoted Wagner as a revolutionary genius, who had already produced works of “the highest type of musical development” by “re-uniting in the music-drama the two arts of poetry and music, which seemed to be separated by a profound chasm and in reality are one.”¹⁴

The book also collected writings on Schubert (who was still not very well known or appreciated in England), Liszt, Schumann, and Robert Franz, all as composers of songs. For Hueffer, the idea of the “Music of the Future” was concerned with the relationship of music and text, but it did not necessarily exclude instrumental music conceived in a “poetical” spirit. While the music-drama, as created by Wagner, is the pinnacle of artistic expression,

... the emergence of this does not make impossible or irrational the perpetuation and perfection of a lower and simpler species as such. Surely the songs of Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn and Franz, or the symphonies by which the three former composers and Liszt have enriched our literature, cannot leave any doubt about the vitality of these forms, based as they are on Beethoven’s reformatory idea, and bearing witness to the high aspirations of their authors.¹⁵

¹⁴ “Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future,” 49.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

Hueffer had thoroughly digested all of Wagner's more important available writings: *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (1849), *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1849), and *Oper und Drama* (1850-51). He had also clearly undertaken a thorough study of Wagner's available scores. Hueffer's formidable literary knowledge gave him a considerable advantage over other critics in demystifying arcane elements of Wagner's plots. He was far more capable of explaining Wagner's artistic goals, methods, and choices of subject matter, particularly to an English audience, than virtually any other Englishman -- or Wagner himself, for that matter.

In his essay, Hueffer discusses in some detail the Prelude and close of the third act of *Tristan und Isolde*, and synopsisizes *Lohengrin*. In addition, he briefly summarizes the histories of *Rienzi*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Die Meistersinger*. His discussions are not distinguished or insightful as to musical details, yet his remarks were probably the first of their kind published in England, and his comments on features of individual works are less significant than his assessments of the works' importance and his discussions of Wagner's methods, philosophy and aesthetics.

Hueffer introduces his discussion by writing virtually an entire history of opera as background to Wagner's entrance. Viewing Wagner heroically, he frequently uses such terms as "giant" and "titan" and is preoccupied with depicting Wagner as an artist who endured great adversity. Indeed, for Hueffer, Wagner required adversity for his art to grow. Hueffer also shows Wagner as polemicist, but emphasizes Wagner's need to assume this role:

The conductor's baton was wrenched from his hand, so he

took up the pen of the critic, attacking in their turn and without distinction or mercy all classes of society, musical conductors and authors, critics, Jews,¹⁶ and actresses, but most of all those mercenaries in his own branch of art who, making “a milch cow of the divine goddess,” overflowed the stage with the shallow display of their commonplace artificialities. The mere invention of the incomparable term “Kapellmeistermusik” for this kind of production would secure Wagner a prominent place amongst satirical writers.¹⁷

Hueffer attributes the source of Wagner’s sometimes savage criticism of the musical establishments of his day (and his fellow composers) to his exile from those musical establishments (specifically, his Paris debacle, the poor receptions of *Holländer* and *Tannhäuser*, and the Dresden rebellion of 1848–49). He continues, with possibly the first English-language version of what would eventually become a popular sport among later commentators:

That the goad of his invective was always wisely directed and used with discretion we should be sorry to assert. But it must be remembered that in cleansing the stables of Augias, one cannot be expected to be over nice in his distinctions; moreover, the combative side of Wagner’s power, which prevents him from discerning the pure gold in a mass of alloy, is too closely interwoven with the whole bias of his nature not to be gladly accepted by his friends . . . Besides, a great man must be accepted or renounced as a whole, like the sea or the sun in heaven. If you look at it through the lens of a dissecting criticism, its splendour will be diffused in single rays of moderate lighting power; so the demigod will look very much like an ordinary mortal, not because he has ceased to be the *hero*, but because you are the *valet* of the proverb.

¹⁶ Hueffer’s attitude towards Wagner’s anti-Semitism will be discussed below.

¹⁷ “Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future,” 71.

And, after all, the polemical part forms only a small and comparatively unimportant fraction of Wagner's writings. It was by means of these theoretical speculations that he himself for the first time became conscious of the enormous bearing of his own artistic deeds on the progress of music. What he had done hitherto was more like a groping in the dark for the dazzling splendour of a distant light, than the steady progress of the accomplished artist in the bright rays of his ideal aspirations. Not that his later works are any the less the immediate creations of impulse. On the contrary, we hear in them more and more distinctly the sound of the unfettered wings of purest inspiration. Only the level from which these inspired wings now start on their sunward flight is higher, and therefore the atmosphere in which they move purer than before, or, to speak without metaphor, through the processes of metaphysical thought and historical study Wagner had become conscious of the ultimate aims of his and of all art, and also of the legitimate means by which this aim might be attained.¹⁸

The popular sport is, of course, apologizing for, accounting for, or smoothing over Wagner's abrasive qualities. The general reader obviously had only Wagner's public statements by which to judge him, and by Victorian standards Wagner must have seemed a very rude individual indeed. Hueffer gives Wagner the role of artistic crusader because of his polemical writings, but at the same time, he assigns them a relatively small and *unimportant* position in Wagner's *oeuvre*. He says, in effect, "why nitpick about the small faults of a great man?" What saves these comments from mere fence-sitting and excuse-making is the insight that Wagner's writings were vital for his own artistic purposes, and formed an integral part of his creative process. Hueffer, however, overlooks the fact that the writings also provided Wagner with invaluable publicity, and that Wagner seemed to know instinctively that any publicity is preferable to no publicity.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

It was through the writings, or rather through the controversy they generated, that Wagner became known as a reformer – or a revolutionary – depending on one’s perspective.

Hueffer engages in a detailed explanation of “the position of Wagner’s dramas in the development of music”: what distinguishes Wagner’s musical works from their predecessors and contemporaries, and why those differences are of particular significance. The music dramas, Hueffer writes, embody an “energetic protest”¹⁹ against the operatic practices of Italy, where “the predominant importance of musical forms had entirely disarranged the harmonious proportions of the opera,” and France, where “the morbid craving for spectacular effects of the lower order exceeded all bounds of nature and common sense, not to speak of the elevated principles of art.”²⁰ Hueffer delicately suggests that even “men of pure intentions and high genius” could not prevail over

a form of art the organism of which was diseased to the core, and in which the principles of music and poetry were so strangely at variance, that, instead of a desirable mutual assistance, they could not but continually check and chain each other’s movements.²¹

Like Wagner, Hueffer also saw the operatic stage in great need of reform. This is a major distinction between him and his senior colleagues Bennett and Davison. These two wholly accepted those aspects of the operatic stage that were under attack by

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

Wagner; they were fluent in and comfortable with the language of operatic convention, and they did not see the necessity for “reform.”

Hueffer, on the other hand, applauds precisely those characteristics of Wagner’s dramas which Bennett had vigorously questioned:

He has crushed the hard fetters of petrified formalities in the firm grasp of his hand, remoulding the dead metal by the burning breath of his genius into new shapes of harmonious fashion. His operas are no longer a series of separate pieces of music, like duets, arias, and finales, with little reference to the action of the piece, and loosely connected with each other by the weak thread of dry *recitativi*.²²

He explains that Wagner’s abandonment of the sequence of set operatic pieces was in the service of “dramatic truth,” and actually characterizes this much-criticized abandonment as a “sacrifice.”

His last and supreme purpose is the attainment of dramatic truth; and from this point of view we must consider the process of condensation and self-restraint to which Wagner ultimately sacrificed the whole apparatus of absolute musical forms. The first and most dangerous excrescence of the opera which he attacked was the aria. This musical equivalent of the monologue of the spoken drama had, in the course of time, obtained an undue importance. It was considered by both the composer and the singer as a welcome test of their musical capacities, and had, in consequence, to be inserted into the piece without rhyme or reason, wherever those two omnipotent rulers of the unfortunate *librettists* thought fit.²³

Hueffer continues by noting that this sacrifice of the traditional operatic forms is

²² *Ibid.*, 75.

²³ *Ibid.*

to be understood not as a loss but as integral to Wagner's "new form of musical expression," in which dramatic values were foremost in their creator's mind.

It need not be added that also the other forms of absolute music, like ensemble and finale, etc., were swept away by the force of this dramatic energy, but Wagner (and in this we have to recognise the *positive* and reconstructive side of his revolution) has at the same time created a new form of musical expression, which originates from, and varies with the impulse of dramatic passion; nay, which is nothing but this passion intensified and idealised by the divinest of arts; the *logos*, which has shaken off its earthly raiments and is transferred once more to its own ethereal sphere.²⁴

In discussing Wagner as librettist, Hueffer explains Wagner's discovery and adaptation of the old *Stabreim*. Once again, giving dramatic truth as the determining condition for Wagner's decisions, he dismisses modern versifying, both rhymed and unrhymed, as ineffective for Wagner's purposes: "The important attraction of rhyme is, for example, entirely useless to a musician," he writes.²⁵ Although Hueffer wipes out centuries of songs with that statement, end-rhyme does not, in fact, convincingly suggest speech (thus, Shakespeare and his contemporaries reserved rhymed couplets for exit lines and statements that required greater emphasis). Blank verse is also dismissed as too difficult and unwieldy for the musician to set successfully. Hueffer quotes the section of *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde* (1851)²⁶ where Wagner explains that the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁶ In *Rienzi* . . . my only purpose was to write an opera, and thinking only of this opera, I took my subject as I found it ready made in another man's finished production. With the *Flying Dutchman*, I entered upon a new course, by becoming the artistic interpreter of a

solution to this problem lay in the actual versification of his sources.

Hueffer next addresses Wagner's concept of a synthesis of the arts as put forward in *Oper und Drama*, noting that it "forms an important item amongst the heads of impeachment, raised by our master's adversaries against him."²⁷

In his "Oper und Drama," Wagner urges the demand of a co-operation of all the arts, that is, of painting and architecture as well as of poetry and music, in the drama of the future. It, therefore, cannot surprise us to see that in his own attempts at realising this ideal work of art, considerable importance has been placed on the visible beauties of the action, as far as they may be attained by the painting of scenery and the grouping of human figures.

Wagner's stage directions are always of the minut-

subject which was given to me only in the simple crude form of a popular tale. From this time I became . . . first of all, a poet; and only in the ultimate conception of the poem, my faculty as a musician was restored to me. But as a poet I was again from the beginning conscious of my power of expressing musically the import of my subjects. This power I had exercised to such a degree, that I was perfectly certain of my ability of applying it to the realization of my poetical purpose, and therefore, was much at greater liberty to form my dramatic schemes according to their poetical necessities, than if I had conceived them from the beginning with a view to their musical treatment. . . .

The plastic unity and simplicity of the mythical subject-matter allowed of the concentration of the action on certain important and decisive points of its development; thus I was enabled to rest on those fewer scenes with a perseverance sufficient to expound the subject down to its last dramatic consequences. The nature of my subject could not therefore, induce me, in sketching my scenes to consider in advance their adaptability to any abstract musical form, the particular kind of musical treatment being necessitated by these scenes themselves. It could not enter my mind to ingraft this on my musical form, growing as it did out of the nature of the scenes, the traditional forms of operatic music, which could only have marred and interrupted its organic progress. I, therefore, never thought of contemplating, on principle and as a deliberate reformer, the destruction of the aria, the duet, and other operatic forms; but the dropping of these forms flowed consistently from the nature of my subjects. Translation by Francis Hueffer of Wagner, *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde* (1851), quoted in "Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future," 79-82.

²⁷ "Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future," 83. Wagner coined the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* in *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (1849).

est, and show all that skill and knowledge of scenic effects which so favourably distinguishes him from most other German dramatists. But the honest Teuton critics stand amazed at this unwonted display of taste and elegance in the highest sense, which to them savours of French *Raffinement* [*sic*] and other dangerous and evil things. They summarily condemn the dazzling splendour of scenery as unworthy of the simplicity of fatherlandish manners and tastes . . .

They [the scenic effects] are made throughout subservient to the economy of the drama, with the organism of which they are connected as closely as music and poetry themselves. To compare this legitimate use of the appliances of the modern stage with the interruption of the action by melodramatic *spectacle*, as we see it, for instance, in the celebrated burning vessel of Meyerbeer's still more celebrated *Africaine*, is an absurdity which requires no further refutation.²⁸

Hueffer then turns to a discussion of *Tristan und Isolde*, focusing first on the Prelude, and then upon Isolde's *Liebestod*.²⁹ These paired excerpts, presented at a Wagner Society concert at the Hanover Square Rooms in 1873, constituted the English introduction to the work. Borrowing from program notes he wrote for that occasion, Hueffer writes:

The enormous importance of *Tristan and Iseult* for the progress of modern music, was at once recognised by friends and enemies, who made its name the hue and cry in their fierce debate.³⁰

Hueffer's comments on the music of *Tristan* would now be considered poor

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

²⁹ This is the commonly used name for that famous section. Wagner's title was simply "*Verklärung*."

³⁰ "Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future," 88.

analysis. While discussing the prominent *leitmotive* and melodic details of the work, he addresses them strictly as melodic phenomena (as Bennett seemed to in his critique of the *Ring*). Today we would note Hueffer's lack of attention to harmony, orchestration, and texture.³¹ This failing may be a result of Hueffer's own musical limitations, but it might just as well have to do with the general nature of the journal. Still another possibility is that Hueffer concentrates on the melodic aspects because of the frequent contention that Wagner's music had little or no melody. Hueffer directly addresses this criticism later in the essay.

Hueffer's assessment of *Tristan*, its style and artistic significance, is quite cogent, almost prophetic, considering the work's newness, and its unfamiliarity to English audiences. In the early 1870's, Hueffer clearly considered *Tristan* a watershed work, both in Wagner's own *œuvre* and in the history of dramatic music.

*Tristan and Isolde*³² is the fifth of Wagner's acknowledged dramatic works, its first performance (at Munich in 1865) following that of *Lohengrin* after an interval of fifteen years. The step in advance marked by it in its author's development, and in that of dramatic music in general, is proportionate to this lapse of time. According to his own assertion, Wagner wrote it with the full concentrated power of his inspiration, freed at last from the fetters of conventional operatic forms, with which he has broken here definitely and irrevocably. In *Tristan and Isolde* we hear for the first time the unimpaired language of dramatic passion, intensified by an uninterrupted flow of expressive melody, the stream of which is no longer obstructed or led into the

³¹ Davison noted down the harmonies he heard in the *Ring*; see p. 59 above.

³² Hueffer uses the spelling, "Iseult" in the essay, but switches to "Isolde" in the interpolated program notes.

artificial canals of aria, cavatina, etc.³³

Hueffer remarks that the orchestra behaves like the “chorus of antique drama.”³⁴

After touching on the influence of Schopenhauer, he offers his assessment of the work’s importance:

After the stated facts, it cannot surprise us to see, that our music-drama (for Opera would be a decided misnomer) has become a bone of contention between the adherents of the liberal and conservative schools of music. Many people who greatly admire “certain things” in *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* draw the line at *Tristan and Isolde*, which, on the other hand, is considered by the advanced party as the representative work of a new epoch in art. A musician’s position to the present work may indeed be considered as the crucial test of his general tendency towards the past or future.³⁵

Hueffer then goes on to review the chronology of the composition of *Tristan* and *Die Meistersinger* in relationship to Wagner’s work on the *Ring*, and takes up the question of why Wagner despaired of the *Ring* receiving a satisfactory presentation on the German stage. The Wagner Societies, writes Hueffer, first overseen by the pianist Carl Tausig,³⁶ were the crucial factor in making the *Ring* a reality. He expected that the *Ring* would appear in the spring of 1875, conducted by Wagner himself. Hueffer was,

³³ “Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future,” 89-91.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 90. Hueffer may have originated this concept.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

³⁶ Carl Tausig (1841-71): Polish pianist, composer, and devoted disciple of Wagner. His piano compositions, which are little-known now, contain passages of incredible virtuosic audacity. Tausig was the first secretary of the *Wagner-Patronatsvereine* for financing the building of Wagner’s theater, but shortly afterwards died of typhus.

of course, wrong on both points. The *Ring* was held up until August, 1876, and Wagner expressly wanted Hans Richter in the orchestra pit, leaving him free to supervise the stage proceedings.

Claiming three major points of similarity, Hueffer compares the *Ring* to the “drama of the antique stage.” First there is:

the relative position of poetry and music, the latter of which, in both Wagner and Sophocles’ drama is strictly limited to receiving and idealizing the intentions of the sister art, on which it never intrudes the conditions of its own separate interest.³⁷

Second, as in the case of *Tristan*, is the role of the orchestra:

. . . for the orchestral part, which by Wagner, has been raised from the secondary position of a mere accompaniment of the voices into an important factor of the dramatic organism, is enabled by his masterly treatment to render in its varied measures the lyrical and reflective elements of the action, resembling in this respect the antique chorus much more closely than the hackneyed exclamations of combined joy or grief which the choral singers of the orthodox opera are wont to utter.³⁸

Finally, there is the shared dependence on myth:

As the last and most important parallelism, we mention the mythical foundation, which in both dramas forms the ideal background of the individual action. From this Wagner himself expects the revival of modern art, and through it of

³⁷ “Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future,” 100.

³⁸ Hueffer is normally the fairest of critics; yet, when writing as an advocate, he occasionally goes overboard in ridiculing the opposing practice. The “choral singers” are obviously not responsible for the “hackneyed exclamations of joy and grief [they] are wont to utter.” *Ibid.*, 101.

national life in a manner too ideal, perhaps, to be ever realised in our actual existence, but which will always be counted amongst the most beautiful dreams of human genius. *Quod felix faustum fortunatumque sit.*³⁹

Hueffer concludes his remarks on Wagner's "personal character and artistic deeds" by re-emphasizing Wagner's special position in the development of the history of art: he is an artist who breaks with previous practices, but preserves or exposes the best aspects of those practices, and produces something momentarily new.

... a "hero" and "swallower of formulas" in the most emphatic sense Mr. Carlyle⁴⁰ ever imparted to that word, but at the same time endowed with the gift of reconstructing what was eternal in the destroyed fabric, after a fashion -- a man, in short, whom you may love or hate intensely, but whom you must reckon with in one way or another, if not the book of artistic revelation shall be for ever sealed to you with seven seals.⁴¹

For Hueffer in 1874, as he would be for the musical world at large, Wagner was an artist who stimulated intense reactions, but one whom "you must reckon with in one way or the other."

Hueffer uses *Lohengrin* to illustrate his statements and claims for Wagner's innovations, because of its relative brevity and accessibility:

... I have chosen *Lohengrin* ... as showing most of the important new features of Wagner's art, yet without some of the most striking anomalies of his latest productions, the

³⁹ *Ibid.* "May it be happy, lucky, and auspicious."

⁴⁰ Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881): highly influential Scottish historian and philosopher. Hueffer alludes to Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841).

⁴¹ "Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future," 102.

beauty and necessity of which can be tested only by the immediate impression of a performance on the stage.⁴²

Before continuing, though, Hueffer interrupts himself, and notes that the essay first appeared as an article in the *Fortnightly Review*, and that this article was the subject of discussion in other venues. A “leading article in the *Daily News*” raised arguments that Hueffer was eager to rebut:

The popular prejudices of which the article made itself the mouthpiece may be summed up in the double assertion, that what I had designated as the fundamental idea of “the music of the future” was wanting “in any genuine novelty”; and further, that if the poetical principle insisted upon were carried out, it would make all instrumental music impossible, and, moreover, lead in its ultimate consequences to the destruction of both arts.⁴³

Hueffer concedes that not all the ideas of the “music of the future” are entirely new, nor did they all necessarily originate with Wagner. “Its compounds have been singly hovering in the air, as it were, felt and known by many . . . ,”⁴⁴ but special qualities are required to gather these components together into a concrete statement and, moreover, to create the exemplifying work of art:

Still it remains the task of genius to develop its *disjecta membra* into an organic whole; and if the idea is one of an artistic kind, to prove its vitality by act of creation. In this sense, and this sense only, I claimed for Wagner the honour or dishonour (whichever it may be) of having urged theo-

⁴² *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

retically, and shown by his creative productions, the necessity of a poetical basis of music.⁴⁵

He speculates that concern that Wagner's innovations would be the end of instrumental music – and of both music and poetry as separate arts – came about because of a misunderstanding of the use of the word “*poetical*.” He is not referring, Hueffer explains, to the making of verses, but to the artist's true creative impulse.

By “poetical” I mean only the original passionate impulse, which every artist must feel, and which he tries to embody in his work, be it by means of articulate words, sounds, or colours. In this sense every artist must be first a poet; and without such a fundamental conception, poetry proper will degenerate into mere rhyming, painting into the worst kind of meaningless *genre*, and music into a shallow display of sound, or “Musikmacherei” as the Germans appropriately call it.⁴⁶

Such a “shallow display of sound” had become characteristic of opera “under the destructive influence of the Italian operatic stage of the last century. Even in great composers like Mozart or Haydn, the poetical idea was encumbered by the strict forms of absolute music.”⁴⁷

My meaning is, to be quite explicit, that they [Mozart and Haydn] would conceive a melody, perhaps full of sentiment, and certainly full of beauty of sound, and develop it exclusively with a view to displaying such beauties. It was Beethoven who first distinctly felt, and Wagner who first expressed in words, the necessity of a previous “poetical”

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

impulse to which the forms of music proper would have to yield. The unimpaired vitality of pure instrumental music, on these grounds, is of course obvious, it being altogether a secondary consideration whether the “poetical basis” be expressed in words or not. Much less is the possibility of poetry as a separate art denied by the above theory. Still it is equally true that where a thorough blending of words and music is effected, and most of all in the drama, the very essence of which is passionate impulse, the common effort of both arts will be of a higher kind than is ever attainable by either in its individual sphere. Both have to resign some of their peculiarities, but both gain new strength and beauty in their supreme surrender.⁴⁸

The writer’s error, in Hueffer’s view, is that he has confused “art as a revelation to inspired mind” and “art as result of the labour of generation,” with rules like “dogmas of established religious creed.” Artists must master these forms and rules; but “fire of individual inspiration is of divine nature” and “superior to the accumulated wisdom and skill of the world.” The true artist is compelled to “find if necessary, unknown modes of expression for his new lore.”⁴⁹ Wagner, says Hueffer, already possesses the requisite mastery of the forms of absolute music, which he then “abandons in case of need, and repudiates with the same courage and zeal as Luther and Calvin did the grooves of Popish dogmatism.”⁵⁰ Like Bennett, in his obituary of Wagner, Hueffer assigns Wagner the role of a reformer equivalent to Luther, with similar pivotal significance; but he does so a decade earlier.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Hueffer is particularly eager to refute the charge that Wagner's music "lacks melody." Aware of the difficulty of proving something that is denied or confirmed through one's sense of hearing, Hueffer has pondered over the reasons why many do not hear what he clearly hears in Wagner's music.

... One of these causes is, strange to say, the continuous glow of melodious beauty which characterises our master's creations, and which makes it much more difficult to single out a particular motive in his works, than, for instance, in the Italian opera, where a snatch of fine *cantilena* appears like an oasis in the desert of *recitativi secchi*. Moreover, in Wagner melody and harmony are so closely connected with the dramatic action, that their separate existence becomes imperceptibly mixed up with the general harmony of the work *of art*, as a whole.⁵¹

Hueffer posits another possibility, perhaps not altogether seriously, but revealing some contempt for the cult of the opera singer:

The second cause referred to is the increased importance of Wagner's orchestra, into which a great part of the melodious flow is transferred, so as to give the voice more liberty in rendering the accents of genuine passion. It was only natural that both the bravura-singer and his faithful adherents should retaliate for this breach of privilege by not acknowledging, or, maybe, actually not perceiving the existence of instrumental melody.⁵²

In assessing Wagner's historical importance, Hueffer believes that Wagner had discovered solutions that would regenerate the operatic stage. Wagner was as pivotal and significant a figure as Hueffer predicted; however, Wagner's solutions were solutions for

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 109.

himself only – for his particular genius. A few years later, Hueffer began to contend with this reality, but in 1874, before the *Ring* had even been produced in Bayreuth, he could see only positive and hopeful ramifications for the musical and dramatic arts in Europe.

Hueffer on the *Ring*

In April 1875, Hueffer published an introductory article on the *Ring* in the *New Quarterly Magazine*; it displayed extreme familiarity and expertise with a work that had yet to be performed in its entirety, and whose last part was still unpublished. After the *Ring* premiere at Bayreuth, Hueffer published a two-part review of the event in the *Examiner*.⁵³

Because there is much overlapping material between the 1875 article and the review, I will examine them together. Hueffer's articles address the work's history, Wagner's use of his sources, and the music. The reviews, naturally, deal largely with issues of performance.

Although he does not offer detailed musical analysis, Hueffer's descriptions are not merely plot synopses, but an attempt to convey the impression of the staged work.

"By its organic continuity," writes Hueffer, "[the work] defies microscopic treatment."

⁵³ Hueffer, "Richard Wagner and His *Ring of the Niblung*," in *Musical Studies: A Series of Contributions* (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1880), 130-78; originally in *The New Quarterly Magazine* (April 1875); "The Wagner Festival," 2 parts, in *Musical Studies: A Series of Contributions*, 179-87, 188-200; originally in the *Examiner* (August 19 and 26, 1876).

“My present purpose,” he writes,

. . . is altogether more of an exegetical than of a critical nature. I shall attempt, as far as my space will permit, to give an idea to the reader of the old Teutonic types, seen through a medium of a great modern poet’s recreative power; and at the same time try to show, as far as this can be done in words, how by the blending of the musical with the dramatic form, a new style of art has been created, differing from and superior to what either music or poetry could ever achieve in their separate spheres.

Instead of dealing with each matter separately, as Davison and Bennett had done, Hueffer’s treatment of the sources, music, scenery, and (in the review) performance is integrated. While there are sections of narration and digressions to discuss Wagner’s sources, Hueffer is seldom far from a description of the *mise-en-scène*, a well-observed (or heard) description of the music, or an elucidation of the action’s significance.

Myth and Meanings

The most striking feature of Hueffer’s writing about the *Ring* is his detailed discussion of the poetic sources of the work and Wagner’s treatment of them. Hueffer introduces his first article on the *Ring* by immediately referring to Wagner’s sources. He stresses the disparities between the culture that produced the stories and mid-nineteenth-century society – as if in anticipation of objections.

. . . I am referring to the drama, or rather the sequence of four dramas, the tetralogy in which Wagner has grappled with those oldest and mightiest types of Teutonic lore, which in the Runic measures of the Icelandic *sagas*, strike us like the phantoms of a wild dream, gigantic at once in their beauty and boldness. The difficulties of handling such a subject need not be pointed out. These types, by

their very essence, are removed from the sphere in which our modern thoughts and actions lie. Our customs, our morals, are unknown to them. The laws by which they act, or by the breaking of which they perish, are derived from an unwritten code of their own, being more intuitively felt than consciously known by themselves. They are led by their own free impulse where we anxiously regard the opinions of others. They represent, in short, the pure symbols of primeval forces, while we are the compounds of consecutive generations. To bridge over this chasm, dividing the old age and the new, to strike that chord of purely human feeling which binds and blends men of all times and nations, is the work of the poet; for he alone is able to combine in his own nature the consciousness of modern thought with the intensity of prehistoric energy of action.⁵⁴

Hueffer's expertise in literary matters is far greater than Bennett's or Davison's.

