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## "Brilliant Gathering at Bayreuth": Early Wagnerism as told by Toronto's Globe (1857-1876)

**Emilie Hurst**

Independent Researcher

On October 22, 1857, the Toronto newspaper *The Globe* (1844-1936) published an in-depth reportage on the four-day meeting of Emperor Napoleon III and Tsar Alexander II hosted by William I of Württemberg in Stuttgart. After the conclusion of the higher-profile imperial talks, the reporter follows the movement of the Tsar on to Weimar to meet with the Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria. Details of the political discussions, conducted behind closed doors, remain sparse, largely left to conjecture based on demeanor. Instead, the article focuses on the cultural activities of the emperors and their entourage, including an opera gala.

After an unfavourable comparison of the dress and stature of the audience to that of Stuttgart, the article pivots to an impromptu review of the opera in question:

The great folks bore this for two acts, probably on account of their curiosity to hear this dawn of a new school of music and to see the very splendid manner which it has been put on the stage. [...] Nevertheless no amount of care and splendour in the getting up can save such a production as a dramatic composition, constructed on the principle of anti climax, as an inverted pyramid, with the apex of interest vested in the beginning, and languishing rapidly into insipidity as it proceeds. As a musical work possessing stray claims to admiration by sporadic passages of beauty, but on the whole a wild screaming jumble of inharmonious instrumentation, snatches of melody that never amount to a tune, and a constantly recurring succession of forced modulations, interrupted cadences, diminished sevenths, and fearfully impressive passages from the whole orchestra in union, all about nothing,—it may be true that this is the music of the future, but the more remote we calculate that future, the more correct will be our judgment (“The Imperial Meeting at Weimar” 1857, 2)

This scathing review marks the first mention of Richard Wagner (1813–1883) or his music in the