With emphasis and repetition, however, he perpetuates the fallacy that Wagner used "purely" mythical material as his source, and "returned" to some primeval state of society for his background. He notes, correctly, that Wagner made more extensive use of Icelandic material than of the medieval German *Nibelungenlied*, but writes that Wagner "justly" preferred the "pure Icelandic sources." Throughout his writings on the *Ring*, Hueffer repeatedly refers to the Icelandic poems as "primeval," "prehistoric," "deep-rooted." He uses expressions that evoke a Jungian sense of atavism and mystery about the material, rather like the descriptions of primitive cultures we read in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss. The *Sagas* and the *Eddas*, however, were products of a literate culture, literary treatments of mythic material, like the *Metamorphoses* or the *Aeneid*. Hueffer relates what was known of their history:

The oldest Teutonic traditions of national gods and heroes

⁵⁴ Hueffer, "Richard Wagner and His *Ring of the Niblung*," 130-31.

contained in popular tales and songs were, at an early date, collected by the priests and scholars of that branch of the great nation which had settled in Iceland. The noble zeal shown in preserving Pagan traditions does great credit to the wisdom of the Christian priests of that island, who, differing in this from the intolerant destructiveness of their brethren in most other countries, carefully preserved every trace of the early history of their nation

He places the writing of the *Sagas* and *Eddas* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,⁵⁵ but surrounds his information with highly prejudicial language.

A German expatriate, Hueffer was in an unusual position regarding the persistent nineteenth-century issue of nationalism. Wagner's German nationalism posed problems for the composer's acceptance in other nations. With his background, and literary mastery, Hueffer was able to soften Wagner's abrasiveness for a literate but uneasy English audience. The "distance" between the modern English and the Nordic mythic worlds was one point of contention (see chapter 3). Hueffer emphasized the closeness, rather than the distance between the subject matter and the audience. He concentrated upon the Icelandic sources rather than the more modern and obviously German *Nibelungenlied*. Like William Morris, he stressed differences between the Northern traditions and the classical mythic traditions, so assiduously studied by the English, while the putatively closer Nordic myths were ignored.⁵⁶

The idea itself, however, of a final destruction of this

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁶ Morris attributed the best qualities of Englishness to Nordic ancestry; therefore he considered the *Sagas* as belonging to the English ancestral past, like *Beowulf* (ca. 757-96 A.D.). In his introduction to his translation of the *Volsunga Saga*, he wrote that these stories should mean as much to the English as the *Iliad* meant to the Greeks.

world and of the gods ruling over it pervades the whole system of old Northern religions, distinguishing it in that respect from the mythologies of all other nations. It is true that the secret cult of Bacchus or Adonis celebrates the death of that god, but the yearly recurrence of that event, with its regenerative counterpart, indicates its scarcely indistinguishable symbolism of the change of the seasons. In the deeper mind of the Germanic nations, a story perhaps originally also indicative of a natural event, was at an early period invested with a permanent, and in a certain sense, ethical character ⁵⁷

A major difference between the Nordic myths and their Mediterranean counterparts, writes Hueffer, is that even the gods are ruled by law, a sign of moral superiority. When Hueffer dismisses the Mediterranean mythic cycles of Adonis and Bacchus to the realm of primitive nature-worship, without an ethical element, he is reinforcing this sense of superiority. Although the material of the *Ring* may seem foreign and distant to English audiences, by appealing to strong Victorian morality, and by triangulating another foreign tradition (*i.e.*, the Classical), Hueffer attempts to avert the possible alienating effects of Wagner's subject matter.

This idea of the final destruction of the gods by their own guilt is a striking feature of the old myths. It proves the deep-rooted feeling of moral responsibility in the consciousness of Teutonic nations. The gods of the Greeks sin but no punishment awaits, no law restrains them; Wotan's power, on the contrary, is founded on law. His treaty with the giants prevents him from recovering the fatal ring by his own action.⁵⁸

Hueffer extols the morality of Wagner's sources in order to draw his audience to

⁵⁷ "Richard Wagner and His *Ring of the Nibelung*," 154.

⁵⁸ Hueffer, "The Wagner Festival II," 188.

the material. Yet in dealing with the intractable subject of incest, Hueffer emphasizes the temporal distance⁵⁹ and differences between the two cultures.

A few words ought to be added in explanation of an episode at first sight so strange, not to say shocking, to our modern feeling, as the one just mentioned. The illicit love between Siegmund and Sieglinde is an important -- nay, vital -- ingredient of the whole story, because Siegfried, the offspring of their union, must have the unmixed blood of Volsung -- that is, of Wotan the god -- in his veins, in order to fulfill his mission. Thus, being unable to omit the incident altogether, Wagner has acted rightly in treating it in the simple, open, and therefore chaste spirit of the Northern myth itself. The law which debars blood relations from mutual passion is essentially founded on the idea of the family. Animal nature knows of no such obstacles, and all the cosmogonies which, like the Pentateuch, derive the procreation of the human race from one couple, imply intermarriages of brothers and sisters. The tragic guilt of Sieglinde, therefore, does not lie in her love for her brother, but in the breach of her marriage vow. The punishment of this guilt is now approaching rapidly.⁶⁰

In his review of the Bayreuth *Ring*, Hueffer repeats and expands his argument:

. . . But it should be remembered that we are not dealing here with ordinary men and women, but with the children of a god -- mythical beings, that is, who have hardly emerged from the stage of natural forces. Who, in his senses, has ever been shocked at the amours of the Greek

⁵⁹ Hueffer here is appealing to the "doctrine of distance," an important determinant of what the nineteenth-century bourgeois public would and would not accept in artistic depictions of sexuality. See Peter Gay, *The Education of the Senses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 380.

⁶⁰ "Richard Wagner and His *Ring of the Nibelung*," 165.

Hueffer uses the very expression -- "chaste" -- that Bennett so deplores in his review of the 1882 London *Ring*. Possibly, Hueffer is the very Wagnerian to whom Bennett was angrily replying in his essay.

divinities on account of their being within the forbidden degrees of relationship, or at the intermarriages of the children of Adam and Eve, which the Pentateuch implies? The tragic guilt for which Sieglinde suffers does, therefore, consist less in the love for her brother than in the breach of her marriage vow. It is on this ground that Fricka, the protectress of wedded rights, urges the punishment of the pair.⁶¹

In order to defend the appearance of incest in the *Ring* sources, Hueffer uses not only the Bible but also Classical mythology (which he had just devalued), which he knows to be accepted by his audience. His introduction of a dual morality, where incest is permissible but adultery strictly punished, is another weak link in Hueffer's argument. The family relationships in the *Volsunga Saga* are incredibly tangled, with a proliferation of cousins, in-laws, widows, widowers, half-siblings, step-siblings, and foster-siblings, all intermarrying. The relationships become so confusing that it is difficult for the reader always to remember who is related to whom; but family ties can demand drastic acts, particularly of revenge. The one instance of sister-brother incest is exceptional, happens under exceptional circumstances, and is thoroughly explained by the narrator of the story. According to Hueffer, the social taboo against incest is "essentially founded on the idea of the family," but in the *Saga*, the act of incest is *necessitated* by that culture's tradition of family loyalty, in order to prepare an act of revenge.⁶²

In all, Hueffer's views on Wagner's use of myth are diametrically opposed to

⁶¹ "The Wagner Festival II," 190.

⁶² The *Volsunga Saga* has several feuds, cycles of revenge killings between two families, the most terrible of which is touched off by the murder of Sigurd. The feud was a typical feature of traditional Nordic writings (it figures prominently in *Beowulf*).

Joseph Bennett's. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Nordic myths were too distant from nineteenth-century concerns for Bennett, and he found the gods unsympathetic as characters. Moreover, Wagner denatured the original myths, robbing them of their power. For Hueffer, however, the tradition was perfectly chosen, and the gods plainly stood in for humans.

Wagner's gods . . . are themselves acting a tragedy of no less import, of no less sadness than the human beings to be afterwards introduced. They are subject to rage and envy, they covet the luring gleam of the gold, and the joy of their existence is marred by the consciousness of an inevitable doom. They are indeed tragic characters in the deepest sense of that word. Wagner, in making use of this feature, has succeeded in rousing our human interest in beings seemingly so remote from our feeling.⁶³

In contrast to Bennett, Hueffer also extols Wagner's treatment of the myths. Wagner's alterations of the myths masterfully called to the surface what was latent within them, and gave them clarity for a nineteenth-century audience:

Of invention proper there is little in Wagner's design, but he has succeeded in connecting with each other and giving psychological and dramatic vitality to the frequently disjointed and misunderstood suggestions of the old popular stories.⁶⁴

In a general way it may be affirmed that the incidents of Wagner's dramas also occur in the Icelandic *Sagas*; only the manner of which these incidents are connected with each other and condensed into a dramatic organism, as also the deep transcendent meaning which is imparted to them, betray the hand of the modern poet . . . The chief compounds of the subject of the *Rhinegold* are, as the reader

⁶³ "Richard Wagner and His *Ring of the Nibelung*," 154.

⁶⁴ "The Wagner Festival I," 182.

will remember, the building of Walhall by the giants, their abduction of the goddess of youth, and the robbing of the gold by the gods to pay the ransom. Every one of these incidents occurs in either of the *Eddas*, but all in separate tales, and without any connecting link amongst them . . . The stones, indeed, lie there like costly jewels, waiting for the artificer's hand to join them together as a diadem of matchless beauty. This task of joining the *disjecta membra* of a deep though disturbed tradition, and of dramatically enforcing their half-forgotten, if ever consciously felt, meaning, Wagner has performed in a manner which displays no less reverence for the spirit of his original than power of recasting it in his original mould.⁶⁵

Wagner has improved the myths, says Hueffer. By his manipulations, he has, if anything, made them truer and more immediate. Wagner has not spoiled the original sense of the myths, but brought out what was hidden to a modern eye. Hueffer sees the stories as hidden gems, their beauty and meaning concealed, rather like Freud's idea of the unconscious. He emphasizes the psychological meanings both of the sources and of Wagner's works. His metaphor of revealing hidden things, or bringing the unconscious to consciousness, is a psychological concept. Neither Bennett nor Hueffer, however, appears to remember that Wagner was using not "raw" material, actual "myths," but literary treatments of myths, already much "manipulated" and altered from their original state (lost in the distant past).

While manipulating the sources in only the best possible way, says Hueffer, Wagner has also remained very true to them, as for example, the incidents of *Das Rheingold* that are taken, then rearranged, from the *Eddas*. He points out that Sieglinde's

⁶⁵ "Richard Wagner and His *Ring of the Niblung*," 157-58.

narrative in Act I of *Die Walküre* is taken almost literally from the *Volsunga Saga*.⁶⁶ The one-eyed god, Odin, mysteriously appears, and thrusts the sword into a tree that supports the building.⁶⁷

The tale tells that great fires were made endlong the hall, and the great tree aforesaid stood midmost thereof; withal folks say, that whereas men sat by the fires in the evening, a certain man came into the hall unknown of all men; and such like array he had, that over him was a spotted cloak, and he was barefoot, and had linen breeches knit tight even to the bone, and he had a sword in his hand as he went up to the Brandstock, and a slouched hat upon his head; huge he was, and seeming-ancient and one-eyed. So he drew his sword and smote it into the tree-trunk, so that it sank in up to the hilt: and all held back from greeting the man. Then he took up the word and said: Whoso draweth this sword from this stock shall have the same as a gift from me, and shall find in good sooth that never bare he better sword in hand than is this. Therewith went out the old man from the hall, and none knew who he was or whither he went. Now men stand up, and none would fain be the last to set hand to the sword, for they deemed that he would have the best of it who might first touch it; so all the noblest went thereto first, and then the others one after other; but none who came thereto might avail to pull it out, for in nowise would it come away, howsoever they tugged at it.⁶⁸

Hueffer quotes directly from Morris's "incomparable" translation, preferring to "let the old tale speak for itself." In *Die Walküre*, Sieglinde describes her forced marriage to Hunding. Her father Wotan, in his guise as the Wanderer, plants the means of her rescue in the midst of her captors right into the house to which she has been brought.

⁶⁶ I also mention this in chapter 3 above.

⁶⁷ "Richard Wagner and His *Ring of the Niblung*," 161-62.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Quoted by Hueffer from *The Volsunga Saga*.

Wagner's manipulation of his source materials -- especially his joining of the story of Siegfried with the Eddic idea of *Ragnarök*⁶⁹ (the end of the gods) -- is particularly admired by Hueffer.

Hueffer views the drama as essentially optimistic; the drama of Wotan represents his progress from a man of the old order to one of enlightenment, although enlightenment to the point at which he can no longer participate, so he must therefore step aside to get out of the way.

A number of years are supposed to have elapsed between the *Rhinegold* and the *Valkyrie*. Wotan has coveted the gold, and thus becomes subject to the curse attaching to it. He feels that his doom is approaching; his power is lost if Alberich, the representative of the powers of darkness and chaos, regains possession of the ring One hope only remains to secure it from Alberich's grasp; if a hero, god-inspired, but not guided by the gods, and regardless of laws human and divine, could gain the ring, the powers of darkness would be baffled. The idea amounts to an apotheosis of free human impulse; it is the leading thought of the whole trilogy ⁷⁰

The third act [of *Siegfried*] introduces us again and for the last time to Wotan. The hero of his choice, born from his own blood and inspired by his own divine will, yet not acting by his command, has taken the ring from the powers of evil. Henceforth light and law and order, represented by the upper gods, are no longer threatened by darkness and chaos. Yet Wotan feels that this order itself has been superseded by a new impulse, *viz.*, the free action of

⁶⁹ Professor Bailey has reminded me that Wagner's term *Götterdämmerung*, usually translated as "the twilight of the gods," has a double meaning; *Dämmerung* can refer to the twilight that occurs at sunset or at dawn.

⁷⁰ "The Wagner Festival, II," 188-89.

human volition, we almost might say genius. The god has grown old; he knows that his end, "the dusk of the gods," is approaching, and willingly he resigns the earth and its joys to youth and spontaneity unimpaired by the shackles of traditional law.

In this voluntary act of resignation lies the catharsis, the expiation of Wotan ⁷¹

Hueffer is a progressive of the most idealistic and optimistic nature, and sees bright possibilities beyond Wagner's destruction of the gods.

Brynhild, mounting her horse and kindling the pyre with a torch, rushes into the midst of the flame. The ring from Siegfried's finger she restores to the Rhine Daughters, who approach on the rising waves of the river. Hagen vainly attempts to lay hold of the ring, and is swept away into the depths of the stream. A bright gleam on the horizon announces at the same time the flaming destruction of Walhall and its divine inmates. Or shall we see in it the dawn of a new day after the "dusk of the gods"?⁷² It is true that the Æsir and the law represented by them perish, but the powers of darkness also are baffled. The curse of the gold is broken by the waves of the Rhine, and a new reign has begun, the reign of free human impulse, no more alloyed by the thirst of gold or shackled by the fear of conventional order. And here again we meet with the idea of the world-redeeming power of a woman's love, so frequently found in Wagner's dramatic conceptions. For it is Brynhild's voluntary death which finally breaks the fetters of mankind, and ushers in the era of freedom and beautiful human development.⁷³

For Hueffer, the optimism he finds in the end of the *Ring* originated in the Norse

⁷¹ "Richard Wagner and His *Ring of the Nibelung*," 172.

⁷² *Götterdämmerung* means both; see note 68 above.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 175-76.

myth of *Ragnarök*, a tradition that appears to reflect a dark and despairing world view, in which even the gods are vulnerable and everything is pre-destined to destruction. He claims that Wagner's treatment in *Götterdämmerung* exposes the "hope of an ultimate reconstruction of a purified world" in the myth.

The very symbol of the World, the World-ash Yggdrasil, with a serpent gnawing at its root and a stag and goat nibbling its foliage, is an image of decay and mortality; the final victory, on the other hand, of the powers of darkness and chaos (dark elves and giants) over the upper gods (Æsir, from beam or column, *i.e.*, prop of the world), the representatives of law and order, is brought about, not without some moral guilt on the part of the latter, as is proved by the hope of the ultimate reconstruction of a purified world. This idea of a possible redemption of what was divine in the old fabric, even after the "Dusk of the Gods" (*Ragnarökr*), Wagner has also introduced into his poem, relieving in this manner the feeling of hopeless doom which forms the dark background of his tragedy.⁷⁴

Even Hueffer is not without confusion in relating and interpreting material from the *Ring*. In describing Act III of *Siegfried*, he writes, "The remainder of the drama is taken up by Siegfried's ride through the fire, and his awakening of the spell-bound Brynhilde." Hueffer makes a surprising slip. Siegfried has no horse, and he does not get one until Brünnhilde gives him Grane in the *Götterdämmerung* Prologue. Hueffer seems to be remembering the corresponding incident from the *Volsunga Saga*, where the hero Sigurd rides a horse through a ring of fire to Brynhild.

In his re-telling of the plot, probably owing to the extraordinary difficulties and contradictions of Wagner's drama, Hueffer also cites three incidents in which he says

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

that the curse is broken, or that some critical resolution has taken place.

In this voluntary act of resignation [the shattering of the spear in *Siegfried* Act III] lies the catharsis, the expiation of Wotan ⁷⁵

Hagen thrusts his spear into Siegfried's back, who sinks down and dies with Brynhild's name on his lips But his death breaks the fatal spell; his redeeming blood has freed gods and men from Alberich's power.⁷⁶

For it is Brynhild's voluntary death which finally breaks the fetters of mankind, and ushers in the era of freedom ⁷⁷

Exactly when is it, and with which action, does redemption come about? Each of these moments serves a separate purpose in Wagner's complex cosmogony, but Hueffer never articulates what is accomplished through each. Although Hueffer's interpretations are generally reasonable, the separate strands in Wagner's plot are sometimes as confusing for Hueffer, the enthusiast, as for Bennett, the skeptic.

Music

Hueffer ends the 1875 article with an explanation of the musical component of the drama. The music is "subordinate" to the meaning of the words, but is the "necessary and inseparable complement of his poetic purpose."⁷⁸ He also points to the "melodious"

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

aspect of Wagner's music, the aspect in which Davison and Bennett found Wagner deficient, or, more accurately, self-defeating. For them, Wagner defeated his gift for melodious writing by its "subordination" to the dramatic function or situation.

Hueffer explains the *Leitmotive* concisely, yet more fully than either of the previous writers. Unlike Bennett, he takes note of the harmonic elements of the motive and also refers (without Davison's sensitivity, however) to Wagner's transformations and combinations of motivic material.

It must first be understood that our composer does not write what may best be described as "absolute music,"—music that is invented for the sake of sonorous beauty and developed with a view to showing this sounding faculty to greatest advantage. In Wagner sound is subordinate to meaning, musical-rule to poetical impulse. Every melody occurring in his work (and the essence of his, as of all good music, is nothing but melody) has its function in the drama; it represents a certain idea or principle in this drama; and wherever this idea becomes the motive of the action, its corresponding melodious or harmonious combination resounds either in the vocal or orchestral part. Representative melodies of this kind, the introduction of which the art owes to Wagner, are of incalculable importance for the dramatic expressiveness of music. In the *Nibelungen* trilogy the continuity of motive throughout the different dramas is expressed by this means in a manner wholly unattainable by words only. Take, for instance, the ardent desire of wealth and power in the minds of gods and men. Wagner has found a musical equivalent for it, expressive at once of its tempting charm and of the danger hidden under its surface. This melody, which first occurs in the *Rhine-gold*, continually reappears in the course of the trilogy wherever the potent spell of the gold comes into action. In this manner a few chords of the orchestra are able to indicate a nuance of motive which it would take pages of writing to explain in words. Frequently also the modification of leading sentiments, or the simultaneous occurrence of two different impulses, gives rise to "thematic" or contra-

puntal developments, such as prove Wagner's absolute mastery over all the technical resources of music. But never do these technicalities obtain undue importance. They always are made subservient to the economy of the drama, the fullest and highest conception of which remains the ultimate aim of Wagner's art. It is thus that in his work, we are struck by a sense of perfect congruity between the combined efforts of two arts, which before him seemed divided by a great chasm, and which only the rarest gift of both musical and poetical creativeness has been able to blend into one harmonious organism.⁷⁹

Whereas Bennett objected to Wagner's "system" as being an artificial imposition which impeded the "natural" flow of artistic impulses, Hueffer writes that "never do these technicalities obtain undue importance." He denies that Wagner's use of a "system" draws any attention to itself and away from the drama.

In discussing the *Ring*, Hueffer follows his older contemporaries in not giving detailed musical analyses. He considers the music as inextricable from the *complete* work of art. He also differs from his two contemporaries in noting numerous specific musical events that would be particularly arresting, especially upon first hearing:

The orchestral introduction to the *Valkyrie* is of a wild, stormy character. The incessant triplets in the violins are suggestive of hail and rain beating on the leaves of tall trees, while the rolling figure in the bass seems to indicate the angry voice of thunder.⁸⁰

A passage describing the third scene of *Das Rheingold* shows Hueffer's attention to striking musical passages and his integration of musical, dramatic, and scenic elements

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 177-78.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 159-60.

in describing the action:

The next-following scene, in its broad touches of primitive coarseness, reminds one of the satyr drama of the antique tragedy. The prelude, with its strong rhythmical accents in the orchestra, accompanied by hammer and anvils behind the scenes, indicates that we are now approaching the country of Alberich, the king of the Niblungs, whom, by the power of his ring, he compels to find new treasures in the bowels of the earth, and work them into splendid ornaments for his pleasure Cruel flagellations, alternating with the cries of the victims, are depicted by the music in the most realistic manner, the grotesqueness of the whole scene being in exquisite contrast with the passionate but aristocratic bearing of the upper gods.⁸¹

Here, perhaps is the most important feature of Hueffer's attitude toward the music drama: "Cruel flagellations, alternating with the cries of the victims, are depicted by the music in the most realistic manner." In contrast, this sort of musical realism was accepted by Bennett only when the dramatic depiction was of something attractive or pleasant. For him, Wagner went too far in his grimmer musical characterizations, such as those of Alberich, Mime, Hagen, and Nibelheim. Hueffer accepts without question the notion that dramatic music dealing in matters of ugliness or evil can and should be as unstinting in its depiction as music reflecting "love" or "nature." *Siegfried* provides several opportunities for the elements to appear side-by-side, and Hueffer is entirely untroubled:

Siegfried contains some of the finest musical passages, and at the same time, some of the most daring ventures, that are to be found in Wagner's work. Siegfried's song, when he fashions the sword, is tuneful and popular, in the best sense

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

of the word. The grotesque character of Mime is sustained throughout with graphic distinctness, and a kind of orchestral interlude descriptive of the mysterious life and whirr of the forest on a summer's day is of sweetest idyllic charm.⁸²

Unlike Bennett, Hueffer is also untroubled by the appearance or non-appearance of concerted music in *Götterdämmerung*. He has no anxiety regarding Wagner's flexibility in using his own "system":

A most striking musical feature of the *Dusk of the Gods* is the comparative frequency of concerted pieces. A powerful male chorus is introduced, and we meet again with joy our old favourites, the Rhine Daughters, and their harmonious songs.⁸³

Performance at Bayreuth

The representation of Wagner's tetralogy, considered merely as a piece of theatrical art, is simply unique. A number of rehearsals under the composer's own direction have secured a perfection of ensemble never before witnessed except perhaps at the Théâtre Français. But despite attaining this perfect co-operation of the single artists, Wagner has succeeded in inspiring one and all of them with the grandeur and intensity of his work. They are lifted above their own sphere by a feeling of spiritual *rapprochement* with the composer, who, although he has given up his position at the conductor's desk to his pupil, Hans Richter, remains the intellectual leader of the whole. This wonderful unity of purpose in the whole performance, which is far different from the mere correctness of a musical ensemble, will, I have no doubt, be felt and acknowledged by the most hostile of English critics.⁸⁴

⁸² "The Wagner Festival II," 195.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 198-99.

⁸⁴ "The Wagner Festival I," 181

Hueffer knew the “most hostile of English critics,” and he need not have concerned himself. In writing of the *Ring*, Davison and Bennett were no less enthusiastic than Hueffer about the performing forces. In some instances, Hueffer was somewhat more exacting and critical. Davison and Bennett approached the performances skeptically; perhaps as a result, they found the quality of the ensemble to be much beyond their expectations.

Hueffer was unstinting in his praise of *Das Rheingold*, in all aspects:

My bald sketch will give the reader but an imperfect idea of the great and varied beauties of the piece. Amongst scenic effects, the descent of the gods into Alberich's realm ought particularly to be mentioned. Musically speaking, Loge's description of the power of the gold is perhaps the most remarkable passage. It was rendered most admirably by Herr Vogel⁸⁵ [*sic*], an actor and singer of whom any country might be proud. The public throughout refrained from applause during the piece, but after his speech, an involuntary burst of admiration could not be avoided. The rendering of Alberich by Herr Hill⁸⁶ and that of his brother Mime, the grotesque character in the play, by Herr Schlosser,⁸⁷ are also deserving of high praise. Herr Betz, one of the most celebrated singers of the German stage, has taken the difficult part of Wotan, which he renders with dignity and pathos. The representatives of Ertha [*sic*] and of the two goddesses were less remarkable; but

⁸⁵ Heinrich Vogl (1845-1900): German tenor, created the roles of Loge and Siegmund in Munich, in 1869 and 1870, respectively. He sang Loge at Bayreuth in 1876 and returned in 1886 as Tristan and Parsifal. He sang all the major Wagner tenor roles except Walther.

⁸⁶ Karl Hill (1831-93): German bass-baritone, who sang the Dutchman at Schwerin, 1873, and Alberich in the 1876 Bayreuth *Ring*. He also created the role of Klingsor at Bayreuth in 1882.

⁸⁷ Max Schlosser (1835-1916): German tenor, originated the role of David (*Meistersinger*) in Munich in 1868 and sang Mime at Bayreuth, 1876.

the three Rhine Daughters, Mlles. Lilli Lehmann,⁸⁸ Marie Lehmann,⁸⁹ and Lammert,⁹⁰ did full justice to the graceful music allotted to them.⁹¹

Hueffer is somewhat more understated in his praise of the festival orchestra than were

Davison and Bennett, but, as noted above, he had fully expected them to be excellent:

The orchestra throughout was admirable, and the effect of sound was greatly increased by its rising in one compact column of air from the lower part of the house, where the musicians were seated, invisible to the audience The whole impression is as different from that received in an ordinary theatre as can be imagined. Wagner has boldly ventured on an entirely new course of dramatic representation; and to judge by the enthusiastic applause of an audience by no means consisting only of Wagnerites exclusively, his success has been complete.⁹²

Moreover, as if addressing his colleagues in the English press, he notes the audience's spirited response, pointing out that it could not have been composed only of the Wagnerian faithful.

Hueffer again refers to the audience's reaction to the duet in Act I of *Die Wal-*

⁸⁸ Lilli Lehmann (1848-1929): German soprano and international prima donna. As a young singer she was a coloratura. She sang Woglinde and the Wood Bird at Bayreuth, 1876; she returned in 1896 to sing the three Brünnhildes. She sang all the major female Wagnerian roles (except Kundry) throughout Europe and in the United States. She had a prodigious repertory, encompassing 170 roles in 114 operas in German, Italian, and French.

⁸⁹ Marie Lehmann (1851-1931): German dramatic soprano, sister of Lilli Lehmann; created the roles of Wellgunde and Ortlinde at Bayreuth, 1876.

⁹⁰ Minna Lammert (1852-?): German mezzo-soprano.

⁹¹ "The Wagner Festival I," 186.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 186-87.

küre:

... A magnificent love duet ensues, unequalled in melodious beauty by anything known to me in music. It was magnificently rendered by Herr Niemann⁹³ and Mme. Scheffzsky⁹⁴ [*sic*], and the impression on the audience was overpowering. Niemann, as I said before, has lost his voice, but his acting and his enunciation of the words make one forget this deficiency of physical power.⁹⁵

Hueffer praises the performance without ignoring Niemann's vocal problems. He also noted the vocal problems of other cast members, notably Franz Betz (Wotan) and Georg Unger (Siegfried).⁹⁶

Hueffer reported scenic matters that fell short of hopes or expectations:

The third act of *The Valkyrie* contains a beautiful piece of concerted music, the chorus of the sword-maidens, admirably executed by the eight ladies who had generously taken these relatively subordinate parts. The same scene, generally called the Valkyries' ride, tended to show the limit of possibility to which representation on the stage can go. Wagner's libretto describes the Valkyries on horseback carrying the bodies of dead warriors to Walhall, but the realisation of the scene by a *magica laterna* fell far short of his magnificent conception.⁹⁷

⁹³ Albert Niemann (1831-1917): German tenor, temperamental star of the Paris *Tannhäuser* (1861), and Siegmund at Bayreuth, 1876. He was also the first American Tristan and Siegfried.

⁹⁴ Josefīne Scheffzsky (1843-1912): German soprano. A long time court singer at Munich. Ludwig II always had her hidden behind plants when she sang at state occasions, because he was repelled by her appearance.

⁹⁵ "The Wagner Festival II," 190.

⁹⁶ Georg Unger (1837-87): German tenor; though recommended to Wagner by Richter, he had considerable technical deficiencies.

⁹⁷ "The Wagner Festival II," 192.

Siegfried's fight with the dragon in Act II of *Siegfried* was also visually disappointing. Hueffer explains that in the final scene of *Götterdämmerung*, Materna, rather than mount her horse and jump into the funeral pyre, as described in the libretto, "led her horse toward the conflagration, by no means an easy task . . ."⁹⁸

Like Davison, Hueffer is aware of the work's difficulties for the singers, particularly of the burden carried by Brünnhilde:

The invocation scene, as it might be called [Hueffer is discussing the final scene of *Die Walküre*], is a splendid piece of descriptive music, such as only Wagner has hitherto achieved. The acting and singing of Herr Betz as Wotan in this scene were replete with tenderness and pathos. Madame Materna, as Brynhild, is also worthy of the highest praise. She is an excellent actress, and her voice is fully equal to the almost superhuman task imposed upon it by Wagner. Next to Mademoiselle Tietjens⁹⁹ [*sic*], she is undoubtedly the greatest tragic singer now on the boards.

¹⁰⁰

. . . Of three of the chief performers in *Siegfried*, I have already spoken. Madame Materna, Herren Betz and Schlosser, sustained their difficult parts admirably. Siegfried, the hero of the piece, was represented by Herr Unger, a young inexperienced singer with a powerful voice and a truly heroic appearance. His vocal training and his mimetic action, however, left much to be desired. The dearth of heroic tenors in all countries was again illustrated by Wagner's choice. Herr Unger's impersonation, however, was not without good points. He had evidently studied his part with the utmost zeal, and his scene with Mime in the

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁹⁹ Therese Johanne Alexandra Tietjens (1831-77): famous soprano, born in Hamburg. She made her career in London, where she was phenomenally successful for more than thirty years.

¹⁰⁰ "The Wagner Festival II," 193.

first act was on the whole excellent. But towards the end, especially in the love-duet with Brynhild, his physical and mental energies seemed to flag.¹⁰¹

Hueffer concludes with a mention of Wagner's curtain speech after the end of the first *Götterdämmerung*.

Alluding to the self-sacrificing enthusiasm of the performers, he said that the existence of a national and ideal art in Germany was henceforth an established fact; "but it is your task," he added, alluding to the public in general, "to show that you desire to have such an art." These may seem proud words, but they fully express the significance of the event. A great work has been performed in a manner unique, perhaps, in the annals of music. Artistic purpose, to the exclusion of all other considerations, has been the guiding principle. An effect has been produced unattainable -- nay -- unapproachable -- at an ordinary performance. Shall this event remain a solitary point of brightness in the dusk of theatrical routine, or shall its influence grow and broaden and bear lasting fruit? To answer that question lies, as Wagner says, with the public.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 196. Unger's deficiencies had been apparent to Wagner for some time. He was handsome and had a big voice, but his vocal technique was flawed, and rather than projecting a heroic personality, his demeanor was modest and self-effacing. Nonetheless, Wagner hoped to make a Siegfried of him, and placed Unger in the hands of the Munich vocal coach Julius Hey (1831-1909) for a year. Unger improved a great deal, in both vocal technique and stage presence, but Hey and Wagner agreed that he still was not nearly prepared for the role. The experienced tenor Niemann would have been pleased to sing the role of Siegfried as well as Siegmund, but Wagner did not want the two characters to look and sound identical; moreover, he wanted a younger man for Siegfried. He reluctantly settled upon Unger for the hero's role.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* Wagner was devastated by the first cycle; a number of scenic disasters in *Rheingold* caused him to hide in his office. Although the mishaps were forgotten by the audience, and they cheered him for a half-hour, he refused to emerge. After the first *Götterdämmerung*, he was beside himself, and barely noticed the wild applause. Persuaded to address the audience, Wagner ended his speech with, "Now you can see what we can do. Now it is for you to want it. If you want it, we shall have an art. Wagner subsequently apologized to the company. Later, he said to the choreographer

At the time, few could make sense of what Wagner actually said, and some of the performers were insulted at the suggestion that they had not produced art, after laboring for months without pay. Hueffer places the brightest possible construction on Wagner's rather confused, and confusing, public statement.

1877 and Beyond

Hueffer wrote *Half a Century of Music in England*, partly history, partly reminiscences, when he was in his early forties, a mature but hardly patriarchal age. The book was published posthumously in 1889, for Hueffer had died suddenly of a heart attack early in 1888. Despite his progressive beliefs, Hueffer admired the royal family, and he believed that Victoria and Albert had been unprecedented patrons of the arts in England. He attributed to their influence the flourishing of music performance, education, and publication, as well as a modest "school" of English composers, and a haven for "new" musical ideas.

Half a Century of Music included Hueffer's views of Wagner's 1855 London debacle, as well as his return to London for the Albert Hall Wagner Festival of 1877. Now Wagner and Cosima were eagerly received by the artistic elite of London. Cosima chatted in English with Edward Burne-Jones, George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, and Robert Browning, and she inspected London's galleries and museums. The Wagners also had an audience with Queen Victoria. Among London's artistic crowd (including

Richard Fricke (1818-1903), "Next year we will do it differently." Richard Fricke, *Bayreuth vor dreissig Jahren: Erinnerungen an Wahnfried und aus dem Festspielhause* (Dresden, 1906); translated as "Bayreuth, 1876," *Wagner* 12 (January 1991), 44.

Hueffer's Pre-Raphaelite friends and in-laws), the Wagner concerts were the events of the year. According to Hueffer,

... Wagner conducted part of the performances on each occasion, and during the rest of the concert sat in the front row of the orchestra, following the music with obvious interest, and himself the observed of all observers.¹⁰³
[Illus.8]

Hueffer candidly noted the decline in Wagner's conducting skills. Wagner was exceedingly tired, and very much out of practice.

As a conductor, he scarcely did himself justice on this occasion. To those who had seen him conduct the Ninth symphony five years earlier, the difference seemed great indeed, and by no means accounted for by the lapse in time, although that no doubt told considerably at Wagner's age. The truth is that Wagner's strength did not lie in keeping great masses together by a firm beat, or in helping an orchestra over the difficulties of making acquaintance with new and intricate music. But when those difficulties were overcome, when the players knew their parts so thoroughly that mere time-beating became unnecessary, then a slight motion of the hand, a keen glance of the eye, would make them do things which a humdrum conductor could never think of. In London this perfect sympathy between the leader and the led was never established; there was not sufficient time for it, to say nothing of Wagner's ignorance of the English language, which made interpretation a weary and arduous task. Wagner in consequence made the orchestra nervous, and the musicians greatly preferred Hans Richter to him, showing that preference with a demonstrativeness which was probably not very agreeable to the most modest of men and greatest of conductors.¹⁰⁴

The concerts were well received by both the audiences and the press. Hueffer

¹⁰³ Hueffer, *Half a Century of Music in England* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1889), 72.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.



Illus. 8.

Wagner at the Albert Hall. Caricature by Charles Lyall, *Musical World*, May 26, 1877.
The musical epigraph is the *Walhall* motive.

believes that the reaction was positive because “English audiences here heard Wagner’s music played for the first time as it should be played”¹⁰⁵ Here Hueffer must be referring to Richter’s leadership of the proceedings. In virtually every other way, however, the music was not presented as “it should be” according to Wagner’s own ideas, and as usually insisted upon by his followers, including Hueffer; that is, in their complete, staged forms.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Wagner’s supporters counted this as a triumph. In spite of all the criticisms of Wagner’s music, from which Hueffer had so energetically and carefully defended it, the music was well-received “apart from the powerful aid of stage surroundings.” Hueffer triumphantly quoted a review¹⁰⁷ that appeared in *The Examiner* “as the expression of contemporary feeling.”

Wagner, it is well-known, advocates the absolute blending of music with the dramatic action from which it takes its rise, and without which it loses much of its power and significance. In the abstract this is undoubtedly true, and the composer would have infinitely preferred to produce his works on the stage for which they are so eminently destined. Unfortunately this stage is wanting in London, for the present at least; and in order to bring before the English public an adequate rendering of his musical intentions, he had, not without reluctance, to accept the offer of a concert-room. But in this case also the ‘ill wind’ has not been without its proverbial good effects. It tends to destroy a prejudice, frequently insisted upon by Wagner’s enemies, that without the assistance of stage appliances, his music would be devoid of all intrinsic charm. The selection from the *Rheingold* on Monday triumphantly proved the absur-

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ See chapter 2 above for Davison’s reviews of these concerts, and his impression of the unstaged Act II of *Tristan und Isolde*.

¹⁰⁷ Hueffer does not name the writer.

dity of such a notion. Here was no darkened theatre, no invisible orchestra, no elaborate machinery—merely a few ladies and gentlemen in ordinary evening dress, and in ordinary concert-room surrounding; and yet the rushing and gushing of the mighty river, enlivened by the gambols of the water-maidens, was placed before the imagination with a distinctness perhaps the more vivid as the ear alone conveyed the charm to the mind. And this effect was produced, not alone on the few devotees who might supply the scenery from their reminiscences of Bayreuth, but on a vast miscellaneous audience, totally indifferent, it may be assumed, to Wagner theories . . . Our remarks are, of course, not intended to advocate the transference of Wagner's music from the stage to the concert-room, but we certainly are prepared to affirm that, without any external aid, this music ranks with the highest productions of the art, both as regards melodious beauty and perfect mastery of form. If the Wagner concerts were to serve no other purpose than to establish this fact beyond the power of captious criticism, their artistic result would be highly beneficial.¹⁰⁸

Yet, artistically successful and well-received as the concerts were, they did not do great business, and did not come close to achieving their purpose of paying off the debts incurred by the 1876 Bayreuth Festival.¹⁰⁹ Hueffer does his best to depict everyone in the most positive light, especially Wagner:

¹⁰⁸ *The Examiner*, May 12, 1877, quoted by Hueffer in *Half a Century of Music*, 74-75.

¹⁰⁹ Although the Bayreuth *Ring* was an artistic success, it was a financial disaster. Hodge & Essex, a London concert agency, invited Wagner to give a series of twenty concerts in the new Royal Albert Hall. The agents convinced Wagner that the venture would be profitable, and he hoped to pay his debts from Bayreuth. The agents did not calculate that a large number of the 10,000 seats in the Albert Hall were paid for annually by subscribers toward the maintenance of the building, and therefore not for general sale. The subscribers could attend the concert at no additional charge, but if they did not attend, the seats remained empty. The number of concerts was reduced to eight, on May 7 through 29. The performing forces were imposing: an orchestra of 170, and several singers who had appeared at Bayreuth, including Materna, Hill, and Unger. The concerts were "largely attended," wrote Hueffer, "though not largely enough to equal the vast sums spent in advertisements, salaries, of vocalists and orchestral players, etc."

A very large sum had been promised to Wagner for his personal services in the matter, but when he heard that things were not going well, he declared himself willing to forego all remuneration with that generosity which if on occasion he expected from his friends, he was not loth to exercise himself. This sacrifice Messrs. Hodge & Essex, who behaved throughout in a straightforward and admirable manner, refused to accept, and a sum of £700 was eventually remitted to Bayreuth. But this Wagner did not accept when he left London, and the last words he uttered standing at the carriage window as the train steamed out of Victoria Station were: "All is lost, except honour."¹¹⁰

Wagner was frequently criticized for his methods of raising money. His dependence on Liszt, his attachment to Ludwig II, and the invention of the *Patronatsvereine* were all attacked by his foes in the press. His supporters, consequently, were pressed to produce evidence that Wagner was not financially irresponsible or a parasite. At this point, however, Wagner's financial troubles were deep indeed; after the financial failure in London, he began to think about selling Wahnfried and emigrating to America.

Hueffer chronicles Wagner's departure from London:

The parting scene was an extremely impressive one. A small group of friends was assembled on the platform to bid the master God speed, all of whom he shook cordially by the hand, while those more intimate he kissed after the German fashion . . . and I remember well that the late Mr. Davison, whom I had encouraged to accompany me to the station, assuring him of the very best reception on Wagner's part, had tears in his eyes. The antagonism of former years was forgotten in this moment of general emotion and reconciliation.¹¹¹

It should be remembered that Wagner was Francis Hueffer's idol, and Davison his

¹¹⁰ *Half a Century of Music*, 76.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

journalistic mentor; Hueffer was a sentimental man, and Davison an emotional one. Late twentieth-century skepticism bristles at Hueffer's story, but such a reconciliation was no doubt what Hueffer intensely desired.

After Wagner's departure, the London Wagnerians, "determined to wipe off the stain on the English artistic character," raised £561 for Wagner, which Wagner returned to them. In a panic over their debts, Cosima desperately wrote to King Ludwig without Wagner's knowledge. After years of angry distance, the King finally responded,¹¹² with the result that Ludwig received the right to produce any of Wagner's works at Munich, and Wagner was to receive ten percent royalties from each Munich production.

Hueffer quotes the letter Wagner sent to Dannreuther, along with the sum:

Bayreuth, 22nd August, 1877.

Dear Friend,

When I found myself compelled to give up a considerable portion of the receipts originally promised to me for the concerts in London so as to ensure the artistic success of these concerts, a number of my friends conceived the idea of covering my loss by a subscription, towards which you took the initiative by appealing to those interested in my art in England. Some little time since, and after you had issued your appeal, other and nearer ways to help me out of the difficulties arising from the deficit at Bayreuth have been found. I would therefore ask the favour of the honoured subscribers, a list of whom you have lately communicated to me, to accept again the sums they have so kindly placed at my disposal; and I would beg of you to offer them all my warm and most sincere thanks for the sympathy they have so kindly showed me.

¹¹² The relationship with Ludwig began to deteriorate when the King realized around 1868 that Wagner and Cosima had deceived him about their adulterous relationship. The rift was deepened by a number of incidents, and particularly when the King had *Das Rheingold*, then *Die Walküre*, produced in Munich, in 1869 and 1870, respectively.

Most truly yours,

Richard Wagner¹¹³

This letter naturally provided Hueffer with an opportunity of refuting the common criticism of Wagner with evidence of the composer's responsibility

Hueffer ends with a consideration of the future of Wagner's music in England, "and what its permanent influence in England is likely to be." He notes that thus far, Wagner's music has been more successful in England on the concert stage than in the theater. He also points to the continuing success of the Richter concerts, which were begun after the Albert Hall Wagner Festival of 1877; he recalls the Wagner seasons at Drury Lane (which were started in 1882) and Neumann's *Ring* cycle, each of which, however, was a financial failure. Hueffer concludes, with a rather Shavian *bon mot*: "English people like serious music, and like the stage, but they do not care for serious music on the stage."

Half-a-dozen or more theatres in London at which operettas of various kinds flourish, and which of course are carefully shunned by the musical public proper, and not a single theatre at which serious Opera, in English has been performed for the last two years. . . How are the *Walküre* or *Tristan* or even the *Meistersinger*, to flourish in a city where *Dorothy*¹¹⁴ runs for a thousand consecutive nights?¹¹⁵

Hueffer points out that there are enough English "lovers of Wagner's music" to

¹¹³ Quoted in *Half a Century of Music*, 77-78.

¹¹⁴ *Dorothy* (1886) by Alfred Cellier (1844-91) was a hugely popular operetta in a Sullivan-esque style.

¹¹⁵ *Half a Century of Music*, 80.

support the Richter concerts, but not enough to make a season of Wagner's operas "a paying thing," and he turns to the question of Wagner's musical influence in England.

A wider range of view here becomes necessary. It has often been said, and I have frequently said it, that Wagner has, for the present, ruined dramatic music in the same sense that Beethoven for a long period ruined symphonic music. Such colossi throw a shadow on the onward path of the art from which later-born and lesser-born men find it difficult to emerge. To ignore Wagner is, for a modern composer, tantamount to assigning his work to the dusty repositories of the past; to imitate him successfully is almost a matter of impossibility.¹¹⁶

Hueffer names some failed attempts at imitating Wagner, and some dead-ends into which the "Wagnerian consciousness" had led some composers. Bizet died young and left France barren.¹¹⁷ As for Italy, "If Verdi were a younger man," Hueffer writes with some temerity, "and Boito a more industrious man, they might no doubt have worked out the problem in their own national fashion." It did not seem to Hueffer that Verdi would either write another opera after *Otello*, or that he could "[work] out the problem in [his] own national fashion." ". . . In the meantime," Hueffer laments, "competent mediocrity rules the day."¹¹⁸

For the present time, writes Hueffer, it seems just as well that English composers are "diverted from the dramatic channel." Hueffer was writing fairly early in the game; a generation of musicians was still maturing. He would not survive to hear Wagner's

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

¹¹⁷ For Nietzsche, *Carmen* represented the very antithesis of Wagnerian expression and aesthetics (which by then he was vehemently denouncing).

¹¹⁸ *Half a Century of Music*, 82.

influence in Elgar's symphonies, concert overtures, symphonic poem, and oratorios, or see the great impact Wagner would have yet to make in France.

What the English musician might learn from Wagner, Hueffer writes, is artistic integrity:

There is yet another respect in which the great master's spirit may be of infinite benefit to English music. The principle of *l'art pour l'art* has never found a more perfect earthly embodiment than it did in Wagner. He abhorred compromise as much as Nature is said to abhor a vacuum. His whole life was a continuous struggle for the high things in art as opposed to the lucrative pursuits of modern vulgarity and commercialism. He had an artist's love for the luxurious amenities of life; but rather than write such things as set the modern fleshpots boiling, he would have starved . . . the royalty ballads, which even composers of note and of talent do not disdain to pour forth, the oratorios and cantatas that have been written, with an obvious view to a rule over the country, as the phrase runs, are the specifically British emanations of modern commercialism. All these things are an abomination to the musician imbued with Wagner's spirit; and rather than condescend to them, he would break stones in the highways, or give lessons at young ladies' schools. There can be, no doubt, such high-minded men among us; but can it be conscientiously said that the majority of English, or for that matter, of Italian or German musicians are in this sense truly Wagnerian?¹¹⁹

This passage reflects Hueffer's idealism. He firmly believed that art should be severed from commercial interests. Hueffer's concerns about Wagner's continuing influence also indicated his dawning realization about the value of Wagner's art. Earlier, in the essay "Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future," he fervently promoted Wagner's theories as the solution to a crucial artistic problem of the nineteenth century.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

After Bayreuth, however, it became clear to Hueffer that although Wagner's solution was the solution for himself and his gifts, it did not necessarily work for anyone else. While Hueffer was among the first in England to perceive Wagner's revolutionary importance, he also later perceived not merely the difficulties of mounting the works, but the real artistic problems and questions that Wagner left behind.

Postscript: Hueffer and Jews

Before leaving Hueffer, we should mention his constructions of Wagner's anti-Semitism. Hueffer almost blunders into the question of Wagner's attitudes towards Jews; in *Half a Century of Music*, after describing the difficulties Wagner faced in his Philharmonic engagement of 1855, Hueffer writes:

What was worse, [Wagner] had written a very ill-judged pamphlet against the Jews, in which Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer were severely criticised, although by no means vulgarly abused.¹²⁰

Hueffer's apology for Wagner is distinctly weak. If it is a matter of opinion whether Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer were "vulgarly abused" in *Das Judentum in der Musik*, other opinions have been quite different from Hueffer's.

In a perplexing passage, Hueffer records the 1877 meeting of two of the most formidable women in Europe:

... I remember more especially an interesting evening at Mr. Dannreuther's house, when he was the life and soul of a large gathering, including, amongst others, George Eliot

¹²⁰ *Half a Century of Music*, 51.

and Mr. G. H. Lewes. Madame Wagner, who speaks English perfectly, served as interpreter, and her conversation with the great English novelist – who took a deep interest in music, although her appreciation of Wagner was of a very platonic kind – was both friendly and animated. “Your husband,” remarked George Eliot, with that straightforwardness which was so conspicuous and so lovable in her character, “does not like Jews; my husband is a Jew.” Needless to add that Wagner’s aversion to Jews was of a purely theoretic kind, and did not extend to individuals – witness his warm friendship for Tausig, one of his staunchest adherents.”¹²¹

Though Hueffer describes the conversation between Cosima and George Eliot as “animated and friendly,” the novelist was very direct about Wagner’s anti-Semitism, which was shared, if not exceeded, by Cosima. Eliot’s confrontational statement does not seem like “friendly” conversation, though unfortunately, Hueffer does not report Cosima’s reaction.¹²² Hueffer seems admiring of Eliot’s direct challenge; yet he hastens to explain, or re-frame, Wagner’s hatred of Jews. He uses the all-too-common device of naming a Jew whom Wagner had accepted into his inner circle. He writes that Wagner’s anti-Semitism was “of a purely theoretic kind.” Why Hueffer thinks that a “purely theoretic” basis for anti-Semitism should have been mitigating is also perplexing.

Indeed, when [Wagner] held forth against Jews he did not use that term for the Hebrew race so much as for the men – Christians, Jews, or Philistines – who had introduced the worship of the golden calf, or “smartness,” and knowing-

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

¹²² Cosima reported in her diary that George Eliot made “a noble and pleasant impression.” Cosima Wagner, *Diaries* 1, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, transl. Geoffrey Skelton (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 962.

ness and reckless striving for effect, into art.¹²³

Thus, Hueffer appears to think that generalizing the term “Jew” to symbolize the corruption of art should make sense to the reader. He seems to believe that depersonalizing Wagner’s attacks makes them less, not more, offensive, and he assumes that the reader understands.

Hueffer’s purpose is to promote Wagner, and also to defend him from criticism; yet he is not ordinarily a blind flatterer or propagandist. His advocacy is based on Wagner’s appeal to his intellect, as well as to his rather sentimental nature. Hueffer’s tone is usually enthusiastic, but he does not withhold his own criticism when he is not satisfied or in agreement. Generally, his reputation for honesty and integrity seems to be well earned. He supported opinions that were unpopular when they seemed right to him, but he addressed Wagner’s anti-Semitism with weak explanations and lame defenses. I believe that whatever Hueffer’s personal attitudes towards Jews, he was probably writing in an atmosphere in which overt expressions of anti-Semitism (such as Wagner’s) were frowned upon, probably more for vulgarity than for being heinous in their own right. Among intellectual circles, straightforward challenges, such as George Eliot’s, to racism or anti-Semitism, were probably considered commendable but not compulsory.

In nineteenth-century England, and other European countries, nationalism treaded very close to the boundary of racial and ethnic antagonism. Classifying people according to national, racial, or ethnic characteristics was common currency, and did not always

¹²³ *Half a Century of Music*, 84.

have malignant intent. Elsewhere in Hueffer's own writings, for instance, he refers to the "shouts and tumults of enthusiastic applause, with which the impulsive Italian audience greeted the appearance of Lohengrin at the first performance of the opera at Bologna,"¹²⁴ and of Schubert, he wrote:

His impulsive genius would have withered in the cold, thought-stricken atmosphere of the north; and we may call it his first and greatest piece of luck, to have been born in the very centre of warm-blooded South German life . . .¹²⁵

Such characterizations are easily found in nineteenth-century writings; significantly, however, Bennett and Davison did not indulge. Hueffer's colleagues would certainly characterize Italian, French, or German music, and Davison had some fun at Wagner's expense; but rarely, if ever, can I find them tagging people with national or ethnic stereotypes. In this regard, Hueffer clearly stands out.

Hueffer's most passing remark is, in a way, the most regrettable. It appears in his discussion of the future of Wagner's music in England:

When Mr. Franke -- an impresario who, unlike the majority of his race, was a musical enthusiast, and ended in the Bankruptcy Court accordingly -- started the Richter Concerts, musical and fashionable London flocked to them . . .

Hueffer states baldly that musical "enthusiasm" is unusual for Franke's "race"; he implies that a "typical" Jew would hardly land in Bankruptcy Court for placing artistic principles above his financial interests. He is quite casual, as if the Philistinism of Jews

¹²⁴ "Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future," 115.

¹²⁵ "Franz Schubert," in *Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future*, 126.

was self-evident to his readers. That Franke's devotion was considered an anomaly for "his race" would probably not have come as a surprise to Franke – as well as to hundreds of Jewish musicians at large throughout Europe – but he probably would have regarded this judgment as ironic, at the very least.

In sum, Hueffer was a critic of many outstanding qualities: intellect, versatility, fine perceptions, and the ability to express things clearly. His promotion of Wagner in England, aside from its timeliness, was enhanced by his fluency with Wagner's literary sources and a firm grasp of Wagner's artistic purposes. He had qualities of gentleness and sincerity that helped blunt Wagner's rough edges for an English public. His rarest trait as a critic was probably his ability to combine tact and honesty. These attributes earned him the friendship and respect of his colleagues, whether or not they agreed with his Wagnerian advocacy. One regrets only that such a person did not overcome the casual prejudices of his background and milieu.

CHAPTER FIVE
WILLIAM ASHTON ELLIS AND *THE MEISTER*

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In the 1880s and '90s, the art and theories of Wagner were staple topics of conversation among educated people. Having seen performances of Wagner successfully established in England, the original London Wagner Society, founded by Edward Dannreuther (1844-1905) in 1873, had fulfilled its purpose. A new Wagner Society, the London Branch of the Universal Wagner Society, was founded in 1888, and began to publish a quarterly journal called *The Meister*. Although originally based on the example of the *Revue wagnérienne* (fl. 1885-88),¹ it resembled a (very much) milder version of the *Bayreuther Blätter* (fl. 1878-1938). The mission of *The Meister* was to convey Wagner's philosophical and social importance, beyond his musical achievements, to the English public. The journal was edited, and sometimes almost completely written, by William Ashton Ellis.

Ellis was an "enigma,"² and so self-effacing that scholars cannot agree on his date of birth. He is best known as the translator of Wagner's prose writings and letters

¹ The *Revue wagnérienne* was founded by Eduard Dujardin (1861-1949), inspired by "four evenings of ecstasy" at a London performance of the *Ring*. The illustrious contributors to the *Revue* included Verlaine, Baudelaire, Huysmans, Mallarmé, and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, a veritable Who's Who of the *fin de siècle*.

² David Cormack, "Faithful, All Too Faithful: A Study of William Ashton Ellis," *Wagner* 14 (September 1993), 108.

into English, and as the author of an incomplete *Life of Wagner*. His translations, although difficult and idiosyncratic, “remain(s) the standard English version of Wagner’s writing in prose.”³ Ellis was “Wagner’s most obsessive English acolyte.”⁴ His uncritical devotion distinguished him from a later generation of commentators, and often caused him to be the target of criticism, even ridicule, by Shaw and Newman.

According to Anne Dzamba Sessa, Ellis was born in 1853; Cormack gives the date as “in fact” August 20, 1852, in Chelsea. His father was a famous surgeon, Robert Ellis. A younger brother, Evelyn Campbell Ellis (1865-1920), knighted in 1914, was an international lawyer. After leaving school in 1870, Ellis began medical training at St. George’s Hospital in 1871. He was admitted to the Royal College of Surgeons in early 1876, and in 1878 he became a physician. Ellis took a post as Resident Medical Officer of the Western Dispensary, which provided home medical care to indigent patients. This dispensary was attached to the United Westminster Almshouses and was supported by charity.

Ellis dates the awakening of his interest in Wagner as around 1875. He did not then join Dannreuther’s Wagner society, nor did he attend Bayreuth in 1876, or the 1877 London Wagner concerts. In July and August 1882 Ellis took five weeks’ leave of absence from the dispensary. This leave coincided with the first performances of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth. He may have been there, but he is not among the Londoners

³ Stewart Spencer, “Collected Writings,” *The Wagner Compendium: A Guide to Wagner’s Life and Music*, 196.

⁴ Anne Dzamba Sessa, *Richard Wagner and the English* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1978), 252.

mentioned by Ernest Newman in his account.⁵ Ellis and Newman often disagreed bitterly after the turn of the century, and so telling whether Newman simply omitted Ellis's presence is impossible.

Ellis, with a Mrs. Wilson, held a benefit concert for the dispensary on March 28, 1883 (Cormack suggests that it was to mark Wagner's death⁶). In April, Ellis took three weeks leave to pay his personal homage in Venice. Ellis became a member of the newly reconstituted London Wagner Society in 1885. His father died in July 1885, and he inherited the mortgage of some property in West Sussex. In 1887, he read his paper "Richard Wagner as Poet, Musician and Mystic"⁷ before the Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts, and before the London Branch of the Wagner Society. He also resigned from the Western Dispensary. Ellis left his post there to treat the serious illness of no less a personage than H. P. Blavatsky (1831-91), the founder of the Theosophical Society.⁸

Ellis was, for several years, a dedicated member of the London Lodge of the

⁵ Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, 4 vols. (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1933-47) 4, 665n.

⁶ Cormack, "Faithful, All Too Faithful," 110.

⁷ Cormack's original article named this as Ellis's first recorded contribution to Wagner studies, but in a later postscript, he reported that another essay, originally "*La théosophie dans les ouvrages de Richard Wagner*," was actually first published in English, as the August 1886 issue of the *Transactions of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society*. Cormack, "William Aston Ellis: Completing the Picture," *Wagner* 15 (May 1994), 63.

⁸ Cormack, "Faithful, All Too Faithful," 112. A recent biography of Blavatsky: S. L. Cranston, *HPB: The Extraordinary Life of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1993).

Theosophical Society, until ideological divisions and power struggles in the Society disillusioned him.⁹ Wagner had become Ellis's religion, and Theosophy was a means to deeper understanding of Wagner. Ellis was receiving his "mission" of communicating Wagner's "astral light" to the English.

The Meister began publication in 1888, with the symbolic date of February 13; Ellis always dated the first two numbers of each year February 13 and May 22, the anniversaries of Wagner's death and birth. The frontispiece illustration was crudely executed and rather unattractive [Illus. 9]. Arranged around the blazon bearing the title, which is rising from a body of water -- the Rhine? -- are a somnolent Rhinemaiden, masks of comedy and tragedy, a spear, and a shield. The shield, divided into four sections, bears devices of sword, grail, swan, and a uroboric serpent, presumably the Ring. Percy Anderson, a "well-known artist and steadfast admirer of Richard Wagner," did the illustration. Shaw suggested the work of Selwyn Image or Walter Crane,¹⁰ but Ellis kept the original illustration. The journal's purpose, as stated in Ellis's editorial,

⁹ Theosophy is any of various forms of philosophical or religious thought claiming mystical insights into the divine nature. The Theosophical Society, founded by H. P. Blavatsky in 1875, advocated a worldwide religion largely based upon Buddhistic and Brahmanic beliefs of reincarnation and a non-personal divine power which ordered the universe, but also partook of metaphysical symbolism from many Eastern and Western cultures.

¹⁰ George Bernard Shaw, 12 December, 1888, in *London Music in 1888-89 as heard by Corno di Bassetto later known as Bernard Shaw*. London: Dodd, Mead, 1937; reprint, London: Vienna House, 1973, 49-50. "... A slapdash drawing from which the Century Guild would recoil ... *The Meister* wants three things; a title-page by Mr [sic] Selwyn Image or Mr Walter Crane; a printer who appreciates the *Hobby Horse* ... and a fighting editor." Shaw's third requirement would be fulfilled, but not in the way he expected; Ellis fought virtually everyone *except* the Bayreuth establishment, whom Shaw felt needed to be put in their place.



Illus. 9.
 Frontispiece of *The Meister*.

establish Wagner as a philosopher of revolutionary importance.

In starting such a journal as this we may be fairly asked what are its aims. Our answer may be summed up in but few words. We endeavour to show to the English-speaking world the many aspects of the departed Master. This we hope to fulfill by reviews of his dramatic work regarded from both the poetical and musical standpoints, by culling from his prose works some of the many pregnant thoughts therein expressed, and by presenting to our readers such portions of the ten volumes of those works, as may be most susceptible to translation into our own tongue. Even were we to confine ourselves to the latter of these objects, we should find matter enough to fill this journal for years to come, and it is from this point of view that we may hope more markedly to open up what to most of our readers will be untrodden ground, in the wide realms of this man's great genius; for rarely have the creative and the critical facilities gone so completely hand in hand as in the case of Richard Wagner. Had he never composed one bar of music, and never conceived one scene of drama, his prose works alone would have ranked him among the foremost thinkers of the day.¹¹

We do not attempt to say whether he was higher as musician, as poet, or as philosopher, but beg a fair hearing for him in each capacity, and therefore though we purpose to collect in this journal all current information as to dates of representation of his musical works . . . We think that it will be of most service to translate and publish certain portions of his prose works.¹²

True to Ellis's word, virtually no musical analysis appeared in *The Meister*. The articles on the operas were exegeses of their libretti (or "poems," as Ellis, the obedient Wagnerian called them) and philosophical themes. *The Meister* also contained a regular section called "Notes," which reported future performances, as well as news of Bayreuth

¹¹ William Ashton Ellis, "Fanget an!" *The Meister* 1 (1888), 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

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¹¹ William Ashton Ellis, "Fanget an!" *The Meister* 1 (1888), 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

and the London Branch, and reviews of recent performances. Ellis himself wrote most of these reviews. As years passed, ever more of *The Meister* became the singlehanded work of Ellis himself, until it would have been fair to say, “Vox Ellis, vox *Meister*.” Not until 1892, however, would he sign his own articles.

In the first number for 1891, Ellis announced a series of translations of Wagner’s lengthier “prose-works” (the hyphenated “prose-works” being a classic example of Ellis’s Teutonic English).

The London Branch of the Society has long felt that its duty to the Cause was only half fulfilled until such an undertaking as this was set about; and indeed the primary object of *The Meister* was a first attempt in bringing this to pass.¹³

The translations themselves were to be sent free to members, to be bound when they reached book-size.¹⁴

1892 brought a crisis for Ellis, although for someone less committed, it would have been little more than a tempest in a teapot. The late Ferdinand Praeger’s book, *Wagner as I Knew Him*, was published posthumously. Losing the opportunity of publishing the first English-language Wagner biography may have irritated Ellis. Praeger’s book also appeared in print before Ellis’s first bound volume of the prose works.¹⁵ Ellis was most upset, however, by certain self-serving inaccuracies in Praeger’s

¹³ Ellis, *The Meister* 4 (1891), 5.

¹⁴ Professor Bailey reminds me that Ellis re-translated Wagner’s prose for the versions published in 1899 (see Appendix, p. 289). The second translations may have suffered from Ellis’s second thoughts; the *Meister* translations are easier reading.

¹⁵ Cormack, “Faithful, All Too Faithful,” 125

book.¹⁵ He entered upon a vendetta against the dead man that outlasted *The Meister* and the remainder of the century. I will discuss Ellis's obsessive battle against Praeger's book later in this chapter.

The last issues of *The Meister* appeared in 1895. These were almost completely devoted to Ellis's translations, and virtually everything else in them was signed "WAE." Ellis had given space to the sycophantic writings of Carl Friedrich Glasenapp (1847-1915), and commended the work of Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927),¹⁶ with whom he later broke. Ellis saw himself assuming the role of "Wahnfried's intellectual ambassador in England."¹⁷ He continued on his own, churning out his volumes of translations.

In 1900, having translated the prose works, and some letters, Ellis turned his attention to translating Glasenapp's biography of Wagner. The biography became Ellis's *magnum opus*, but he increasingly strayed from the sense of Glasenapp's biography, until he became completely untracked, and the work remained unfinished. The first three volumes of Ellis's biography translated the first two volumes of Glasenapp's six-volume work. From Volume Four, Ellis began to omit Glasenapp's name from the title page, aware that the biography was no longer Glasenapp's work. Ellis's Volume Five was the crucial volume, for it was there that Ellis's long feud with Praeger's account re-

¹⁵ One such inaccuracy was that he claimed to have brought Wagner to England himself in 1855. See chapter 2.

¹⁶ A recent biography: Geoffrey Field, *The Evangelist of Race: The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

¹⁷ Cormack, "Faithful, All Too Faithful," 126.

erupted, and from that point on, he never regained his footing; Volume Six, after a delay, was the final volume of this unfinished project.

Ellis was heartbroken and appalled by the outbreak of World War I. He publicly broke with Chamberlain, whose *Kriegsaufsätze* (War Essays, 1914) were published in England as *The Ravings of a Renegade*. (Chamberlain did not give up his English citizenship until 1916). The pain that this must have caused Ellis is unimaginable.

In 1915 Ellis returned to his old post as Resident Medical Officer of the Western Dispensary. He had many disputes with the dispensary bureaucracy. In 1918 the British Red Cross Society awarded him an Honorary Life Membership, and he became a subscriber toward the free care of the poor. He died at the dispensary on January 2, 1919, of a heart attack.

William Ashton Ellis was one of many late nineteenth-century individuals who sought an alternative system of beliefs to traditional Christianity. Much like a Biblical fundamentalist, Ellis found everything in his study of the texts of Wagner's operas. His writings on the operas are overladen with mysticism. His embrace of Theosophy suggests his vulnerability to what he believed, or hoped, to be experiences of the transcendental. His espousal of a metaphysical, passive, and uncritical reception of the music (as opposed to a rational, analytical approach) is much like the recommendations of Bayreuth attachés such as Chamberlain. The direct, personal experience of the work of art is of infinitely greater spiritual value than critical appraisal or analysis, and renders the auditor capable of receiving the work's mysteries.

Ellis wrote:

. . . But if we cannot enter upon the Indian mysteries of nature, and like Wagner, surprise her at her work forcing from her archetypes and bringing them from what the Eastern call the *Akasha*, and the Western occultists [*sic*] ‘the astral light’ – that sphere in which the moulds of things past, present and to come, lie as an open secret, unlocked to inspiration – down to the plane of matter: if we cannot do this, we can at least judge from the effect whether he is right or wrong

. . . My advice to those about to witness a Wagner performance would therefore be: leave your motiv-books behind you and give yourself up, hearts and soul to the music, action, poetry and scene set behind you. If you lose your identity for the time, what matter? It will come back to you, sure enough, with the matter-of-fact din and hubbub of the streets, when you return to them.¹⁸

In the same essay, in the section concerning music, he writes:

I am not schooled in rules of harmony, and have cared not to indulge in the sad diversion of picking a passage of music to pieces to see what it is made of. Such scientific dissection I must leave to the professional musicians, though not without recognising that it is an all-important duty for them to exercise themselves in the anatomy of their art.¹⁹

This interpretation shows not only Ellis’s omnivorous spiritualistic readings but also his idealistic naiveté. He was following the anti-scientific, anti-intellectual stance promoted by Wagner’s Bayreuth circle. Ellis was, in a way, “simple minded,” as W. B.

¹⁸ Ellis, “Richard Wagner as Poet, Musician and Mystic.” Paper given before the Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts, and the London Branch of the Universal Wagner Society (1887), 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

Yeats cruelly characterized him.²⁰ He trusted that whatever came from Wahnfried was “the truth” about Wagner, and it was this truth that he wished to disseminate and defend in England. His reasoning appears to have been that these were the people who were closest to Wagner in his lifetime, so they must know best. Wahnfried favored Ellis with pats on the head,²¹ as they grandly ignored the skeptical Shaw, who clearly saw the propaganda machine that was taking hold there:

Now you, my friends, wonder how I can scoff thus at so impressive a celebration. I reply that Wagner is dead, and that the evil of deliberately making the Bayreuth Festival Playhouse a temple of dead traditions, instead of an arena for live impulses, has begun already. It is because I too, am an enthusiastic Wagnerite that the Bayreuth management cannot deceive me by dressing itself in the skin of the dead lion.²²

This naiveté was the force that impelled Ellis to battle Praeger’s book fiercely in print, that eventually drove Ellis away from the Theosophical Society, and later devastated him at the outbreak of the First World War.

²⁰ “. . . the very simple minded musician He is the editor of the new Wagnerian journal the ‘Meister’.” Letter to Kathleen Tynan of June 15, 1888. *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, John Kelly and Eric Domville, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 72.

²¹ Ellis, “Notes,” *The Meister* 2 (1889), 146. At the Festival in 1889, Ellis met Cosima Wagner, who “expressed her complete satisfaction with our London efforts to spread the knowledge of her late husband’s many-sided genius.”

²² Shaw, 1 August, 1889, *London Music in 1888-89*, 184.

Ellis and the Theosophical Society

In his "Life of Wagner," Ellis expressed his contempt for traditional Christian dogma, quoting from *The Peep of Day: A Series of the Earliest Religious Instruction the Infant Mind is Capable of Receiving*, punctuated with Ellis's characteristic square-bracketed remarks:

The little book was first published in 1836, and I have a vivid recollection of it as one of the earliest Instructors of my own childhood, an odd score of years later . . . let me give one further illustration of its standpoint as regards the lower animals: 'God makes the corn. Of what does he make it?-- Of nothing [!]. God makes things of nothing . . . if he did not grow corn in the field, we should die. But he will not forget us. He even [subtle poison in that "even"] remembers the little birds. They are too silly [!] to plough or sow corn, or to reap, or to put corn into barns [or overeat themselves]; yet God does not let them starve [never?]. He hears their cry, and gives them food. Now God loves us much better than he loves the little birds, because we have souls, so he will certainly hear us when we pray to him.' We are not informed why no 'souls' were given to the birds-- had the supply of 'nothing' run short?-- but to tranquillise the Infant Mind, the booklet ends up with a picture of the seamy side of the world to come and a grim warning that 'Many people in Hell will say, "How I wish I had listened to the words of my teachers!"' It does not add that some of those teachers may there have an opportunity of revising their doctrine as to the 'throwing away' of dead puppies like orange-peel.²³

The point that so offends Ellis here is a traditional Christian view of animals as lower, soulless creatures, which was, of course, against Wagner's own convictions.

²³ Ellis, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, 6 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900-06; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1977) 6, 6-8 [vols. 1-3 are translated from Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, *Das Leben Richard Wagners*].

Disillusionment with the Theosophical Society eventually matched Ellis's distaste for traditional religion. Cormack cites a memo from 1887 at the Western Dispensary, noting Ellis's resignation; he finds the reason in a letter from H. P. Blavatsky (1831-91) to her sister:

What am I to Ellis who never saw me before, that he should think nothing of the risk, when leaving the hospital without permission, for a whole week for my sake; now he has lost his place, his handsome pay, and his rooms at the Westminster [*sic*] dispensary. He went home and returned here laughing; he does not care a bit, he says! "He will have more time to spend on theosophy."²⁴

Blavatsky's companion, Countess Constance Wachmeister, further illuminates the situation:

Towards the end of the winter [ca. March 1887], H.P.B. became very ill . . . I telegraphed to Madame Gebhard . . . and also to Mr. Ashton Ellis, a member of the T.S. and a clever doctor, both responded to my call and helped me through those trying days, and in the end Mr. Ellis' wise treatment pulled her through the dangerous crisis.²⁵

H. P. B. was ill with Bright's disease (a kidney ailment), and this was her second supposedly terminal illness. Her followers regarded her recovery as miraculous.²⁶

²⁴ Cited in William Kingsland, *The Real H. P. Blavatsky: A Study in Theosophy and a Memoir of a Great Soul* (London: J. M. Watkins, 1928), 20. Letter is erroneously dated as 1886.

²⁵ Constance Wachtmeister, "At Würzburg and Ostende," *H. P. B.: In Memory of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky by Some of her Pupils* (London, 1891), 20, cited in Cormack, "Faithful, All Too Faithful," 113.

²⁶ Cormack, "Faithful, All Too Faithful," 113. He notes that in Anne Dzamba Sessa's studies, there are two errors: in *Richard Wagner and the English*, the date of this illness is given as 1886; and in "At Wagner's Shrine," in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, eds. David C. Large and William Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,

Blavatsky eventually died in 1891, with another doctor at her deathbed. Annie Besant (1847-1933) succeeded her. Besant's career had encompassed free thought, atheism, and socialism before she settled on Theosophy. Many of Blavatsky's followers mistrusted her, and a schism quickly followed, with a "Blavatsky Lodge" set up against the "London Lodge" that had existed since 1878. By the middle of the decade, each side was accusing the other of charlatanism, even of dabbling in black magic.

Richard Wagner, who had considerable knowledge of magic,²⁷ gives an exact and terrible illustration of this process in his symbolical music-drama, *Parsifal* . . . at the beginning of Act II Klingsor is seen calling up Kundry's red-violet Astral Body while her physical body lies in a hypnotic sleep under a bush in the Grail's domain. . . . The whole may be taken as a drama of the Theosophical Society, which now may be said to be under the domain of Klingsor, and still awaiting the coming of its Parsifal who can shatter the vast fabric of psychic illusion.²⁸

In his *Parsifal* article of 1888, Ellis describes Klingsor in language obviously derived from the cafeteria-style spiritualism of Theosophy. The florid syntax is also Ellis's own.

The red turban which [Klingsor] wears . . . is the distinctive mark in the East of the sorcerers who use their knowledge of the secret forces of nature for the furtherance of black magic, in pursuance of inordinate selfish ambition, and

1984), she writes that Ellis attended H. P. B. at her "final illness."

²⁷ The notorious self-styled "mage," Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), included Wagner in his pantheon of "demigods." Debussy, in a less literal sense, referred to Wagner as "old Klingsor." Claude-Achille Debussy and Ernest Chausson, "Correspondances inédites de Claude Debussy et Ernest Chausson," *Revue de Musicologie* 7 (December 1, 1925), 116.

²⁸ Addendum by Basil Crump in Alice Leigh Cleather, *H. P. Blavatsky as I Knew Her* (London: Methuen, 1923), 21.

who are called from the wearing of this colour the Dugpas (red caps).²⁹

In the disarray following Blavatsky's death, Ellis withdrew from the Theosophical Society, and occupied himself entirely with the task of translating Wagner's prose.

Ellis and Bayreuth

Ellis followed his own form of Wagnerism, composed partly of a Theosophically-derived mysticism, partly of the Wahnfried-dictated party line. Both systems required an anti-modernist, anti-materialist, anti-rationalist stance of the believer. The Wahnfried circle dictated (through the *Bayreuther Blätter*) an anti-rational emulation of the Master's anti-scientific caveats. In Wagner's writings, the anti-scientific stance was, for the most part, a benign one; he expressed concern about technological advances that led to more efficient and deadly weapons of war, and more efficient means of oppressing workers. *Religion und Kunst* posits that vegetarianism, anti-vivisectionism, alcohol temperance, pacifism, and true socialism were key factors in the "regeneration" of humankind. The common factor that brought these together was the idealized compassion that Wagner took from Schopenhauer. He saw this as the truest nature of mankind. In *Parsifal*, Wagner extolled this quality of *Mitleid*, which was to extend beyond humans to animals.³⁰

²⁹ Ellis, "Parsifal," *The Meister* 1 (1888), 84-85.

³⁰ This quickly appears in Act I, with Kundry's line, "Sind die Tieren hier nicht heilig?" and the killing of the swan.

For Wagner and his inner circle, however, the issues of “degeneration” and “regeneration” implied more than vegetarianism and temperance. First, they applied directly to the German people, not to the “human race.” Second, the major cause of “degeneration” was a corruption of German blood through foreign or “Oriental” (i.e., Jewish) influences, and miscegenation with inferior races.³¹ Carl Glasenapp explicates the connection between anti-Semitism and the Wagnerian antipathy toward scientific rationalism in an article appearing in the first number of *The Meister*. He writes of an inimical “Scientific-Historical School” which is implicitly associated with Jews. The discounting of racial theories by rational thinkers made them dangerously lax to the signs and symptoms of racial “degeneration.”

. . . Conversely, [the “Scientific-Historical School”] sees in the Jew of to-day, not the booty-loving Son of the Desert, who has preserved his character unchanged through thousands of years, but the wooden citizen of the Mosaic confession. The racial idea is for it an abstraction, no living and realisable perception. Perchance these instances may suffice to show how over all, and in every domain of science, is working the same noxious influence of a method of inquiry which we are so loud in proclaiming as a grand result of the critical spirit of our century . . .³²

Gauging Ellis’s personal anti-Semitism is difficult, since he himself made no direct anti-Semitic statements that have survived. The overtly anti-Semitic Glasenapp essay, in the very first number of *The Meister*, is not promising, and neither is Ellis’s

³¹ The Bayreuth racism, like the other “scientific” or systematized racial theories, was a confused mixed bag of linguistic, racial, and anthropological classifications, tied to an invincible ignorance of human biology and genetics.

³² Carl Glasenapp, “Wagner and the *Bayreuther Blätter*,” *The Meister* 1 (1888), 18.

critical praise of Chamberlain's Wagner biography, which blamed Wagner's bad publicity on conspiring Jews.

In the paper read before the Royal Musical Association, in 1887, Ellis names *Das Judentum in der Musik* as a "fugitive" essay, but he does not consider it as damaging as the anti-French satire *Eine Kapitulation*, the only one of Wagner's writings that he admits wanting to see suppressed.

In *The Meister* of 1895, Ellis published his own short series on the *Ring*. By examining Wagner's letters to Röckel and his emendations to the *Ring* text, Ellis compares Wagner's attitudes toward the work before and after his readings of Schopenhauer. He quotes, without comment, from Wagner's letter to Röckel from Spring 1855:

For long, I had found it difficult to maintain an optimistic footing, in the face of overwhelming facts, and friend Schopenhauer has merely helped me by his enormous force to slough the last remains of Jewish superstition, the last willful self-delusion . . .

. . . Moreover, the latest scientific researches have established beyond dispute, that the original idea of Christianity had its home in India; the enormous difficulty, nay, impossibility, of grafting this pure, this altogether world-rejecting thought, with its turning from the Will-to-live, upon the barren stem of Judaism has been the unique cause of all the contradictions that have so mournfully distorted Christianity to this very day and made it wellnigh unrecognisable. The true core of Judaism, however, is that soulless, heartless Optimism, which finds everything just as it should be, provided purse and stomach be well-filled -- for which, indeed, there's plenty of opportunity, if only one goes prudently to work and knows how to turn the world as

it is, you know, to one's personal advantage.³³

As with Schopenhauer, the universal compassion which included animals did not extend to Jews.³⁴ It is troubling to see such passages published without comment in *The Meister*. As will be shown, Ellis could and would print positions with which he disagreed, but he usually filled them with the buckshot of his editorial commentary.

Ellis also provided an English venue for the Wahnfried circle's reactionism. The reverent and stubborn preservation of Wagner's ideals had hardened into a living museum conceived to resist changing times (and even reality). Wagner's survivors honored the minutest letter of Wagner's dicta, but betrayed the progressive spirit in which his dramas were conceived. For example, in order to make sacred Wagner's body of work, they entirely ignored the single quality of Wagner's music dramas that had the most immediate impact upon the rest of the world: their sensuality. In his writings about the operas, Ellis also entirely skirted this issue.

In his important article "On Reading Cosima Wagner's Diaries," Eric Salzman

³³ Wagner to August Röckel, 1855. Quoted by Ellis in "Wagner's Ring Drama," *The Meister* 8 (1895), 106, 108-09.

³⁴ Paul Laurence Rose, *Wagner, Race and Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). In this book, Rose claims to dispel the contradiction of German racism and the doctrine of "*Mitleid*" by a close examination of Wagner's philosophical underpinnings. Rose's book was the subject of an extended exchange in the *German Quarterly*. See Hans-Rudolph Vaget, "Wagner, Anti-Semitism and Mr. Rose: *Merkwürdigen Fall!*," *German Quarterly* 66, 2 (Spring, 1993), 222-36; William Rasch and Marc A. Weiner, "A Reply to Hans-Rudolph Vaget's 'Wagner, Anti-Semitism and Mr. Rose: *Merkwürdigen Fall!*,'" *German Quarterly* 67, 3 (Summer 1994), 400-08; and Vaget's reply, *Ibid.*, 408-10. All these were followed by Paul Lawrence Rose, "The Wagner Problem in the History of German Anti-Semitism," *German Quarterly* 68, 3 (Summer 1995), 304-05.

writes of the melancholy disillusionment of Wagner's last years. Among the composer's cares was a growing fear that the innovations of his music-drama had no living legacy. Although he was abundantly influential in musical language and aesthetics, Wagner's fears were borne out by history; his music-drama had no clear direct successor.³⁵

In the years following Wagner's death, his closest followers took this lack of a continuing artistic legacy, and turned it into a virtue. Wagner, like Beethoven, was a pinnacle; there was no hope of succeeding or surpassing him. The sterility that Wagner had dreaded was enshrined as uniqueness. In "Wagner and the *Bayreuther Blätter*," a Bayreuth manifesto, published in the first number of *The Meister*, Carl Glasenapp rejected efforts by younger composers to emulate the Wagnerian music drama. He mandated the Bayreuth Festival as the only true monument -- Shaw might have said tomb -- of the Wagner legacy.

. . . Undoubtedly, after the art-work of Bayreuth, this following has done more for the propagation of the real Wagnerian "geist" (spirit) than the fruitless attempts to found a Wagnerian (or neo-German) school by training up young German composers in fruitless wrestlings with the outer aspects of the style of composition of Richard Wagner -- a style only half understood by them, and too masterful for them to deal with. As to where we are to look for the true "school" of Richard Wagner, there can no longer be a shadow of a doubt. Not in the scores of "New German" composers but in the theatre on the Bayreuth hill, within these walls, the creative spirit of the Meister is still working with undiminished power in each performance and each singer, by the hallowed nature of the surroundings; where the first examples of artistically finished performances were given by himself as models of

³⁵Eric Salzman, "On Reading Cosima Wagner's Diaries," *Musical Quarterly* 68 (July, 1982), 340.

style.³⁶

With *noblesse oblige*, Glasenapp lent the obscure English journal some *echt* Bayreuth glamor, that Ellis was probably only too happy to have. Glasenapp was on most intimate terms with the Wagners, who rewarded his loyalty with unprecedented access to their private papers, a privilege granted to one who could be trusted to transmit only the most flattering portrait. Glasenapp co-edited a *Wagner-Lexicon* with Heinrich von Stein and produced the first “official” Wagner biography, a huge, six-volume work. He also produced a Wagner encyclopedia (with the subtitle “The Greatest Moments of Art as Illuminated by the Thought of Richard Wagner”) and shorter writings.

William Ashton Ellis took Glasenapp’s biography as his gospel, and he earnestly labored to translate it into English. Glasenapp’s depiction of Wagner’s personality and personal life was seriously accepted by Ellis, on the simple trust that what came from Wahnfried must be true. Several times, Ellis turned to Glasenapp to lend authority to his defenses of Wagner’s character in *The Meister*. As David C. Large puts it, Glasenapp’s biography was

a portrait of a kind of Victorian *pater familias*, albeit given on occasion to the harmless eccentricities one had to expect and forgive in an artistic genius. Richard Wagner was painted as a pious, patriotic, bourgeois gentleman, lover of children and dogs, personal life essentially as edifying as his great art.³⁷

³⁶ Glasenapp, “Wagner and the *Bayreuther Blätter*,” *The Meister* 1 (1888), 18.

³⁷ David C. Large, “Wagner’s Bayreuth Disciples,” in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, 103.

In other words, Richard Wagner was presented as Mr. Nice Guy. In surveying his source material, Glasenapp distorted and overinterpreted some things in an excess of loyalty.

Ellis had no way of knowing this and would have resisted the suggestion.

The other biographer whose work was embraced by Ellis was Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who in 1908 married Eva Wagner (1867-1942). Chamberlain is probably the most notorious member of the Wahnfried circle. He is remembered for his specious book entitled *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, for his outrageous racism, and for his complete conversion to Germany, which later caused him to be considered a dangerous traitor by the English at large, and by the shocked and disillusioned Ellis. Chamberlain's biography was especially favored in Bayreuth as a popular alternative to the ponderous work of Glasenapp and, more importantly, to counter the very-much-frowned-upon work of Ferdinand Praeger.

Of Chamberlain's biography, Ellis wrote:

Well done, Chamberlain! In the midst of annoyances and petty persecutions of a far more odious and intensive character than the public has ever had any idea of (in connection with our joint unmasking of a ridiculous travesty of Wagner's life), to have found the philosophic calm demanded by an undertaking of such magnitude as the splendid volume now offered to the world, is more than a matter for congratulation; it is the strongest proof of a lofty nature. How infinitely Mr. Chamberlain towers above the puny coterie of his villifiers is shown by the mere fact of that "travesty" being only alluded to once in all his book and this merely indirectly; the attacks upon himself are very properly passed by, as quite beneath the notice of a writer for posterity. And for posterity this book is really written; its present welcome is assured by its intrinsic merits of style and extrinsic wealth of pictorial illustration, but its standpoint is so advanced that we hardly expect a

generation that regards Richard Wagner almost purely in the light of an exceptionally endowed musician to fully realise the depth and epoch-making character of this latest addition to a Wagnerian library whose shelves are already groaning under the weight of superfluous matter. Apart from Wagner's own writings, the works that can be set by the side of Mr. Chamberlain's new book may wellnigh be numbered on the fingers of one hand . . . there is only wherewith to compare it; that one is C. F. Glasenapp's as yet uncompleted third edition of the "Leben Richard Wagner's." Yet even here there can be no comparison saving of degree; in kind, the two works are so far from bearing any resemblance to each other that Mr. . . . Chamberlain refers his readers to Glasenapp's "Life" to supplement his own production. The latter writer having furnished so exhaustive an account of all the more important details in the life and surroundings of Richard Wagner, Mr. Chamberlain has been able to confine himself to the broadest of outlines, and thus to save the bulk of his space for a study pre-eminently suited to his special talents, the inner life of Richard Wagner.

. . . In conclusion, not only has Chamberlain produced a work of first-class importance in its subject, and that subject's treatment, but he has contributed a masterpiece to German Literature itself. Such dignity of idea and limpidity of style as are to be found in Richard Wagner are rarities indeed.³⁸

It was in the Praeger affair (the "travesty" referred to in Ellis's review) that Ellis and Chamberlain joined forces. Ellis in England and Chamberlain in Germany worked to the utmost to discredit Praeger's memoir. Praeger was an expatriate German piano teacher who met Wagner on his visit to England in 1855. He claimed to have been responsible for bringing Wagner to the attention of the Philharmonic Society, although this has long been known to be untrue. He never became really intimate with Wagner,

³⁸ Ellis, Review of Chamberlain's *Leben Richard Wagners*, *The Meister* 8 (1895), 126-27.

but remained an occasional correspondent. The memoir, *Wagner as I Knew Him*, was published by William John Manners, Lord Dysart,³⁹ the president of the London Wagner Society, in 1892, a year after Praeger's death. The Wahnfried crowd was less concerned with the book's many inaccuracies than they were with Praeger's critiques of Wagner's character, among which were indictments of Wagner's selfishness, anti-Semitism, his obfuscation of his involvement in the 1849 Dresden uprising, and his treatment of his first wife, Minna Planer (1809-66). Chamberlain and Ellis immediately rose to the attack on both German and English fronts. In Bayreuth, in 1892, the two men painstakingly compared the German and English versions of the book and found many discrepancies; they questioned the authenticity of the Wagner letters that Praeger quoted in his text and found fault with Praeger's chronology. Chamberlain was able to discredit the book in the *Bayreuther Blätter*. Ellis, in England, launched an intensive campaign in *The Meister*, and a torrent of letters and essays in the other journals. Ellis was sufficiently riled to abandon "for the nonce, the editorial 'we' and criticise in propria persona."⁴⁰

Wahnfried was not satisfied, however. Chamberlain actually went to England in 1893, a most unusual occurrence by this point in his life. While Ellis had been refused admittance to Dysart's archive of Praeger's letters, Chamberlain was fortunate enough to make his visit while Dysart was out of the country. He convinced Dysart's staff to admit him, and saw the letters for himself; fourteen of the letters cited by Praeger in the book

³⁹ William John Manners, Earl of Dysart (1859-1937), blind from birth, was a lover of music and opera, and quite apolitical.

⁴⁰ Ellis, Editorial, *The Meister* 5 (1892), 61.

were missing. Chamberlain transcribed the remaining twenty letters and published their contents in another *Bayreuther Blätter* article. The German publishers of the book publicly thanked Chamberlain for exposing the book's deficiencies, and withdrew it in 1895. The English version of the book, however, remained available to the public, and Ellis, with amazing tenacity, dug in and continued his journalistic war. In May 1895, *The Meister* noted the German withdrawal of Praeger's book, and that the *Musical Standard's* account of the matter did not identify the dedicatee (although anybody who read the book could readily enough find the name). After reminding his readership that this dedicatee was Dysart himself, Ellis announced that "The Earl of Dysart, on the 17th ult. resigned his Presidency and Membership of the Wagner Society, London; at the ensuing meeting of the Committee, Lord Dysart's resignation was accepted."⁴¹

Edward Dannreuther, the founder of the original Wagner Society, succeeded Dysart as the President of the London Branch. In the two final issues of *The Meister*, Ellis seemed to have made a spiritual break with London and grown closer to Wahnfried. Considerations of London music no longer appeared in the "Notes" sections. He never succeeded in getting Praeger's book withdrawn in England.

Dysart finally began to fight back against Chamberlain; he mentioned a lawsuit, then threatened to publish some letters "which I think certain persons whose names I do not care at present to mention will not care to see the light." Dysart's warning was understood as referring to correspondence from or about Wagner's first marriage, and the "certain persons," of course, meant Cosima. Although the book had been withdrawn in

⁴¹ Ellis, "Notes," *The Meister* 8 (1895), 128.

Germany, Wahnfried still was not satisfied, and Dysart continued to protest. The affair dragged on past the turn of the century, with Chamberlain's critiques being published in bound form, in two editions, and a chapter of Ellis's Wagner biography being dedicated to a thorough rehash of the entire contretemps. Wahnfried eventually (and predictably) decided that Praeger was merely a malcontent Jew, trying to avenge himself on Wagner's heirs.

Ellis was devastated by the outbreak of the First World War. The idea of war between England and Germany was insupportable to him. He himself was a pacifist, and he identified intensely with Wagner's pacifistic writings. Everything at the center of Ellis's life depended upon friendly relations between England and Germany. He no longer had the Bayreuth Festivals, nor contact with Wahnfried, and he also felt profoundly betrayed by the Wahnfried clique's aggressive nationalism. Ellis published three articles in the *Musical Times* of 1915, all highly condemnatory of Germany; he was particularly appalled at the "butchery" of the sinking of the *Lusitania*.⁴² Most of all, he was disillusioned and disgusted with his old ally, Chamberlain:

Could the Bayreuth Master arise from the tomb in which he was laid to rest over two and thirty years ago, I can imagine nobody who would be more indignant at the articles recently penned by that renegade ex-Englishman who now lives in his house, or at the prior insolent action of that old pupil we all once so honoured. But one thing is certain: his spirit would flee to the uttermost ends of the universe to escape contamination from the air polluted by the Hohenzollern decadent who but lately conferred a badge of shame, the Iron Cross "with white ribbon (for non-combatants)" on his posthumous son-in-law . . .

⁴² Ellis, "Wagner contra Militarism," *The Musical Times* 56 (1915), 396.

To speak for myself, if I may be allowed to, even in the most inconceivable event of the festival-theatre at Bayreuth opening its doors any time again during my lifetime, never more could I enter a town or country where a traitor to his native land apparently is held in high esteem, neither could I ever shake hands again with anyone of German birth who has not expressed a stern and honest detestation of those crimes this outcrop of barbarians misnames “necessities of war”; but of all his countrymen our Wagner was most innocent of any influence in that direction, and to condemn him for the wickedness of those who now are reversing all his cherished principles would be grotesquely absurd were it not so grimly tragic.⁴³

Thus did Ellis maintain his idealism. In 1916, Ellis returned to his old position at the Western Dispensary, and effectively retired from the field of journalistic battle. He took his grand piano with him.

The Operas in *The Meister*: Ellis as Editor and Critic

Virtually no musical consideration of the operas appears in *The Meister*. Most of the writings about them are retellings and explications of the plots or the “poems,” as Ellis called the dramas, carrying the German expression into English. Ellis viewed Wagner as an artistic prophet-philosopher, whose writings bore significance for all of society well beyond the musical craft; for example, in the realms of philosophy, religion, history and literature. Ellis’s square-bracketed interpolations in articles by other commentators proclaim his sense of personal authority, overriding other interpretations of Wagner’s “poems.” This most distinctive feature of *The Meister* appeared in articles written by people other than Ellis. Ellis obsessively interjected replies of varying length

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 397-98.

to every statement with which he had a quibble. These editorial comments surrounded by square brackets rendered many articles in *The Meister* a kind of dialogue, or argument, between Ellis and the author.

Ellis's editorial remarks in the articles tend to correct statements which do not adhere to his mystical interpretation of the music-dramas. As a mere editor, the gentle Ellis would not have dreamed of changing the text of any of his contributors' assertions; but as the English guardian of "Truth" about Wagner, he could not restrain himself from doing his duty on every possible occasion. Such an eccentricity could not fail to catch the eye of George Bernard Shaw, and without mentioning names, Shaw pulled Ellis's leg in the *Star*. In this excerpt from Shaw's article, the square-bracketed insertions represent Shaw's parody of Ellis's editorial voice.

I am a member of the Wagner Society, and as such, ready to roll its log at all times, but I do not think I shall contribute to its journal the *Meister*. I can stand a reasonable degree of editing, but not even from the all-omniscient editor of the *Star* would I bear a series of footnotes contradicting every one of my opinions. If the *Meisterful* method were introduced at Stonecutter-street, my criticisms would appear in this wise:

On Tuesday last a numerous and crowded audience were attracted to St. James's Hall by the announcement that Miss Pauline Cramer would sing Isolde's death song, that most moving piece of music ever written [Note by ED.-- Surely our gifted contributor has forgotten Let Erin remember the days of old, in making this sweeping statement.] It is unquestionably the greatest of Wagner's works, and is far superior to the compositions of his earlier period [We agree on the whole; but would point out that in the *Tannhäuser* March and in his well-known William Tell Overture, Wagner has attained a more engaging rhythmic emphasis, and, at least, equal sweetness of melody.--ED.] Those who heard Miss Cramer must have forgotten for the

moment all previous experiences of this kind [Has our critic ever heard Miss Bellwood's rendering of What cheer, Ria? If so, we can hardly let this statement pass without a protest.—ED.] And so on.⁴⁴

Shaw was slightly inaccurate in his lampooning; editorial square brackets never appeared in the "Notes" column of *The Meister*, because most of the reviews were written by Ellis himself. This paragraph, however, amusingly captures the anxious pedantry of Ellis's interjections. Shaw's debonair, razor-sharp style provides a perfect foil for Ellis's sincere, yet pedantic plodding.

"*The Nibelung's Ring*"

In William C. Ward's article "*The Nibelung's Ring*,"⁴⁵ Ellis's square brackets frequently appear, taking issue with the author's interpretations. Ward's article micro-interprets the *Ring*, to a degree that we can only find amusing today. Wagnerians regarded Wagner's poetic texts as revelation, and this is displayed in Ward's attachment of a symbolic philosophical significance to virtually every object, person, and occurrence in the drama, much as Wolzogen micro-interpreted musical gestures in his *Leitmotive* catalogue. Everything and everyone represents something else in Ward's interpretation; e.g., the Nibelungs "are an embodiment of the entirely material and sensual part of

⁴⁴ Shaw, "Musical Mems: by the *Star*'s own Captious Critic," in *How to Become a Musical Critic*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (London: Society of Authors, 1961; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1978) 140.

⁴⁵ William C. Ward, "*The Nibelung's Ring*," *The Meister* 2 (1889).

mankind."⁴⁶

Ward relates the plot to its sources: the *Volsunga Saga*, the *Eddas*, and also Christianity. A reader might think that Ward's interpretation of the *Ring* is sufficiently mystical to meet Ellis's standards, but Ellis argues with many small points. The following passage contains plentiful examples of Ward's reductive analysis of the plot and characters, along with one of Ellis's contentious corrections:

It is Wotan, who in conjunction with the all-knowing Earth-mother, Erda, -- may we say Religious Belief in concert with the Law of the Universe? -- produces the race of the Valkyries, in which are symbolized all noble passions and emotions which elevate the soul. It is Wotan again who begets the Wälsungs, types of the heroic principle in Man, by whom he himself is finally overcome, when his ways are wandered from truth, and Erda warns him no more. Here also, I would indicate a passage, replete with significance, from the last act of Siegfried, wherein the poet gives clear expression to his belief that is our creed, lies hidden the germ of the highest, although they are unable to bring to perfection that which they have half-unconsciously nurtured. Brünnhilde, the Spirit of Divine Truth and Love is made to say:

I alone
of Wotan's aim was witness;
that I dared not know
by the name he dealt it,
that I may not fathom
and merely could feel,
for which I faced
warfare and work;
for which I thwarted
him who had thought it;
for which I suffered the shackles of sleep
when I failed to think it,

⁴⁶ Ward, "*The Nibelung's Ring*," 12

and only felt.⁴⁷

Wotan's aim is, like that of the founder of Christianity, the redemption and purification of the human soul [Again we must differ from the author, for Wotan's aim is ever self-aggrandisement, his ruling wish for power and mastery.—Ed.], but the freedom to accomplish it is denied him. The intellect fails to attain the good which is accessible only to the diviner intelligence of feeling, and it is Brünnhilde -- Love -- who "did not think it, and only felt" by whom the conception of the good is fulfilled, though at last in opposition to its will.⁴⁸

Ellis's bracketed correction would now be considered as off-the-mark as Ward's interpretation. Wagner's Wotan is certainly not a Christ figure. Ellis's perception of Wotan appears to be limited to the character as he appears in *Das Rheingold*. Wotan's aim in *Das Rheingold* is certainly presented as "ever self-aggrandisement, his ruling wish for power and mastery." One of the great themes of the *Ring* narrative, however, is

⁴⁷ Ward's translation of:

. . . denn mir allein erdünkt Wotans Gedanke:
Der Gedanke, den ich nie nennen durfte;
den ich nicht dachte, sondern nur fühlte;
für den ich focht, kämpfte und stritt,
für den ich trozte dem, der ihn dachte;
für den ich büß, Strafe mich band,
weil ich nicht ihn dachte, und nur empfand!
Siegfried, Act III, scene 3.

A more straightforward translation:

. . . For I alone grasped Wotan's idea-
the thought I dared not name;
that I did not think, but only felt;
for which I fought and struggled,
for which I defied him who conceived it;
for which I atoned, bound in punishment,
because I did not think it, but only felt.

⁴⁸ Ward, "*The Nibelung's Ring*," 9.

Wotan's transformation from a grasping, loveless tyrant to a conscience-stricken father.

Ellis also interrupts with a brief apologia for the sister-brother incest in *Die Walküre*. He notes that the incest also occurred in Wagner's source, the *Volsunga Saga*, as if to suggest that Wagner's fidelity to a source (in this case) obviates his responsibility for depicting the unspeakable.

In Ellis's (and Wagner's) time, the incest theme in *Die Walküre* could not be taken for granted; it had to be addressed, and explained over and over again. Wagner himself has it debated between Wotan and Fricka in Act II. As observed in previous chapters, the incestuous relationship was frequently the focus of the charges of immorality against Wagner and the *Ring*. The sister-brother incest theme *is* found in the *Volsunga Saga*.⁴⁹ Signy knowingly commits incest in order to conceive a full-blooded Volsung son to avenge the murder of her father. Wagner's Wälsungs fall in love before they are aware of their relationship. Many nineteenth-century (and some twentieth-century) observers were horrified that the realization of their blood ties does not stop Siegmund and Sieglinde in their tracks, but only increases their enthusiasm ("*Braut und Schwester bist du dem Bruder, so blühe denn Wälsungen Blut!*"⁵⁰). In citing the legendary origins of the incest theme, Ellis appeals to the "doctrine of distance," as did Hueffer in his discussion of *Die Walküre*.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Volsunga Saga*, 41.

⁵⁰ *Die Walküre*, Act I.

⁵¹ Peter Gay, *The Education of the Senses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 380.

The incest taboo, however, responds only with great difficulty to this “doctrine of distance.” An educated person might read Euripides without much distress; not only is the unsuspecting sin of incest set in a classical milieu, but horrid punishments are visited upon the family until it is destroyed.⁵² Wagner, however, was a contemporary artist, depicting a brother and sister who knowingly commit incest. Siegmund and Sieglinde behave like many a pair of operatic lovers, embracing onstage, and singing a love duet. One commentator wrote acidly of Wagner’s stage direction, “Curtain falls rapidly” (*“Vorhang fällt schnell”*), that “it was quite time it did fall.”⁵³

Ellis’s oddest editorial comment concerns the Valkyries:

[(The Walküren) are the later manifestation of the Will evolving upon a higher, more spiritual place. In these nine Walküren and their father Wotan, we have a correspondence with the ten Elohim of the Kabhala, of which Malkuth the Bride, is fitly represented by Brünnhilde.]⁵⁴

Here Ellis’s eager syncretism causes a kind of intellectual collision. He merges a Schopenhauerian interpretation with one drawing on the Judaic mystical tradition of the Kabbala. Schopenhauerian approaches to Wagnerian drama are certainly not out-of-the-way, but the Kabbalistic angle is one I have never seen duplicated or echoed anywhere in

⁵² Wagner was greatly enthusiastic about the *Oedipus* cycle. He was especially fond of Antigone, the daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta, who buried her brothers after the debacle of the Seven against Thebes, and defied the law to follow the inner dictates of love. Wagner considered her a prototype of Brünnhilde.

⁵³ H. C. Statham, quoted by Peter Gay in *The Tender Passion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 267.

⁵⁴ Ellis’s editorial comment in Ward, “*The Nibelung’s Ring*,” 45.

the Wagnerian literature. The two in the same paragraph make strange companions indeed.⁵⁵

Ellis himself wrote on the *Ring*,⁵⁶ as mentioned in the previous chapter; instead of offering an interpretation of Ellis's own, this article deals specifically with the *Ring*'s philosophical genesis, drawing upon Wagner's letters to August Röckel, before and after Wagner's reading of Schopenhauer.

"Parsifal"

Some unsigned essays on the operas are clearly by Ellis himself. He happily (if rather pedantically) expands upon his own pleasure in the dramas, without having to correct the errors of other explications. The absence of the characteristic square brackets strongly implies Ellis's authorship.

Ellis's unsigned article on *Parsifal*⁵⁷ is, if at times exaggerated, quite perceptive. He is predictably full of enthusiasm. In his *Parsifal* writing, Ellis's florid excesses often

⁵⁵ Ellis's application of Schopenhauer is sound enough, but the Kabbala is stretched beyond its limits. What he calls "*Elohim*" are probably actually known as "*Sefiroth*," aspects or "emanations" of God, some of which are distinctly feminine. One of these is indeed called "*Malkuth*" ("Kingdom"). The *Sefiroth* ("emanations") are arranged in symbolic hierarchies; they are not, however, to be construed as intermediary beings but as each and all identical with God Himself. Making matters more confusing, each *Sefirah* has its own system of symbolism within itself, a different system in relationship to the other *Sefiroth*, and sometimes another system related to a particular combination of *Sefiroth*. The systems of symbolism draw on cosmological, organic, familial, and sexual images. Gershon Gerard Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1974), 96-116.

⁵⁶ Ellis, "Wagner's *Ring* Drama," *The Meister* 8 (1895), 73-83, 105-17.

⁵⁷ Ellis, "*Parsifal*," *The Meister* 1 (1888).

seem spirited rather than tiresome. He gives unexpected attention to the Eastern aspects of Wagner's story and mentions Wagner's Buddhist readings and projections. This unusual sense of what is present but not explicit in *Parsifal* undoubtedly derives from Ellis's Theosophical reading. Incidentally, Ellis's writing on *Parsifal*'s more sensational elements inadvertently reveals a Victorian relish for *Grand Guignol* and penny dreadful, which is rather refreshing after all his philosophizing and spiritualizing. Ellis did not often mention the sensuous aspects of Wagner's music-dramas, but rather their spirituality and their philosophically edifying aspects. He could be likened to an Anglican clergyman with a taste for Wagner, with the difference that his religious leanings were not specifically Christian, and the spirituality he found in the poems was more universal. In this sense, he was very much in line with the Bayreuth Wagnerians, who also desensualized their interpretations of Wagner's dramas in order to sacralize them.

... such eroticism, in the nineteenth century, masqueraded in higher pretensions; the more sensual the work, in fact, the more exalted the rhetoric accompanying it. Wagnerians, especially the assiduous devotees, treated Wagner's music as revelation . . . as an unprecedented political and religious message . . . The fashionable audiences that thronged to the Bayreuth festivals from 1876 on solemnly understood that they were attending a sacred rite . . . in company with his worshippers, Wagner was ambivalent about acknowledging that his music dramas manifestly embodied, and boldly staged, sexual longings and fulfillments that ordinary mortals keep to themselves, if they consciously experienced them at all.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Gay, *The Tender Passion*, 264.

Ellis, in his writings, often apologizes for his ignorance of music. While his prose takes on an enthusiastic color in his descriptions of the action in *Parsifal*, he also displays considerable familiarity with, and sensitivity to, the music, as in this description of the opening of Act II:

He begins a scene of the most diabolical energy, which we can scarcely witness without a shudder. The motiv of Klingsor winds like a fiery dragon through all the dialogue [Ex. 1],⁵⁹ crushing in its folds the helpless victim, and hissing out the venom of his hate for every holy thing; while Kundry's anguished theme [Ex. 2] falls, octave by octave in helpless cries of agony, ending in despair. The poor soul is writhing in torture at the horrible deed she is called on to perform, and is powerless to refuse.⁶⁰

Although Ellis's language is purplish and musically simple for our taste, and he does not provide musical examples, his observations are good enough to pinpoint his references in the score.

Female characters tended not to be of great interest to Ellis, but he describes Kundry in terms brimming over with ideas from his Theosophical readings:

... in the rank wealth of intoxicating flowers, [Kundry] is indeed the Höllen-Rose, the Rose of Hell, that mystic, sensuous antitype of the Rose of Heaven, worshiped by the Rosicrucians under the form of the Rosy Cross, and by the Roman Catholic Church as the Virgin Mary; she is also the Teufel's Braut, the Devil's Bride, as opposed to the Sponsa Dei, the Bride of God.⁶¹

⁵⁹ The bracketed designations refer to musical examples which are provided not by Ellis in the original commentary, but by the author of the present study. The examples appear after the discussion of Ellis's *Parsifal* article.

⁶⁰ Ellis, "*Parsifal*," 85-86.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

For a moment, victory seems to have crowned her traitorous attempt; but the victory is only apparent. The trance in which he has sunk passes suddenly away, as Parsifal hears, in the magnetic circle which Kundry has now completed, the cry of Amfortas. His contact with the source of Amfortas's suffering has roused to full power his intuitive faculties and placed him at once *en rapport* with the sufferer. With a loud cry, "Amfortas!" he starts up and casting aside the heedless folly of his youth, becomes a man! The kiss of Kundry has indeed, as she promised, turned his folly into knowledge, but in a manner which she had not foretold. Instead of opening up to him the delights of material pleasure, it has revealed the deadly danger lurking in the poisoned cup.

This is the grand crisis of the drama. Henceforth, Parsifal is no more the thoughtless fool, but with one bound, he has become the conscious redeemer of his race.⁶²

It is impossible to leave consideration of this extraordinary conflict between Parsifal and Kundry without mentioning its immense dramatic effect. The materials are entirely taken from the inner life of the soul and the outward action is but slight; yet Wagner has condensed into one single scene a whole world of tragedy. We feel, when witnessing it, that it is not a mere question of the triumph of Kundry or of Parsifal, but of the wide-reaching victory of the powers of good or evil. In his music, Wagner has never reached such a pitch of intensity as in this dialogue, and it alone would be a full justification, were such needed, of his method of creating concrete symbols from short musical phrases, and employing the orchestra as a running commentary upon the text.⁶³

The motives of the Grail, of the Spear, of Klingsor, of Sorcery, of Amfortas, etc., are constantly emerging from the sea of harmony and pointing out the inner connection of the story. It is in this way that the meaning of Kundry's kiss is clearly shown, through its accompaniment by the music of sorcery [Ex. 3] the indication of the deception of

⁶² Ellis, "*Parsifal*," 116.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 118.

the senses; thus that the first motiv of Herzeleide [Ex. 4] as Parsifal's mother is, as soon as the youth becomes the compassionate man, replaced by a second Herzeleide-motiv which finds henceforth more general application, the heart's affliction passing from the personal sorrow of the individual to the universal sorrow of mankind, and is in this sense developed later as an accompaniment for Amfortas's cry of "Death!";⁶⁴ and thus that Kundry, longing for the love of Parsifal, employs the same yearning motiv that is employed by her lowlier sisters, the Zaubermädchen [Ex. 5], showing her relationship with them, and preparing us for their fellowship in her redemption, when in the last act her sobs of penitence are accompanied by the same theme.⁶⁵

Ellis gives closer attention to the music in this article than in any of his others on Wagner's operas. He writes about the relationships of music and text, music and action, and music and meaning. While these reflections are quite brief, they amount to much more musical consideration than in any of his other essays. Although Ellis expresses his thoughts in unsophisticated language, he picks out elements that were remarked upon by more musical commentators, most notably the "sea of harmony" from which motives emerge, the flexibility of the motives, and the "running commentary" of the orchestra.

⁶⁴ I believe Ellis has confused two motives here. The first "Herzeleide" motive appears in Act I first at mm. 787-92, and again at mm. 820-24, while Parsifal narrates the story of his early life with his mother. The motive reappears in Act II, mm. 740-44 and mm. 790-91, as Kundry tries to soften up Parsifal with memories of his mother. The so-called "second" "Herzeleide" motive is a variant of the motive which first appears in Act I (mm. 140ff.) at Amfortas's entrance, and is associated with his suffering. This motive appears in exactly the places named above by Ellis: Act II, after the kiss (mm. 974ff.), when Parsifal himself experiences the pain of Amfortas's wound; again in Act III (mm. 1002 ff.) in Amfortas's final speech; and for the last time (mm. 1026ff.) as Parsifal heals Amfortas's wound. Contrary to Ellis's idea, it is always closely associated with Amfortas, not Herzeleide.

⁶⁵ Ellis, "*Parsifal*," 118.

Ellis always has a confident, authoritative tone, and uses numerous metaphysical references (sometimes mistaken or incongruous), both to support his arguments and to decorate his writing.

Ellis concludes:

Thus ends the most remarkable drama of modern times, a drama whose unity of purpose, simplicity of construction, and poetry of diction would make it among the masterpieces of artistic creation, and which, wedded to music, whose beauty has never been surpassed, must remain a living monument to the genius of the man who, like Parsifal, preserved his faith through years of battling with the world.⁶⁶

Wagner probably would have been delighted to read Ellis's conclusion. His deep identification with his own characters is well known, although not so often commented upon in the case of *Parsifal*.

⁶⁶ Ellis, "*Parsifal*," 123-24.

Example 1.

a) *Parsifal*, Act II Prelude. Klingsor's motive.

b) Act II, scene 1. "The motiv of Klingsor winds like a fiery dragon through all the dialogue, crushing in its folds the helpless victim, and hissing out the venom of his hate for every holy thing . . ."

a Heftig, doch nie übereilt.

PLANO. *p* *cresc.*

P. *etc.* *dim.*

b

KLINGSOR.

Furcht - - ba - re Noth! —
Hor - - ri - ble lack! —

Lebhaft.

dim. *p* *f* *p* *f*

Un - ge - bän - dig - ten Seh - nens Pein, schreck - lichster Trie - be Höl - len - drang, den
Ir - re - pres - si - ble long - ing pain! Ter - ri - ble prick - ing lust from hell - which

Example 2.

a) Kundry's "laughter" motive.

b) Act II, scene 1. "Kundry's anguished theme falls, octave by octave in helpless cries of agony, ending in despair."

α

KLINGSOR. (Kundry's Gestalt macht die Bewegung einer Erwachenden. Sie stößt hier einen grässlichen Schrei aus.)
(Kundry's figure moves like one awaking. Here she utters a terrible cry.)

Lebhaft.

pp *accel.* *molto cresc.* *sf*

P. + *P.* + *P.* +

Er-wachst du? Ha! Meinem Ban-ne wieder ver-
You're wak-ning? Ha! You have fallen a -gain to

sf *p*

P. + *P.* +

(Kundry lässt ein Klagegeheul, von größter Heftigkeit bis zu bangem Wimmer:
sich abstufend, vernehmen.)
(Kundry gives vent to a loud wail of misery, that sinks gradually into low accent
of fear.)

fallen heut' zur rechten Zeit.
my spell to-day in time of need.

Heftig. *etwas zögernd und sehr ausdrucksvoll* *rallent.*

f *sf* *dim.* *dim.*

Example 3.

Act II, scene 2. Kundry's kiss.

"It is in this way that the meaning of Kundry's kiss is clearly shown, through its accompaniment by the music of sorcery, the indication of the deception of the senses."

KUNDRY

ge - hend u - ber - floss! Die Leib und Le - ben einst dir ge -
sion hot-ly moved And she who gave you bod - y and
Wieder etwas zurückhaltend

p

ge - ben, der Tod und Thor-heit wei-chen muss, sie beut dir
sens - es must keep both death and fol - ly far. She sends by

pp

p

beut als Mut-ter - se-gen's letzten Gruss der Lie - be er - sten
me her fi - nal biess-ig and fare-well: she gives you love's first
Gedehnt. Immer langsamer

pp *pp* *ppp*

p *p*

(She has bent her head completely over his and now presses her lips to his mouth in a long kiss.)

KUNDRY

hauss!

Sehr langsam.

pp

u.c. p.

Oder führt Parsifal plötzlich mit einer Gebärde des höchsten Schreckens auf: seine Haltung drückt eine furchtbare Veränderung aus; er stemmt seine Hände gewaltsam gegen das Herz, wie um einen verheerenden Schmerz zu bewältigen.)

(Suddenly Parsifal starts up with a gesture of intense fear; his demeanour expresses some fearful change; he presses his hands tightly against his heart, as though to subdue a rending pain.)

Sehr belebend.

cresc.

pp *f*

p

Example 4.

- a) Act I, scene 1. Herzeleide's motive.
- b) Act II, scene 2. Variant of Herzeleide's motive used by Kundry.
- c) Act II, scene 2. Herzeleide variant: Parsifal's guilt.
- d) Act II, scene 2. Herzeleide variant: Kundry's "aria."

a

GURN. (wendet sich wieder zu Parsifal.)
(turning again to Parsifal.)

Nun sag' nichts weisst du was ich dich fra-ge; jetzt meld' was du weisst; denn et-was musst du doch
Now speak! Since you know noth-ing I asked you, just tell what you know —for sure-ly you must know
Sehr langsam.
p

PARS.

Ich hab' ei-ne Mutter; Her-ze-let - - de sie
Yes! I have a moth-er, Heart of Sor- - row her
wissen.
some-thing. *etc.*
p dolce

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b

RUNDY.

si." dich rei-nen Tho-ren: „Par - si - fal.“ So rief, als in a-rab'schem Lander ver-
 si." Thus, pure and fool-ish: "Par - si - fal." The name was ut-tered in far Ar-ab-y's

pp

schied, dein Va-ter Ga-mu-ret dem Soh-ne zu, den er, im Mut-ter-schoos ver-schlos-sen, mit
 land, by Ga-mu-ret, your fa-ther, to that son who still was locked with-in his moth-er; and

dic-sem Na-men ster-bend grüss-te; ihn dir zu kün-den, harrt' ich dei-ner
 with this ut-ter-ance death did take him I've wait-ed for you just to give this

Sehr langsam.

piu p *espressivo*

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beut.
love.
PARSIFAL (Im Trübsinn immer tiefer sich sinken lassend).
(sinking lower in his sadness).

Die Mutter,
My mother,
die Mutter
my mother!
Kannst'ich vergessen!
Could I for-get her?
Sehr langsam.

Dehnend.
p *piu p* *pp* *ppespr.*

M415 P. + P. + P. +

viel er-sah.
seen a lot.
Ich sah das Kind an sei-ner Mut-ter Brust. sein
I saw the child up - on its moth-er's breast.

Sehr mässig und ruhig.

p *p*

erstes Lal-len lacht mir noch im Ohr: das Leid - im Her-zen, wie lach-te da auch Herze-
coo-ing cries still lin - ger in my ear Though filled - with sor-row she lauged through the tears of that

p *pdolce*

Example 5.

“... and thus that Kundry, longing for the love of Parsifal, employs the same yearning motiv that is employed by her lowlier sisters, the Zaubermädchen, showing her relationship with them, and preparing us for their fellowship in her redemption, when in the last act her sobs of penitence are accompanied by the same theme.”

a) *Parsifal*, Act II, scene 2. The Flower Maidens' entrance music.

b) Act II, scene 2. Kundry pleads with Parsifal, “Mitleid mit mir.”

c) Act III, scene 1. Good Friday scene; Kundry has just washed Parsifal's feet.

a

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1. Mir traf er den Freund.
He wound-ed my friend.

2. Lieb-sten.
lov - er.

3. Weh! Woe! Weh! Woe!

Meines Lieb-sten Feind.
It's my lov - er's foe.

Noch blu - tet die Waf-fe!
The weap-on still blood-y!

Oh Weh! Ach.
Oh woe! Oh

1. Mir traf er den Freund.
He wound-ed my friend.

2. Meines Lieb-sten Feind.
It's my lov - er's foe.

Weh! Woe! Weh! Woe!

1. Lieb-sten.
lov - er.

2. Noch blu - tet die Waf-fe!
The weap-on still blood-y!

3. Du dort!
You there!

Weh! Woe! Weh! Woe!

Was schufst du sol-che
Why have you caused th-

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b

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KUNDRY.

selbst ruf' ich die Wehr, gibst du dem Sünder des Mitleid's Ehr! Ha.
 too I turn the spear, since you show pity where none is due! Ha!

Wahn-sinn! Mit-leid! Mit-leid mit mir!
 Mad-ness! Pit-y? Pit-y for me?

Etwas dehnend. rall.

c

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PARSIFAL (nimmt Kundry sanft das Fläschchen ab und reicht es Gurnemans).
 (gently taking the vial from her and passing it to Gurnemans).

Wieder etwas süßend Du salbest mir die Fü-ße, das
 You loved my feet, and thank you. A-

Hauptmannsal-be Ti-tu-rel's Ge-noss, dass heu-te noch als Kö-nig er mich
 noint my head, O friend of Ti-tu-rel, that so to-day as king I may be

"A Study of *Die Meistersinger*"

Barry Millington has written, "On one level, *Die Meistersinger* is a glorious affirmation of humanity and the value of art, as well as a parable about the necessity of tempering the inspiration of genius with the rules of form."⁶⁷ On the "other" level mentioned by Millington, the work is "the artistic component in Wagner's ideological crusade of the 1860's: A crusade to revive the 'German spirit,' and purge it of alien elements, chief among which were the Jews."⁶⁸ In his essay about *Die Meistersinger*, Ellis takes the "humane world-view to be the sole impulse of *Die Meistersinger*."⁶⁹ It was typical, however, of Ellis, to see Wagner's work in terms of its universal moral and spiritual benefits to humankind.

The *Meistersinger* article may easily feel unsatisfactory to the modern reader who is fully equipped with historical perspective and late-twentieth-century cynicism.

It has often been raised as an objection to this work that in it, Wagner departed from his rule of seeking for his plots in the myths of primitive nations. It is true that there alone could he find the material for such colossal works as the *Ring des Nibelungen* or the *Tristan-und-Isolde*, but as the Athenians, by the comic epilogue relieved the intensity of emotion aroused by their great tragedies, so has the poet-composer offered us in the *Meistersinger* a bridge over which we may pass from his world of gods and demi-gods to the busy concerns of our own daily life.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Millington, "*Die Meistersinger*," in *The Wagner Compendium*, 304.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Ellis, "A Study of *Die Meistersinger*," *The Meister* 3 (1890), 5-6.

Wagner first conceived of *Die Meistersinger* to contrast with *Tannhäuser*. He stated this in his 1851 *Mittheilung an meine Freunde*, which Ellis certainly knew well.⁷¹ Wagner departed from his usual practice of writing about legendary figures, but for purposes of comedy, this was to be expected. Wagner's idealized vision of sixteenth-century Nuremberg may have had less to do with the "busy concerns" of late nineteenth-century London than even Wotan's allegorical activities. Ellis does not grasp Wagner's very specific purpose in choosing sixteenth-century Nuremberg as his locale (although the nationalistic aspect of the work is clear enough to Ellis, as noted below). In one of his typically fulsome letters to Ludwig II of Bavaria, Wagner wrote:

. . . Nuremberg, the old, true seat of German art, German uniqueness and splendour, the old, free city, well-preserved like a precious jewel, reborn through the labours of its serenely happy, solid, enlightened and liberal populace under the patronage of the Bavarian throne . . .⁷²

According to Timothy MacFarland, the city of Nuremberg

. . . provided a remarkable symbol of ancient urban greatness, 16th-century rather than mediaeval, surviving intact from the idealized heroic age of Albrecht Dürer and Martin Luther . . . by mid-century the cult of Nuremberg and of mediaeval Germany in general was sufficiently universal to account for Wagner's referring to it as the

⁷¹ "Just as a comic satyr play followed the tragedy in the Athenian theatre, so I suddenly had the idea of a comedy that could follow my 'Singer's War at the Wartburg' as a truly relevant satyr play. It was *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* with Hans Sachs at their head." Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," in *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Essays*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1993; reprinted from *Richard Wagner's Prose Works* 1 [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895]), 329. Page citations refer to reprint.

⁷² Wagner to Ludwig II of Bavaria, July 24, 1866, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, 701.

“nerve-center of German life” . . . as the temper of middle-class culture became more nationalistic in the later nineteenth century, the myth of the Nuremberg of Dürer and Sachs . . . became the hackneyed theme of countless pageants, processions, historical paintings and the like . . . The virtues of warm-hearted and plain-dealing reliability, of solid craftsmanship and community loyalty were enshrined as the German middle-class virtues and celebrated in 16th-century costume. And as German nationalism became more strident, self-assertive and intolerant, the cult of Nuremberg was assimilated into the ideology of the extreme right, leading finally to the place of special honour conferred on the city in the Third Reich.⁷³

Nuremberg was chosen by Wagner as a lost Paradise of German culture. It decidedly did *not* resemble any place in the modern world, not even modern Germany which, according to Wagner, was in a dangerously decaying state. While Wagner was consciously idealizing Nuremberg according to *his* vision of “the virtues of warm-hearted and plain-dealing reliability,” his Nuremberg and its denizens betray Wagner’s own “strident, self-assertive intolerance” by actually displaying a narrow-minded and violent character.⁷⁴ There is no need to fault Ellis for not perceiving the ominous import in *Die Meistersinger* seen by critics of our generation. He lacked, after all, the perspective of two destructive World Wars with Germany.

⁷³ Timothy MacFarland, “Wagner’s Nuremberg,” in *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, English National Opera Guide 19 (London: John Calder 1983), 27-28. See also Stewart Spencer, “Wagner’s Nuremberg,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4 (March 1992), 21-41, and by the same author, “Wagner’s Nuremberg,” *Wagner* 14 (January 1993), 3-29.

⁷⁴ According to Stewart Spencer, seventeenth-century Nuremberg was controlled not by middle-class guilds but by a small group of aristocratic families who refused to share their power. This was the cause of the town’s long economic decline from the Reformation to its annexation by Bavaria in 1806. Spencer, “Wagner’s Nuremberg,” *Wagner* 14 (January 1993), 6.

Returning to Ellis's explication,

[Wagner] seems to teach us in this poem the lesson that heroism and devotion, manliness and pure love, are not to be found alone in regions far removed from our daily life, but can be brought down even into the lowly shoemaker's workshop. And, in his customary rejection of modern subjects, it was only the petty intrigue that he warned against; what traces of *that* are to be found in this poem, except as offered up to ridicule? The whole work is conceived in the noblest strain, and with the breath of life, the individualisation of its characters, and the constant flow of its *naïf* humour, it is fitted to rank its author as the German Shakespeare.⁷⁵

Ellis devotes a small essay to each of the main roles. About Hans Sachs, Ellis writes:

Its central character is Hans Sachs, a character so noble, so loving and so true that we cannot but recognise in it the grandest delineation of wider poetry. The spirit of unassuming self-sacrifice, of ungrudging help of others, of friendly counsel and of frank good nature, flows from Hans Sachs in one constant, refreshing strain. To turn from the everlasting self-seeking of modern society to the fresh, manly character of this mediaeval shoemaker is like leaving the poisoned air of a hot-house for the quickening breezes of an autumn sea.

. . . Turning to another side of Sachs's character, we find a depth of earnestness such as ever accompanies the fine humour of noble minds. Here is the man who looks below the surface of things, and recognises in the world a divine factor which cannot be meted by the rules of earthly sense; who sees in the works of Art the same inscrutable mystery that veils itself behind the garb of Nature . . . here is the philosophy of the man who, rising high above his handiwork, sees, amid all the illusory materialism of the

⁷⁵ Ellis, "A Study of *Die Meistersinger*," *The Meister* 3 (1890), 6.

world, the great ideal reality which sets the universe in motion.⁷⁶

The character of Sachs, like the entire drama of *Die Meistersinger*, is now recognized as being considerably more problematic than Ellis could recognize. According to Carl Dahlhaus, "Sachs is Wagner's self-portrait as a classicist";⁷⁷ Wagner confided his own sense of identification with Sachs in a letter to Ludwig II.⁷⁸ Ellis was able to recognize the drama and its characters as creations of Wagner, and Wagner's strong identification with this particular group of characters. With the exception of Beckmesser, *each* of the major figures in *Die Meistersinger* is more a facet of Wagner's own personality, his philosophy and vanity -- an idealized little Wagner projection -- than in any of the other works. Dahlhaus writes:

The malicious tricks he [Sachs] plays on Beckmesser recall Wotan's wagering with Mime, where the wager is a trap. Just as Wotan leaves it to Siegfried to exact the forfeit that Mime owes, so Sachs delivers up Beckmesser to the lethal derision of the crowd. (For both Wotan and Sachs, resignation involves keeping their hands clean).⁷⁹

Ellis goes on:

Thus too, in his exhortation to the people, the grand depth of Sachs's character is shown: "Have care! For evil tide is

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 10, 44-45.

⁷⁷ Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, 69.

⁷⁸ "I am sitting here in my lonely lakeside fortress, like Sachs in his cobbler's shop, observing the world with a view to writing poetry and music about it. . . ." Wagner to Ludwig II of Bavaria, November 22, 1866, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, 706.

⁷⁹ Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, 65.

in the wind; should German folk and German realm be lead astray in false and foreign luxury, no ruler then his people's heart would comprehend. I bid ye then, honour your German masters!"⁸⁰ The reproof of the man who would fain see his nation saved from the insidious temptation of giving over its own manly character and noble traditions to a sordid imitation of the hollow joys of lighter races, rises here to the height of patriotism in its grandest sense, and Sachs, the humble cobbler-poet, becomes the great representative of a people determined to stand on its own bottom and to cast off the unworthy weight of foreign nations. Wagner has given here to Sachs the expression of his own life-long struggle to rouse the German nation from a slavish borrowing of its art from foreign sources, especially in the domain of drama, and to call it, by the memory of its own great artists, to fresh endeavours to raise a monument of national art which should reflect the character of the people and urge them forward to their own development.⁸¹

Ellis's enthusiasm leads him again to excess, and his ordinarily flowery writing, into real awkwardness. He translates Sachs clumsily, with a mixed metaphor ("evil tide in the wind") and makes provocative if vague references to "lighter races" and "the

⁸⁰ Ellis is referring to:

Habt Acht! Uns droben übel Streich':
zerfällt erst deutsches Volk und Reich,
in falscher wälscher Majestät
Kein Fürst dann mehr sein Volk versteht,
und wälschen Dunst mit wälschen Tand
sie pflanzen uns in's deutsche Land.
Was deutsch und ächt wüsst' keiner mehr,
lebts nicht in deutscher Meister Ehr'.
Drum sag ich euch:
ehrt eure deutschen Meister. . . .

(*Die Meistersinger* Act III, Scene 5)

⁸¹ Ellis, "A Study of *Die Meistersinger*," 45.

unworthy weight of foreign nations.”⁸² Ellis clearly comprehends the nationalistic significance of *Die Meistersinger* and the position of art in the relationships among nations (and “races”) emphasized by Wagner. This passage, which has served as kind of a “red light” in many recent critiques of the work, is entirely untroubling to Ellis. There was no fear in nationalism for Ellis, because there was so little aggression in the man. He was a loyal Englishman, even sentimentally so, and he could understand and sympathize with German nationalism without perceiving any threat. Again, he had no memories of German aggression to affect his perspective. From our point of view, Ellis appears naïve in this sense. At the time of his writing (1890), the terrible disillusionment of World War One was still many years away.

Ellis partially responds to Wagner’s concept of “*Wahn*,” or illusion, as expressed in Sachs’s monologue (Act Three, scene 1). He readily connects the idea of “*Wahn*” with an Eastern-influenced concept of the folly or illusion in the “materialism of the world,” but manages not to perceive its other side: the force of creative passion required by the artist.

As for Walther:

In this drama, Walther is the heaven-born poet whose song is no arid outcome of pedantic rule, but springs from the warm impulse of a heart attuned to harmony with Nature. His poetic gifts are awakened by the old legends of a tune of larger life and more free adventure, as were Wagner’s own by the full-blooded myths of the infancy of its race; his music, like Wagner’s, he will borrow from no conventional systems, but seeks in sounds of Nature’s orchestra: “In the woods among the carolling birds, there

⁸² My guess is Ellis took Wagner to mean the French in this case.

learnt I all my song."⁸³

Once again, Ellis looks with equanimity and affection upon a character whom many readers have recently regarded with suspicion. Dahlhaus points out that Sachs and Walther, characters whom Wagner idealizes, inevitably betray the flaws of their creator. Walther, the natural, spontaneous poet and singer, is depicted as impetuous, but is just a bad-tempered bully. He is another Wagnerian self-projection, the artistic "outsider" whose original ideas and creative powers shock and outrage a conservative public, and seem dangerously subversive, even revolutionary.⁸⁴ Finally, why should Walther's music not resemble Wagner's? It was, after all, composed by Wagner.

Ellis continues:

The stilted, sickly melodies of the operatic forms, of aria and concerted piece mean nothing to him (Walther), for his song will only flow to the unrestrained measures that Nature prompts. This simile of the forest Wagner has beautifully worked out in an article entitled "*Zukunftsmusik*" ("The Music of the Future," taking up the parable from his enemies), written shortly before the composition of the poem of *Die Meistersinger*.⁸⁵

With regard to the "stilted, sickly melodies of the operatic forms," the musical

⁸³ Ellis, "A Study of *Die Meistersinger*," 95.

⁸⁴ Walther is marked as a noble among guildsmen. Wagner did not seem to desire nobility, or have the same sort of "family drama" as Maynard Solomon has posited for Beethoven (Maynard Solomon, *Beethoven* [New York: Schirmer Books, 1977], 21-24). This motif, however, recurs in *Parsifal*, when in Act I, Gurnemanz remarks to the unknown young hero, "Doch adelig scheinst du doch selbst und hochgeboren." Possibly, this was a way of flattering Ludwig II, whom Wagner addressed as "Walther" or "my Parsifal" in several letters.

⁸⁵ Ellis, "A Study of *Die Meistersinger*," 95.

acumen that enhanced Ellis's reading of *Parsifal* does not appear here. *Die Meistersinger* is Wagner's most consciously archaizing and nostalgic drama, in its particular sound-world, and in the traditional forms that abound. Wagner's persistent use of bar form throughout is playful rather than *geheimnisvoll*; the choruses, arias, marches, and dances, however, are closer to being set pieces than one finds in any other of Wagner's "music-dramas." The Act III quintet is uniquely operatic among Wagner's mature works and, far from being "sickly and stilted," it is stunningly beautiful.

Writes Dahlhaus:

... Walther covertly betrays the secret that lies at the heart of his [Wagner's] own work ... that art, in order to be art, must conceal itself, and appear in the guise of nature. That means that the expedients must not be visible, reflection must be transformed into spontaneity, immediacy must be recreated and still be immediacy, and every trace of effort must be expunged. The paradox is that it takes technique to deny technique but in Walther the contradictions are resolved in a utopian image ... The recreated, second immediacy, for which Wagner worked so hard, comes to Walther first time round.⁸⁶

Ellis normally has little to say about female figures, and has little to say about the character of Eva; she doesn't inspire him to the same rhapsodic writing as Kundry did.

His writing about Eva is not without insight, but is fairly limited.

Eva is perhaps the most completely human of all the female types that Wagner has created. Regarded as the ideal of Art, which Wagner has uncontestedly symbolised in the character of Eva, it is only meet that she should entertain for Sachs, the honest poet of the people, an

⁸⁶ Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, 70-71.

affection second only to that to face with the unfettered inspiration of the highest poetry, typified by Walther.⁸⁷

In one sense, Ellis is right; Eva is the most human of all Wagner's heroines in that she seems most like the girl next door of 1865, but she betrays plenty of spirit along the way. Her position as prize in the song contest appears annoyingly passive, and in Wagner literature, she is made much less of than his other heroines. Sieglinde runs away from her husband with Siegmund. Brünnhilde is rebellious and disobedient; she goes through a period of disastrous passivity and equally disastrous vengefulness, before getting around to her decisive act. Isolde determinedly pursues a man not her husband, and seems not to know at first whether she wants to become his mistress or his murderer. Timid Elsa is punished for having the unspeakable nerve to want to know whom she has married. Eva is not a goddess or a queen, just the richest and prettiest girl in town, and she tries to run away with Walther. Although Sachs convinces her not to do this, we can imagine what she might do if Walther *didn't* win the contest. And though she is sorry, she does take advantage of Sach's affection and attraction in order to enlist his aid in ensuring that she gets Walther.

Ellis notes the significance of the community in this Wagnerian drama; and the collective people of Nuremberg certainly constitute a major force. Importantly, the work's title is "*Die Meistersinger*," referring to a group, rather than "Hans Sachs" or "Walther von Stolzing," after an individual (as in the cases of *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Siegfried*, and *Parsifal*). Ellis writes:

⁸⁷ Ellis, "A Study of *Die Meistersinger*," 49-50.

We have here no dull and lifeless mob introduced for the purpose of filling up the volume of vocal sound, but the People form a kind of collective, many-sided personality, of which the beloved head is Hans Sachs.⁸⁸

Recent commentators have observed, however, that the crowd is mainly the vehicle of intense social pressure, implicitly and explicitly threatened punishments, and the carrying-out of those punishments.⁸⁹

Beckmesser is the most problematic portrayal in *Die Meistersinger*, and Ellis's understanding of the character is also problematic for us.

We must now turn to the opposite of Sachs, the jealous, pettifogging, self-seeking Beckmesser. The contrast would not be complete without the connecting link that brings the two men into relationship with each other -- their humour; with Beckmesser, however, this humour, while keen enough, is degraded to a spiteful wit, and is always employed for the sake of puffing up his own attainments and depreciating the motives and actions of others. The man is a mass of narrow-minded conceit and pedantry, and shows it in every word he utters.⁹⁰

Of the comic element, the role of Beckmesser is full. The whole conception of his serenade, and the manner in which he sings its last stanza, jerking out a word here and there at the top of his voice, in his outbursts of rage at Sachs's hammering, are laughable in the extreme. Equal in humour to this scene are his entry in the shoemaker's workshop in

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 99

⁸⁹ For detailed discussion of this point, see Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*; Roland Matthews, "My Most Genial Creation," in *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*; Warren Darcy, "In Search of C Major: Tonal Structure and Formal Design in Act III of *Die Meistersinger*," proceedings of an 1989 *Meistersinger* symposium in Seattle, ed. A. Porter and B. Millington (publication forthcoming), quoted by Millington, "*Die Meistersinger*," 305.

⁹⁰ Ellis, "A Study of *Die Meistersinger*," 46.

the Third act, with the contrast between his fantastic festal dress and his uneasy movements, occasioned by the drubbing of overnight, and the ridiculous figure he presents in the tournament of song in the last scene, where his absurd unintentional parody of Walther's poem is greeted by the derision of the populace.⁹¹

Much of the purported comedy of *Die Meistersinger* resides in the conduct of Beckmesser, which was invented by Wagner, and in the ridicule of this character. Ellis, Wagner's fan, does not acknowledge the cruelty of the treatment of the character. Once again, however, Ellis could not have possessed certain sensitivities that are now standard. Wagner presented Beckmesser as *provocateur*, as well as buffoon, and Ellis did not probe beyond this level.

Two interpretations of the character of Beckmesser have dominated through the years. He is, in one sense, the caricature of one of Wagner's *bêtes noires*, the critic (in his prose drafts, Wagner named the character "Hanslich"). In Wagner's view, critics were creatively sterile, reactionary, and insistent on rules, forms, and traditions. The other interpretation (which need not contradict the first) sees Beckmesser as a vicious, satirical representation of a Jew. Although apologists have denied this intention, and others have called for some sort of "rehabilitation" of Beckmesser in performance,⁹² the question of anti-Semitism in the portrayal simply will not go away. Wagner makes clear

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹² Dietrich Borchmeyer, *Richard Wagner, Theory and Theatre*, trans. Stewart Spencer (London: Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991), 270-79. Borchmeyer denies the anti-Semitic interpretation entirely, and says that Beckmesser is an old-fashioned pedant, drawn from the *commedia dell'arte*. Dahlhaus does not mention the issue of anti-Semitism at all.

correspondences between Beckmesser's inability to create, or to understand relationships of words and music, and the traits offered in the essay *Das Judentum in der Musik* (1850, reprinted 1869), which the composer had reprinted in the year following the *Meistersinger* premiere. It has been suggested that the deficiencies of "Jewishness in music" are illustrated in Beckmesser's songs.⁹³

Ellis published explicitly anti-Semitic writings in *The Meister*, such as the article by Carl Glasenapp in the first issue and the letter on Schopenhauer from Wagner to August Röckel, both mentioned above, but without commenting one way or another. Ellis did read *Das Judentum in der Musik*, since he dismisses it as a "minor writing" and a "fugitive" essay in his address on Wagner's prose to the Royal Musical Association.⁹⁴ In the context of later writings, such as "*Was ist Deutsch?*" and "*Religion und Kunst*" (the latter of which is included in Ellis's translations of Wagner's prose, and had already appeared in *The Meister* in 1889), Ellis's classification of the essay as "fugitive" is certainly inaccurate: the essay marked the opening volley of Wagner's cultural war, which only became more immoderate with time. It is consistent, however, with Ellis's previous actions always to present Wagner's character in the most positive

⁹³ Marc A. Weiner, in *Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) and Barry Millington, in "Nuremberg Trial: Is there Anti-Semitism in *Die Meistersinger*?" *Cambridge Opera Journal* (March 1993), 247-60, argue strenuously that Beckmesser is an anti-Semitic caricature. Millington suggests that Beckmesser's Jewishness is musically depicted. This view has been challenged by Hans-Rudolph Vaget, "Sixtus Beckmesser -- A Jew in the Brambles?," *Opera Quarterly* 12 (Autumn 1995), 35-45; and in a new book by Michael Tanner.

⁹⁴ Ellis, "Wagner's Prose," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 19th session, 1892-93 (December 13, 1892), 13-30; subsequent discussion, 30-33.

possible light. Ellis found nothing to trouble him in these essays. For him, there was nothing wrong with the idea of nationalism; in his world-view, it was a benign value, and simply did not necessarily involve aggression.

Ellis displays all his trusting devotion in his *Meistersinger* essay. This article most directly communicates his belief that Wagner's works held universal moral benefit for all humanity. He is enthralled that Wagner could also accomplish this through comedy.

"The *Lohengrin* Drama"

The essay on *Lohengrin*⁹⁵ in 1894 was Ellis's last extended critique of one of the operas (the piece on the *Ring* from 1895 is an examination of Wagner's pre- and post-Schopenhauerian conceptions of the narrative). By contrast with his other writings on the operas, the *Lohengrin* essay is down-to-earth, relatively free of occult references, and without any exuberant excess. Perhaps he really did not find *Lohengrin* very exciting. He concentrates on the German sources of the *Lohengrin* legend (literary and otherwise), and on the idea of it standing as "an authentic myth of the people" (or "völkisch," as Wagner would have had it); there is barely a mention of the music.

It is the fashion nowadays to treat *Lohengrin* as an un-Wagnerian work of Wagner's, to exclude it – together with its predecessors – from the articles of one's faith, if one is a professing Wagnerite; to admit it as just within the limits of toleration, if one is not – well, the following quotation from Mr. J. F. Rowbotham's singularly infelicitous prophecy in the *Nineteenth Century* of October 1888 shall

⁹⁵ Ellis, "The *Lohengrin* Drama," *The Meister* 7 (1894).

explain:

“But the bubble has at last burst, and in a few years time, except the little opera *Lohengrin*, there will be no tongue left to call attention to the high and inflated pretensions which it has been the object of these pages to describe.”

Lohengrin is one of those intrinsically simple masterworks, which, mutilate as you will, you can never rob of their direct appeal to the heart. In fact, at this moment it would be difficult to name another drama -- not even *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and Goethe's *Faust* -- which has become so completely a possession of all the people, all classes, throughout the civilised world.⁹⁶

Ellis's conception of the “civilized” world may been slightly different from that of many of his fellow Londoners, as it included German-speaking nations, and other English-speaking ones. *Lohengrin* (1850) had been in the English operatic repertory for a longer time than any of Wagner's other works, with the exception of *Der fliegende Holländer*,⁹⁷ just over twenty years by the time of Ellis's writing. In the United States, *Lohengrin* had been performed since 1871. The Metropolitan, the most prominent opera theater in the latter country, mounted Wagner performances through the 1880s and '90s that were favorably compared to Bayreuth's.⁹⁸

The situation in France was more complicated. Wagner was the object of intense love and hatred in France. The story of the Parisian *Tannhäuser* debacle of 1861 is well

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁹⁷ *Lohengrin* was first heard in England in a concert performance in 1873, and first staged at Covent Garden in 1875.

⁹⁸ Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) is now the definitive study of Wagner's impact on American culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

known. Anti-Wagnerian feelings in France were stirred by the Franco-Prussian War (1871), and Wagner himself fanned the flames with his unbelievably tasteless satire, *Eine Kapitulation: Lustspiel in antiker Manier* (1870), in which he cruelly ridiculed the Parisians under the German siege. Wagner never forgot the privations and offenses that he had suffered in France. The French eventually forgave him for his insults, but it took time.

The conductor Charles Lamoureux (1834-99) and the opera manager Léon Carvalho (1825-97) struggled for years to mount *Lohengrin*, strenuously opposed by the press and by powerful nationalist organizations. Carvalho tried to stage *Lohengrin* at the Opéra-Comique in 1885, but was defeated by a vigorous press campaign. In 1887, Lamoureux managed to present only two of his ten planned performances of *Lohengrin* at the Eden Theater, again discouraged by journalistic outcry, as well as by street demonstrations. Lamoureux, whose great ambition was to establish a Wagner opera theater in Paris, finally brought *Lohengrin* to the Paris Opéra in 1891,⁹⁹ a scant three years before Ellis's writing. Ellis's idea of the civilized world seems therefore not to include France. It is my impression that rather than *Lohengrin* having become a "possession of all the people . . . throughout the civilised world," Ellis's conception of the civilized world included only those countries which accepted Wagner.

Other writings on the operas appearing in *The Meister* include an unsigned, strictly Schopenhauerian essay on *Tristan und Isolde* (possibly by Ellis, or another

⁹⁹ Elaine Brody, *Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope, 1870-1925* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1987), 48-59.

resident Schopenhauer expert); translations into English of parts of *Tristan und Isolde* by a poet named Alfred Forman; and Ellis's crisply written, amusing account of his research on sources for *Der fliegende Holländer*.

David Cormack begins his biographical article on Ellis thusly: "Poor William Ashton Ellis." Michael Tanner, in his recent book, *Wagner*, writes:

First a bit about Wagner's own writings. As I pointed out in the text, though they are often illuminating they are also verbose and frequently obscure. That is the case in the original, and is only compounded in the English version of the complete Prose works (more or less), at present being reprinted in paperback. This translation, made by the bizarre William Aston Ellis, is into a language only remotely related to English as anybody else knows it. . . .¹⁰⁰

Ellis has received criticism from some Wagner scholars, and is regarded with a kind of exasperated affection by others. There is a Victorian quaintness about his writing, and his hero-worship can be displeasing to the modern scholar, raised on a diet of objectivity. Yet Shaw, who often criticized Ellis for fanaticism, also wrote:

We now have a translation which is . . . an eminent addition to our literature; but that is not because its author, Mr. Ashton Ellis, knows the German dictionary better than his predecessors. He is simply in possession of Wagner's ideas, which were to them inconceivable.¹⁰¹

In addition to his translations and Wagner biography, Ellis left us an important historical document in *The Meister*. Of Ellis's Wagner biography, George Buelow has written: "Ellis actually makes us witnesses to at least a little of the passionate enthusiasm for

¹⁰⁰ Michael Tanner, *Wagner* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 222.

¹⁰¹ Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Niblung's Ring*, 4th edition (London: Constable 1923; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967), xix-xx.

Wagner so many felt in those days."¹⁰² *The Meister* makes us witnesses to much more than a little of this enthusiasm.

¹⁰² George Buelow, introduction to *The Life of Richard Wagner*, 6 vols., by William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900-06; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1977) [vols. 1-3 are translated from Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, *Das Leben Richard Wagners* vols. 1 and 2], IX.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

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Wagner was an artist of overwhelming importance both for his time and ever since. From the 1860s until after his death in 1883, he drew the attention of Europe to an unprecedented and unsurpassed degree. Although obscure in England at the time of his first visit in 1855, within ten years he became a topic of curiosity, then furious controversy in the English music journals. Debate about Wagner filled the editorial columns and the letters to the editor, even though not much of his music had yet been performed in England.

In this concluding discussion, I will address a number of issues. First I will examine the relationships between the four writers and their critical perspectives. Then I will briefly review Wagner reception in England after *The Meister* and the phenomenon of Wagnerism. In the 1890s, when Wagner's works were accepted and applauded, George Bernard Shaw challenged Wagnerians about their performance and interpretation. Lastly I will discuss the positions of Shaw and Ernest Newman as dominant figures in English Wagner reception, *vis-à-vis* these four earlier writers.

The four writers studied in this volume – Davison, Bennett, Hueffer, and Ellis -- led the discussion of Wagner. They were among the most influential by virtue of professional position, historical placement (they were there first), and approach (whether

through devotion, diligence, or productivity). Without access either to frequent performances of Wagner, or benefit of an accumulated body of interpretation and analysis, they recognized that Wagner was an artist of revolutionary importance. They made him a talking point for artistically minded Britons and steered the debate. Each made a meaningful and distinct contribution to Wagner's early reception in England. Davison's reactionary stance did much to make Wagner *persona non grata* in London theaters, but he also made Wagner a "hot topic" and an object of curiosity. His later imprimatur on the *Ring* must have encouraged cautious bourgeois audiences. Bennett and Hueffer each filled crucial gaps in the arguments, and sought to make the debate an informed one. Finally, as Wagner was becoming established in England, Ellis introduced the metaphysical content of his works into the discussion, in addition to providing English readers with direct access to Wagner's thoughts and ideas.

Davison, Bennett, and Hueffer each arrived upon much the same English musical world: a concert repertory dominated by a succession of composers from Beethoven¹ to Mendelssohn, and an operatic repertory dominated by Italian and French composers. By the time their careers were over, Wagner was standard in both repertories.

During these four writers' lives, Wagner electrified the artistic atmosphere, even where his music was not being performed. Looking through the correspondence and editorial columns of English music journals in the 1860s, one sees the many letters and essays about Wagner -- pro and con, sophisticated and naive, genteel and blustering. The realization that no complete work of Wagner's had yet been heard in England may

¹ At least the symphonic works; the chamber and solo piano music was still little known.

therefore come as something of a shock. Both the curious and the indignant waited with interest, then excitement, for what would happen next. The editors of the *Musical Times* and other journals impatiently called for the London opera producers to stage a Wagner opera, so that the English public could judge for themselves.

By the time the *Ring* was performed at Bayreuth in 1876, three of Wagner's operas had been fully staged in England. These works -- the *Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*-- were, of course, not exemplars of Wagnerian music drama. They bore the stigma of Wagner's revolutionary writings, however, because they came from the years of Wagner's more important prose works, and the Weimar premiere of *Lohengrin* was directed by Liszt, who, with Wagner, represented outrageous *avant-gardisme* at the time.² When they were finally performed in England, driven by the massive interest in the *Ring*, they were more than twenty years old.

Though Wagner's artistic pronouncements bewildered and provoked, and his remarks on contemporary artists offended, his audacity in producing the *Ring* proved irresistible. While some relished the prospect of a disaster of proportions that could already be called Wagnerian, and others confidently expected a masterpiece, everyone with an interest in music was firmly focused upon Bayreuth. When it was over, Davison truthfully called it "an undertaking which has been incessantly talked about for upwards of a quarter of a century."³ Davison, Bennett, and Hueffer undoubtedly *did* talk about it,

² After Davison's resistance collapsed in the face of the *Ring*, and though he even waxed rhapsodic over *Tristan*, he still abhorred *Lohengrin*, probably because it dated from the days of those writings of Wagner that Davison could least abide.

³ Davison, "The Wagner Festival" *The Times* (August 26, 1876), 525.

before the event, while at Bayreuth, and afterwards. Yet each reacted to the experience differently.

An Evolution of English Criticism of Wagner

The four critics' reception of Wagner appears to fall into a chronologically ordered pattern that shows a (perhaps) predictable progression from rejection to acceptance and embrace. The two older critics, Davison and Bennett, were the least sympathetic. Davison, born in 1813, reacted with bitter animosity for many years before his uneasy truce with Wagner at the 1876 *Ring*. Bennett, born in 1831, remained unsettled. Following Davison by a generation, Hueffer (b.1842) and Ellis (b.1852) were Wagner's wholehearted supporters. Acceptance of Wagner in England, as in the case of any provocative artist, involved the passage of time. Those born "too early" will be more likely to reject the artist, while those born later will be more likely to be accepting for a host of reasons: historical, cultural, educational, technological, and psychological.⁴

Davison's writings also partially confirm an expectation that exposure to new and unfamiliar artistic styles over an extended length of time may enhance tolerance and acceptance of the new style. It is difficult to ascertain what changes time would have effected upon Hueffer's and Ellis's views, because Hueffer did not live long enough to see other radical changes in musical style, and Ellis confined himself to Wagner.

Nevertheless, when we thoroughly examine Davison's and Bennett's writings over the

⁴ We need look no further than the divergent musical tastes of parents and children for unscientific confirmation.

length of their careers, we find that the idea of a straight line of progression from rejection to acceptance is probably fallacious, except in the broadest sense.

Criticism, moreover, like the very art it examines, has its “Apollonian” and “Dionysian” aspects, its rational and irrational sides. We tend to agree with Nietzsche that Wagner was a “Dionysian” artist, and we associate Wagner with extreme engagement of the emotions, both in the experience of his art and in its discussion. For the critic there were rational and irrational ways of expressing reaction, whether positive or negative. Davison, for example, was a man whose tastes ran to “Apollonian,” classicizing art, but his mode of expression, and perhaps his inner experience of music, was vehement and explosive. Hueffer, on the other hand, loved modern music, but he wrote in a manner that carefully emphasized the qualities of form and internal logic, which seemed lacking to more conservative ears.

Temperamental resemblances across lines of opposition can be more interesting than those among allies in the Wagner wars. Joseph Bennett had little of Francis Hueffer’s flair or multidisciplinary learning, but each applied objective values to his criticism, and based his inquiries on direct reference to Wagner’s written work. Hueffer was clearly an enthusiast, wishing to spread his enthusiasm, but he rarely allowed sheer passion to drive his writing. While promoting and defending Wagner, he avoided the heat of journalistic battle, using a temperate tone to reply to critics. Bennett, while not supporting Wagner, proposed to dispel conflict through presenting Wagner’s aims as explained by Wagner himself. Each wanted direct reference to Wagner’s own words to dispel the confusion and outrage generated by hearsay and second-hand accounts.

Davison, the famous and powerful critic, and Ellis, the humble laborer in Wagner's service, resemble each other in a strange and intriguing way. Ellis wore his irrationality so proudly, it needs little discussion. Ordinarily mild-mannered, he fought fiercely for Wagner when he felt the necessity. Davison represented the mainstream as it existed for most of the century, but he also evinced the vulnerability of reception to irrational forces.

In his memoir, Davison's son described the great range of the *Times* critic's influence; not only was he the leader of the London music press, but the *Times* was also read "by most of American and European society."

The *Times* in those days, read by everybody who was anybody, was indeed a power in art as in politics. Who spoke through it might be heard by the whole English public, by most of American and European society, through perhaps a million readers. . . . To quote the words Richard Wagner used when referring in 1869, to the *Times* of 1855: "Just reflect how colossal and universal is the paper of which I am speaking." The power of the journalist is that of advertisement. He can focus general attention, to do which with care and ability from the point of vantage afforded by such a paper as the *Times* was to be a councillor and officer in the government of Art, to protect, encourage or repress; one whose assistance is scarcely less valuable to the artist that has obtained a position in the public view than to him that has not yet emerged from obscurity. For, though merit is self-luminous, its recognition may be hastened or indefinitely retarded by the man on the look-out.⁵

In addition to -- or as a result of -- his position at the *Times* and the *Musical World*, Davison was at the center of a complex social network. He loved music and

⁵ Henry Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 65.

journalism, but he craved spending time with musicians and journalists at least as much. Ernest Newman considered Davison too friendly with too many musicians for optimal critical distance.⁶ His insistence upon reviewing Arabella Goddard's concerts would certainly be considered highly inappropriate today. Davison's friendships and animosities with musicians had widespread consequences not only in what he himself published in the *Times* and *Musical World* but also in his personal relationships with press colleagues.

The extent of Davison's influence was only half the story; his artistic conservatism, while of legitimate value, was inextricably connected to a touchiness and defensiveness. As did Ellis, he had an emotionally-based assurance of his correctness. He lived in a time of artistic ferment; as Ernest Newman wrote:

... there was a vague sense in the minds of many that music was taking a new direction, that the old values were being questioned, that the new values were as yet dubious, and that the flamboyant Liszt and his hot-headed young Weimar disciples were beginning to be a danger to "classical" art.⁷

Davison's wit and humor lent his criticism an illusion of distance and masked the emotional tension in his resistance to *avant-garde* art. He had a sense of "barbarians at the gate." For him, Mendelssohn personified the best artistic values; to insult Mendelssohn was to attack those very values. Thus Davison never forgave Chopin (who himself

⁶ Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner* 4 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943-47), 467.

⁷ *Ibid.*

disdained “modernism”) for his insult to Mendelssohn (see chapter 1 above). In this respect, Wagner was the greatest sinner of all. Hueffer wrote in 1855 that any hope of Wagner succeeding in England was “snuffed out by an article. That article, perhaps I should say that series of articles, appeared in *The Times* newspaper.” Of course it was the work of Davison. Hueffer continues,

The historical importance of this indictment, which deserved quotation as an authentic expression of critical opinion of the time, is increased by the fact that it seems to have served as a watchword to the remainder of the press. The opinion of *The Times* was echoed by the other papers.⁸

Today we have so ingrained a heritage of venerating objectivity that we may find it disturbing to consider the *personal* nature of Davison’s criticism, which was amplified through the wide circulation of his writings, and his extensive network of friendships in both the journalistic and musical communities. Davison’s influence in that network was probably a significant factor in the absence of Wagner performances in England through the 1860s. Yet in being so provoked, Davison was instrumental in establishing Wagner’s notoriety in England; and this made Wagner all the more celebrated after the watershed year of 1876.

⁸ Hueffer, *Half a Century of Music in England*, 56-57.

After *The Meister*

Wagnerism

Ironically, the most eccentric of these writers has had the most influence on our own time, through his unfinished Wagner biography, and through his English translations of Wagner's writings. Ellis occupied the territory between the introduction of Wagner in England and English acceptance, even embrace, of him. Proudly, Ellis considered himself the first truly *English* Wagnerian, when the terms "Wagnerian" and "Wagnerite" were acquiring significance beyond a mere liking for Wagner's music. Whether he was first may be debatable, but Ellis was certainly the epitome of English Wagnerism, and *The Meister* was its manual.

"Wagnerism" is difficult to define. Most writings I have found about Wagnerism proffer more of a description than a definition, probably because the phenomenon was elusive and varied from culture to culture. This discussion, by Erwin Koppen, aims to cover all bases:

First, Wagnerism is a predominantly *extramusical* form of Wagner reception. Wagner exerted a more extensive extramusical influence than any composer before or after him. His impact was greater on contemporary literature, on aesthetic theory, on facets of philosophical and political thought – albeit to a lesser extent – on the plastic arts than it was, in fact, on contemporary music. This is especially true of France, less so of Germany, England and Italy.

Second, Wagnerism differs from pure Wagner worship not so much in the sense that it is a more thoughtful and informed response to Wagner's art (Wagnerism does not exclude ignorance of entire areas of his work) but by the sense that his work becomes linked, frequently in an idiosyncratic fashion, to particular spiritual, literary, and

other currents and conceptions, and is held to constitute the very basis and justification. Quite regularly, certain programs and ideologies are projected onto Wagner. (A similar tendency informs to a considerable degree those attempts, which can be observed in Germany, to make Wagner the symbol of nationalist, indeed fascist ideologies; in fact, however, neither at that time nor nowadays do such ideologies form part of the concept of Wagnerism, but rather constitute a different and quite separate chapter).

Third, the notion of Wagnerism refers to a phenomenon that has acquired historical contours. Its beginnings go back to the 1860's; it reached its heyday in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, and gradually subsided in the years leading up to the First World War. By the end of the war it was already felt to be part of history – and herein resides the contrast with Wagner worship, which operates without any sense of historical delimitation.⁹

In *The First Hundred Years of Wagner's Tristan*, Elliot Zuckerman discusses “Wagnerism” as having two principal strains, “Wagnerism” and “Tristanism.”¹⁰ “Wagnerism” is the philosophical embrace of ideas culled from Wagner’s “ambiguous prose, and requiring little direct experience of the music,” as Anne Dzamba Sessa puts it.¹¹ “Tristanism” emanates from the listener’s direct emotional response to the music, and it is apolitical (although it is still commonly believed that Wagner’s more unsavory doctrines are “encoded” in the music itself, and secretly communicated to the listener¹²).

⁹ Erwin Koppen, “Wagnerism as Concept and Phenomenon,” transl. Erika and Martin Swales, in *Wagner Handbook*, 343–44.

¹⁰ Elliot Zuckerman, *The First Hundred Years of Wagner's Tristan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 30.

¹¹ Sessa, “At Wagner’s Shrine: British and American Wagnerians,” in *Wagnerism in European Ideas and Politics*, 271.

¹² See, for example, a letter to the Arts and Leisure Section of the *New York Times*, July 10, 1994, from Gavin Borchert of Cincinnati: “. . . However, it seems as if Ives . . .

“The Wagnerite must learn theories and cultivate habits. The Tristanite needs only to be overwhelmed.”¹³ Although there is truth in both definitions, each probably undervalues the role of music in the “Wagnerian” experience.

It still may be easier to understand Wagnerism through its records, such as *The Meister*, than through secondary definitions. After examining such records, I would define “Wagnerism” as the engagement of Wagner’s art as something beyond art, as a phenomenon with significance extending into various areas of life: it is the perception of Wagner as more than a composer of operas, but as a kind of teacher (or prophet) of aesthetics, history, heritage, philosophy; of where we have come from and where we might be going. Wagnerism could – and often did – involve elements of spirituality distilled into a quasi-religion.

Paradoxically, Wagnerism began in France, where Wagner’s music was most resisted by the public. The French brand of Wagnerism originated among poets who were attracted to a Wagnerian aesthetic and mode of expression, and knew little of his music.¹⁴ Wagnerism then spread over the written and visual arts throughout Europe and in England. I believe it is inaccurate, however, to dismiss a strong musical component in Wagnerism as it developed. The phenomenon was differently felt and expressed in various parts of Europe and the United States, and its nature changed in France itself as

intentionally encoded his homophobia in the harmonic clashes of his music, as surely as Wagner encoded his anti-Semitism in Siegfried’s heroic Aryan leitmotifs in the *Ring*.”

¹³ Zuckerman, *The First Hundred Years of Wagner’s *Tristan**, 30.

¹⁴ The foremost among them was Charles Baudelaire (1821-67).

Wagner attained more general acceptance by musicians and the public. More often than not, the personal experience of the music was the touchstone of artistic and spiritual associations. Aural sensation was powerfully extrapolated to the perception of philosophical and spiritual systems.

In her studies on English and American Wagnerians, Sessa refers to an “altered state of consciousness”¹⁵ in response to Wagner’s music, or at least emotional reactions of the most profound character. We have the testimony of many witnesses to confirm the widespread nature of this sensation. Thomas Mann (1875-1955) described his “hours of deep and solitary happiness. . . hours filled with *frissons* and delights for the nerves and intellect alike. . . .”¹⁶ Shaw wrote, “. . . the music begins to stir within you and haunt you with a growing urgency that in a few days makes another hearing seem a necessity of life.”¹⁷ The hardheaded Mark Twain, who did not love most of Wagner’s music, confessed to being “driven mad with ignorant delight” by *Tannhäuser*.¹⁸

Many Wagnerians responded with tears. In Munich to attend *Tristan*, Chabrier sobbed, “after 17 years, that open A in the cellos!”¹⁹ As for Hans Richter, Ellis de-

¹⁵ Sessa, “At Wagner’s Shrine: British and American Wagnerians,” 271.

¹⁶ Thomas Mann, “Die Leiden und Grosse Richard Wagners,” translated as “The Sorrows and Greatness of Richard Wagner,” in *Thomas Mann: Pro and Contra Wagner*, transl. Allan Blunden (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1985), 100.

¹⁷ Shaw, 7 August 1889, *London Music in 1888-89 as Heard by Corno di Bassetto*, 194.

¹⁸ Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens), “At the Shrine of St. Wagner,” in *Collected Essays of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 64.

¹⁹ Cited in Rollo Myers, *Emmanuel Chabrier and His Circle* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), 26.

scribed him as “weeping like a child”²⁰ at a performance of *Tannhäuser*. In 1894, Fauré wrote to Marguerite Baugnies:

If one has not heard Wagner at Bayreuth, one has heard nothing! Take lots of handkerchiefs because you will cry a great deal! Also take a sedative because you will be exalted to the point of delirium.²¹

These sometimes unhinged states strike one as resembling those induced by intensive prayer or meditation (or ingestion of drugs). Religious rituals have always used the power of music and other sensory stimuli to facilitate these states in worshipers. Attending the music drama offered a communal experience akin to church worship, in a rarefied atmosphere where the attendants (or communicants) have a shared purpose. In combination with what could be considered a written philosophical canon left by a departed prophet, these activities provided much to capture the imaginations of late nineteenth-century seekers of philosophical, spiritual, or artistic truths.

The self-appointed guardians of Wagner’s heritage continually emphasized the centrality of the *Festspielhaus* in the *Bayreuther Blätter*,²² in language that consciously

²⁰ “Well, this giant among pigmies, this man who must have conducted *Tannhäuser* several hundred times, was sitting near me at the performance of August 17th. I never saw a man so moved by any work. He will forgive me, I hope, for letting out the secret that he was *weeping* like a child. . . .” Ellis, “Report from Bayreuth,” *Musical News* (August 19, 1892), 196.

²¹ Cited in Philippe Fauré-Fremiet, *Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1957), 66.

²² See David C. Large, “The Bayreuth Legacy,” in *The Wagner Compendium: A Guide to Wagner’s Life and Music*, 389-92; “Wagner’s Bayreuth Disciples,” in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, 72-133.

alluded to a shrine.²³ The original reasons for this were rooted in the mundane. In 1883, the festival was in debt, and many did not relish the trip to Bayreuth, when Munich, for example, was far more accessible and could afford to mount more opulent productions. Bayreuth's distance from urban and industrialized places had to be viewed not merely as an inconvenience, but as underscoring the festival's difference from everyday life, "the negation of modern materialist and cosmopolitan civilization."²⁴ Distinct from the everyday art that is just diversion or entertainment, the works, as performed at Bayreuth, were not merely models or even ideals which could be imitated elsewhere, but held to be separate and transcendent -- the center of life itself. William Ashton Ellis's essays in *The Meister* reflected this sense of awe, providing a kind of devout "testimony." Hans von Wolzogen, the most ideological of Wagner's Bayreuth followers, wrote ecstatically:

"... with these divine harmonies, the heavenly spirit of love at once seizes the stirred hearts of the listeners, who are lifted upwards toward the divine source of the pronouncement."²⁵ H. S. Chamberlain agreed: "... Wolzogen, whom I used to laugh at, states the simple truth. . . . Yes, bourn upwards, that is the term; you feel as if you were being

²³ For a decidedly anti-Wagnerian view of the Festival, see Peter Gay, *The Tender Passion*, 267-70. Gay quotes a merciless letter from Brahms's friend, Elisabeth von Herzogenberg (1847-92).

²⁴ Geoffrey Field, *The Evangelist of Race: The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 140.

²⁵ Wolzogen, quoted by Chamberlain in a letter to Harriet Chamberlain, July 31, 1882. Chamberlain *Nachlass*, Richard Wagner Gedenkstätte, Bayreuth. This, like many of Wolzogen's other pronouncements, reads almost like an advertising slogan.

carried up to the heavens on angels' wings." ²⁶

This sensation of musical "Tristanism" appears to have been an important *entrée* to the so-called "Wagnerist" philosophy,²⁷ and the two tendencies certainly existed at once in the same person, although in different proportions. Ellis wrote of the transporting effects of the performance itself, and how that experience held the key to understanding. Shaw blasted Wahnfried and the London Branch of the Wagner Society, with his usual dose of common sense, but readily confessed his ecstatic personal response to the music.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

In 1889 George Bernard Shaw wrote:

And now – now that it is not merely a question of whether he or Offenbach is the more melodious, but of whether he is to be accepted as the Luther of a new Reformation, the Plato of a new philosophy, the Messiah who is to redeem the fall and lead us back to the Garden of Eden, now that the temple is up and the worshipers assembled, now that we are face to face with pretensions for "The Master" in comparison with which the old simple claim to rank as an artist and man of genius was a mere joke, dare we pick up our weapons and resume the fight?

... I picked up a score of *Lohengrin*; and before I had taken in ten bars of the prelude, I was a confirmed Wagnerite in the sense the term then bore, which committed me to nothing further than greatly relishing Wagner's music. What it commits a man to now, Omniscience only knows. Vegetarianism, the higher Buddhism, Christianity divested

²⁶ Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *ibid*.

²⁷ Zuckerman, *The First Hundred Years of Wagner's Tristan*, 30: "... an infatuation with the music could lead to a pondering of the myth."

of its allegorical trappings (I suspect this is a heterodox variety), belief in a Fall of Man brought about by some cataclysm which starved him into eating flesh, negation of the Will-to-Live and consequent Redemption through compassion excited by suffering . . . all these are but samples of what Wagnerism involves nowadays.²⁸

By the nineties, when Bernard Shaw wrote his major critical work on the *Ring*, and Ernest Newman began his critical and journalistic career, Wagner's works were largely unquestioned as operatic and concert repertory. The stage, visual arts, and literature were all flaunting Wagnerian influences. The notoriously tough nut of French acceptance on the stage had finally been cracked.²⁹

Shaw contributed weekly columns on music to the *Star* in 1888-89 (under the name "Corno di Bassetto") and the *World* from 1890 to 1894. His critiques of Wagner performances in London and Bayreuth throughout the nineties were penetrating and merciless; his criticisms, even at their harshest, were a kind of "tough love." He questioned the necessity of a single Wagnerian temple and insisted that a Wagnerian theater in London was needed to rescue Wagner from his Bayreuth heirs (Ellis, who gloried in Wagner's dominance in the nineties, suggested that both London and Bayreuth performances offered valuable and unique advantages). "The whole tendency to make Bayreuth an Occidental Mecca should be resisted tooth and nail in England," Shaw

²⁸ Shaw, "Bayreuth and Back," in *How to Become a Musical Critic* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1961), 147.

²⁹ Many French artists, writers, and musicians had long admired Wagner, but the public and the press rejected him because of his anti-French posturing. After the 1861 *Tannhäuser* debacle, no Wagner work was successfully staged in France until *Lohengrin* in 1891. See chapter 5.

wrote.³⁰

His work was important, as Ernest Newman's would later be, because he perceived that the excessively adoring and reverent brand of Wagnerism actually posed a threat to the future of Wagner performance. Shaw's sharp remarks were an astringent counterpoint to the mystical Wagnerism typified by Ellis's *The Meister. The Perfect Wagnerite*, Shaw's interpretation of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, appeared in 1898, a scant two years before the turn of the century. Here Shaw articulated both the ideological underpinning of his artistic appraisals, and the opposition of progressive and reactionary politics implied in his criticism of Bayreuth.

Although a gifted critic, Shaw was not cut out to spend his life on other peoples' work. He himself was a creative artist of marked individuality, and intense convictions, often masked by the quick and easy humor of his shorter writings. *The Perfect Wagnerite* is a Shavian manifesto, perhaps better titled *Wagner, the Perfect Shavian*. Slonimsky characterizes this famous work as "a highly individual socialistic interpretation of the *Ring of the Nibelungs*."³¹ In his essay on Wagnerism, Koppen writes, "Shaw uses his reading of the *Ring* . . . to put forward his own analysis of contemporary society."³²

As a *major* statement of a *major* voice on the *major* work of another *major* artist, however, *The Perfect Wagnerite* tends to obscure Shaw's own earlier, excellent journal-

³⁰ Shaw, 6 September 1889, in *London Music in 1888-89*, 218.

³¹ Nicolas Slonimsky, "George Bernard Shaw," in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 8th ed. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 1694.

³² Erwin Koppen, "Wagnerism as Concept and Phenomenon," in *Wagner Handbook*, 352.

istic work on Wagner's behalf.

While Shaw's work brought English Wagnerian argument to the twentieth century,³³ his influence was eclipsed by Ernest Newman, whose contribution to Wagner reception has shaped the thinking of virtually everyone who has followed him, and obscured virtually everyone who had preceded him.

³³ Further reading on George Bernard Shaw:

Elsie Bonita Adams, *Bernard Shaw and the Aesthetes* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1971); Hans Peter Breuer, "Form and Feeling: George Bernard Shaw as Music Critic," *Journal of Irish Literature* 11, no. 3 (September 1982), 74-102; Nancy Cirillo, *The Poet Arm'd: Wagner, D'Annunzio, Shaw* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1968); Deryck Cooke, *I Saw the World End* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 15-25, 269-71; Anthony Gibbs, *The Art and Mind of Shaw: Essays in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1983); Nicholas Grene, *Bernard Shaw: A Critical View* (London: Macmillan, 1984); Janice Henson, "Shaw's Contribution to the Wagner Controversy," *The Shaw Review* 4, no. 1 (January 1961), 21-26; William Irvine, *The Universe of G. B. S.* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1968); "G. B. Shaw's Musical Criticism," *Musical Quarterly* 30 (July 1946), 319-32; *Shaw: A Critical Survey*, ed. Louis Kronenburger. (New York: World Publishing, 1953); Richard Nickson, "The Perfect Wagnerite? Wagner and His Shavian Advocate," *The Independent-Shavian* 28 no. 3 (1990), 51-61; Thomas D. O'Sullivan, "The Perfect Wagnerite: Shaw's Reading of the Ring," *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)* 30 (1987), 39-47; L. J. Rather, *The Dream of Self-Destruction: Wagner's Ring in the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 149-67; Anne Dzamba Sessa, *Richard Wagner and the English* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1979), 50-65; *The Shavian* (journal); George Bernard Shaw, *How to Become a Musical Critic*, ed. with an introduction by Dan H. Laurence (New York: Da Capo Press, 1978; reprinted from London: Society of Authors, 1961); *London Music as Heard in 1888 by Corno di Bassetto, Later Known as Bernard Shaw, with Some Further Autobiographical Particulars* (New York: Vienna House, 1973; reprinted from London: Dodd, Mead, 1937); *Music in London 1890-1894: Criticisms Contributed Week by Week to the World*, 3 vols. (New York: Vienna House, 1973; reprinted from London: The Society of Authors, 1958); *The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on The Niblung's Ring* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967; reprinted from 4th ed., London: Constable, 1923); Robert F. Whitman, *Shaw and the Play of Ideas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

Ernest Newman (William Roberts) (1865-1959)

Newman was born in Lancashire, and belonged to a younger generation than the four writers of this study.³⁴ Like Davison, Bennett, and Hueffer, he made his living as a newspaperman. He was active in the northern cities of Manchester (the *Guardian*) and Birmingham. It was not until 1920 that he began his career in London, as a music critic for the *Observer*. His primary position was as a regular columnist for the London *Sunday Times*, where he remained from his engagement in 1923 until 1955.

In some of his earliest writings, Newman made up in outright eccentricity for what was lacking in his magisterial four-volume Wagner biography.³⁵ As Newman would later treat Ellis with some disdain, one can easily imagine the strait-laced Ellis's reaction to such writings as this excerpt from an article in the *New Quarterly Musical Review* of 1893:

Fully half of the great music that is written . . . is erotic in nature, the product of an esurient desire in the composer. The man predisposed to erethism who listens to such music of this kind is likely to undergo unconscious metamorphoses of emotion – silent accretions of weakening and degrading sensualism and imperceptible slipping-away of the firmer soul.³⁶

³⁴ William Roberts was the writer's real name; he took the pseudonym Ernest Newman to indicate that he was an "earnest new man."

³⁵ Although I will discuss Newman's four-volume Wagner biography, which is by far the most influential work, he also published a short biography, *A Study of Wagner*, in 1899, which was characteristic of his eccentric earlier writings, and *Wagner as Man and Artist*, in 1914. Stewart Spencer calls these books "frivolous, philistine." "Wagner Literature: Biographies," in *The Wagner Compendium*, 402.

³⁶ Ernest Newman, "The Culture of the Emotions," *The New Quarterly Musical Review* 2 (August 1893), 60.

Newman is considered a light of objectivity in Wagner biography and scholarship, but he had a decidedly un-Apollonian tendency to equate disagreement with his views with mental incapacity. We see this in one early piece, in which he wrote of the near-futility of music criticism, and its essential uselessness to audiences:³⁷ “What reasonable hope is there for scientific criticism of music when you compare such disparate judgements on Wagner’s music as those of Chorley, Hueffer, Macfarren, Hullah,³⁸ Gurney,³⁹ and Naumann?”⁴⁰ There is no certainty in judgments of music -- no objectivity, writes Newman.

When a man sees no melody in *Tannhäuser* or *Lohengrin*, and another sees the most beautiful and expressive melody on every page, how can we ever hope for certainty in judgements of music? Is it not only too evident that men always have criticised music from the standpoint of their own individual temperament, and that Macfarren’s judgement of Wagner being just as valid for his organism as Hueffer’s opinion was for his, no amount of reasoning would ever change the opinion of either?⁴¹

³⁷ It is an interesting commentary on the man that he joined, and eventually was a leader of, a profession which he considered “useless” and “futile.”

³⁸ John Pyke Hullah (1812-84): English composer and organist; greatly influential in the teaching of singing. He took an anti-Wagner position.

³⁹ Edmund Gurney (1847-88): English theorist with a taste for the metaphysical; author of *The Power of Sound* (1880).

⁴⁰ Emil Naumann (1827-88): German music scholar and Mendelssohnian composer, opponent of Wagner.

⁴¹ Ernest Newman, “The Difficulties of Musical Criticism,” *The New Quarterly Musical Review* 7 (November, 1894), 110.

For Newman, the explanation for Hullah's and Macfarren's resistance to Wagner resides in their *mental incapacity*; Wagner's music is simply beyond them. "[Hullah] could only think in orderly relations of melodies of a certain degree of complexity," while Macfarren was "a man of too small intelligence vainly struggling to comprehend a system too vast and too complex for him."⁴² What suggestion could be more inflammatory? Many years later, as we shall see, Newman turned his sights upon Davison in a chapter of his Wagner biography entitled "The London Inferno."

While distilling much nineteenth-century English reception of Wagner, Newman must partially obstruct our view both of Wagner and of his critics. He had in common with many Wagner commentators a desire to correct the errors of his predecessors. In his Wagner biography, he comments (at varying length) about each writer I have considered in my own study. Ellis's Wagner biography is one of his sources, and so he continually confronts Ellis, whose major flaw seems to be excessive slavishness to the point of a desire to whitewash. Newman treats Ellis sternly for attempting to minimize Wagner's revolutionary activities in 1848-49. He also indicts Ellis for the inelegance of his writing style and his translations. Hueffer is mentioned in passing as confusing some dates. Newman dismisses Joseph Bennett, whom he judges to be as mentally insignificant as any of Wagner's other detractors. Poor Davison, who probably could have made short work of any opponent while alive, receives the full blast of Newman's scorn:

The nominal head of the profession was J. W. Davison, who, besides being the musical critic of the *Times*, was editor of the *Musical World*. The range of his musical or

⁴² *Ibid.*

general knowledge was on the whole no wider than that of Chorley, though he wrote with a blustering belief in himself and a knockabout comedian's gusto in his journalism. . . . He was undoubtedly on terms of greater intimacy with a number of composers and performers than it was wise for any critic to be, even in those days, when the standard of propriety in these matters was not so high as it is now; but although malice might make capital out of one incident in his career there is no reason to doubt his general honesty. He was of the journalistic type that finds no difficulty in persuading itself that its own rather small intelligence is the measure of all things musical, and therefore regards each of its naïve repulsions as the expression of a taste so pure that God alone could have been the creator of it.⁴³

Newman reduced one of the most powerful music critics in nineteenth-century Europe to a small-minded and vindictive dilettante. A reader or potential scholar relying upon Newman's work could hardly be blamed for not considering these writers worthy of closer examination. Although Newman's biography has been superseded, and its deficiencies in documentary scholarship have been corrected, it was the major English-language source on Wagner's life for the post-war years of the twentieth century. Every English-language Wagner scholar of the next generation stood upon Newman's shoulders.

Nor should we forget that Newman was writing his biography during the Second World War. Newman's own urgent mission was rescuing Wagner's art from the Third Reich for England and the world. Both the near-mystical adoration of Wagner and the canonization of the Wagner Festival had been dangerously subsumed into Nazi ideology. Newman's biography is, most importantly, always a portrait of a human being. Even his

⁴³ Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner* 2, 464.

lively writing style was an indictment of the Nazis' pompous solemnity.

Newman's biography is nonetheless a landmark in Wagner research. . . . Newman's gamble was to desecrate for the first time certain sacred symbols of the Wagnerian gospel: the idea of Liszt as unstinting benefactor and unselfish servant of Wagnerism, of the "mad" King Ludwig, of Cosima as the liberal protector of the Holy Grail, and many others. For Newman the effort of archival labor and scholarly precision paled before the more onerous critical task of undermining an entrenched myth of formidable power. (The task was made more urgent by the falsification and exploitation of Wagner's life and work by the Nazis which gained ground while Newman was at work on his biography). . . . Yet if the monumental scale and intellectual bluster of Newman's biography is unsympathetic to the modern scholar, it is still a work of unshakeable distinction and critical flair which, combined with greater accessibility to, and a more sophisticated handling of, original documents, could point the way to future studies.⁴⁴

So it has. Yet one could have made a similar claim for Ellis's writings, for example. In his introduction to the 1977 reprint of Ellis's biography, George Buelow writes:

Although Ernest Newman, in his own major four-volume life of Wagner gave little credit to Ellis, one needed only to compare the parallel sections of the two biographies for the years 1853-1859 to witness how much Newman depended on Ellis. In many instances, Newman's prose reads like a condensed version of Ellis's own work, and Newman does little to disguise his virtual adaptation of Ellis's knowledge and method of presentation. Indeed, one soon realizes that if Ellis had completed his own *Life*, there would no longer have been a need for Newman to write his own Wagner biography.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ John Deathridge, "A Brief History of Wagner Research: Biography," in *Wagner Handbook*, 212

⁴⁵ George Buelow, introduction to *Life of Richard Wagner*, 6 vols., by William Ashton Ellis, vi.

Newman is the starting point for the entire post-World War II generation. We hardly think of him as an exponent of *British Wagner* reception, but simply as “Mr. Wagner.” The only earlier British critical voice about whom we usually think in relationship to Wagner is Shaw’s, particularly for *A Perfect Wagnerite*. In reality, however, Shaw, and especially Newman, are more correctly located as mediating voices between our time and an earlier critical, and even historical process (e.g., Bennett, Hueffer, and Ellis *each* wrote Wagner biographies, and so ventured to control history and future reception) that began while Wagner was alive. Newman censors and minimizes his predecessors, but he needed their work, particularly that of Ellis. Their writings had to undergo his scrutiny in order for him to formulate his version of Wagner’s reception in England, even his version of Wagner’s life. We formulate *our* ideas starting with Newman, who furnished a kind of template. Issues to which Newman gave little consideration probably seemed inconsequential to his readers, who could not have been expected to know of certain issues which he skirted or excluded.

The recent *Wagner Compendium*, for example, is an extremely valuable resource, an international effort drawing heavily upon English scholarship. Oddly, however, English Wagner scholars still seem to take little interest in their own critical “lineage.” This may be an outcome of following Newman’s lead in deciding what is and what is not important in Wagner reception. In any event, the essay on reception has the following to say about Davison and Bennett at Bayreuth:

Toward the end of his career, Davison came to soften his view of Wagner, and indeed he had considerable praise for the *Ring* on its premiere in Bayreuth. So did the *Daily*

Telegraph critic Joseph Bennett who . . . liked most of the music he heard there, especially *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*, which he called “a grand addition to the world’s store of beauty.”⁴⁶

We know that although Davison lavished praise on some aspects of the *Ring*, the very same reviews showed his misgivings. We also know that while Davison seemed to join the Wagner camp during the 1870s, he defected when the pre-*Parsifal* “hype” became too much for him to endure. Furthermore, having read Bennett’s *Ring* critique, we know how much more complicated the matter was for him. Moreover, other studies of *Ring* reception extract remarks from Davison’s and Bennett’s reviews that seem to indicate reactions entirely opposite from those quoted above.

“A few samples of the verdicts rendered by Europe’s *culturati* will suffice to show that there was only one common ingredient in their assessments: extreme partisanship, for or against,” writes David Large in *The Wagner Compendium*.⁴⁷ Yet this is a common oversimplification in Wagner study. The conflicts raging in the musical world were sometimes matched by conflicts within the same mind, which could be both for *and* against. In addition, Wagner’s works were so large and complex, it could hardly be expected that a new listener would like or despise everything about them.

Historians need not characterize Davison’s or Bennett’s reception of the *Ring* as one thing or the other, even when attempting to summarize their views. It is possible to state that these critics were conflicted, ambivalent, and inconsistent in their response to

⁴⁶ Large, “Contemporary Assessments,” in *The Wagner Compendium*, 383.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Wagner; they liked some things about the *Ring* and disliked others.⁴⁸

If Wagner was the central musical figure of the late nineteenth century, with far-reaching consequences in the twentieth century, his reception by such a responsive and articulate audience as nineteenth-century England certainly merits attention. This study represents a limited sample of documentation in a lavishly documented arena. Musicology's recent scrutiny of the interplay between music and society makes examination of this complex and sophisticated musical culture all the more compelling.

⁴⁸ The larger realm of Wagner reception has abundant evidence of ambivalence. Three of the most famously ambivalent were Debussy, Nietzsche, and Mann; all three wrote positive things about Wagner's works, but nobody would think of considering only those in analyzing their relationships to Wagner.

APPENDIX
CHRONOLOGY: WAGNER IN ENGLAND

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- 1813 **[Wilhelm] Richard Wagner** born (May 22), Leipzig.
James William Davison born (October 5), London.
- 1831 **Joseph Bennett** born (November 21), Gloucestershire.
- 1833 First appearance of **Wagner's** name in English press: *Harmonicon* announces Dresden performance of "a symphony by Richard **Wagner**, scarcely twenty years old, which was much and deservedly applauded."
First writings by **Davison** published in the *Musical Examiner*.
- 1836 **Davison**, with William Sterndale Bennett, meets Mendelssohn in Düsseldorf; they are star-struck, and remain devoted Mendelssohnians.
- 1842 Davison joins the *Musical World*. *Musical Examiner* and *Musical World* both report premiere of *Rienzi* in Dresden; **Davison** and Sterndale Bennett make spectacle of themselves, hissing Thalberg at Philharmonic concert.
- 1843 Franz Hüffer (**Francis Hueffer**) born (May 22) in Münster.
- 1846 **Davison** joins the *Times*.
- 1848 **Davison** becomes *Times* music critic.
- 1852 **William Ashton Ellis** born in London.
- 1854 Amateur Musical Society plays "March from *Tannhäuser*" at Hanover Square Rooms, London.
- 1855 **Wagner's** conducting engagement with Philharmonic Society, London; performs his *Tannhäuser* Overture and *Lohengrin* Bridal Music. **Wagner** receives rough treatment from press, especially J. W. Davison of *Times* and *Musical World*.
- 1859 **Davison** marries pianist Arabella Goddard.

- 1868 "Entry of the Mastersingers" from *Die Meistersinger* (1868) premiered by August Manns and the Crystal Palace Orchestra, London.
William Roberts (**Ernest Newman**) born in Lancashire.
- 1869 **Hueffer** awarded doctorate from University of Göttingen, settles in London; writes for *Fortnightly Review*, the *Academy*, and the *Musical World*, and becomes an editor for the two latter journals.
Lohengrin Prelude performed by Philharmonic, London.
- 1870 **Bennett** becomes music critic of the *Daily Telegraph*; he reviews first fully staged performance of a complete **Wagner** opera in England: *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843), or as presented at Drury Lane, *L'Olandese dannato*.
- 1872 **Hueffer** marries Catherine Madox Brown.
- 1873 First London Wagner society formed by Edward Dannreuther; *Tristan* prelude and Isolde's *Liebestod* performed at small concert at Hanover Square Rooms; *Lohengrin* performed in concert version by New Philharmonic.
Arabella Goddard (Mrs. Davison) departs for three-year world tour.
- 1874 **Hueffer** publishes book, *Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future*.
- 1875 *Lohengrin* (1850) staged for first time in England, at Covent Garden, in Italian, with Emma Albani as Elsa.
Hueffer publishes "Richard Wagner and his *Ring of the Niblung*" in the *New Quarterly Magazine*.
- 1876 First Wagner Festival in Bayreuth; three complete *Ring* cycles under Richter.
Bennett, Davison, Hueffer are in attendance.
Ellis admitted to Royal College of Surgeons.
First complete staged *Tannhäuser* (1845) in England, at Covent Garden, in Italian. "Funeral Music" from *Götterdämmerung* played at Covent Garden Promenades.
- 1877 Wagner and Cosima in London for Albert Hall **Wagner** Festival; great popular success, but financial failure. **Bennett, Davison, Hueffer** all present.
Davison sues *Truth* for libel.
- 1878 Wagner Society reconstituted as London Branch of the Wagner Society. **Davison** retires from *Times*; succeeded by **Hueffer**.
Ellis becomes Resident Medical Officer at Western Dispensary.

- 1879 *Rienzi's* (1842) English premiere by Carl Rosa Company (London). English premiere of the *Siegfried Idyll* at the Crystal Palace; Orchestral Festival Concert series begins, featuring **Wagner** and other new music; they become known as "Richter Concerts" and are a great success.
- 1882 English premiere of complete *Ring* cycle at Her Majesty's Theatre, conducted by Anton Seidl; first English *Tristan und Isolde* and *Meistersinger* under Hans Richter, at Drury Lane. **Ellis** takes leave from Dispensary in July and August, perhaps to attend Festival at Bayreuth. First *Parsifal* at Bayreuth.
- 1883 **Wagner** dies (February 13) in Venice; universally eulogized as premiere musician of Europe. **Ellis** takes three weeks to visit Venice. **Bennett** becomes the first editor of *The Lute*, and a judge at the Welsh National Eisteddfod.
- 1884 August Manns introduces *Parsifal* Prelude at Crystal Palace. Joseph Barnby and Royal Choral Society perform concert version of *Parsifal* at Albert Hall (staged performances outside Bayreuth Festspielhaus were proscribed under *Parsifal* copyright). **Bennett** publishes *The Musical Year 1883*; makes tour of U.S.A.
- 1885 **Davison** dies.
- 1887 **Ellis** gives paper on Wagner to Theosophical group; attends H. P. Blavatsky through a near-fatal illness. He leaves Western Dispensary.
- 1888 **Hueffer** dies. First four issues of *The Meister*.
- 1889 **Hueffer's** *Half a Century of Music in England* (posth.).
- 1891 **Ellis** begins his translations of **Wagner's** writings; distances himself from Theosophical Society after Blavatsky's death. **Bennett** writes **Wagner** biography for *Musical Times*. Ferdinand Praeger dies.
- 1892 Praeger's specious *Wagner as I Knew Him* published posthumously. **Ellis** begins efforts to have it withdrawn.
- 1895 Last issues of *The Meister*. **Ellis** announces withdrawal of German version of Praeger's book, and resignation of Lord Dysart as President of London Wagner Society.
- 1896 *Ring* finally produced again at Bayreuth; Siegfried Wagner (1869-1930) conducts fourth of five cycles.

- 1898 **Shaw's** *The Perfect Wagnerite*.
Mary Burrell's *Richard Wagner: His Life and Works from 1813 to 1834*.
- 1899 **Ellis** completes *Prose Works of Richard Wagner* with Volume VIII.
Ernest Newman's first book on Wagner, *A Study of Wagner*.
- 1901 **Ellis** begins translating Glasenapp's *Life of Richard Wagner*.
- 1906 **Bennett** retires from *Daily Telegraph*.
- 1908 **Bennett** publishes his memoirs, *Forty Years of Music*.
- 1911 **Bennett** dies. **Ellis** publishes *Family Letters of Richard Wagner*.
- 1914 First World War begins.
- 1915 **Ellis** returns to medical practice at Western Dispensary.
- 1918 **Ellis** awarded Honorary Life Membership in British Red Cross. War ends.
- 1919 **Ellis** dies with Wagner biography unfinished at six volumes.

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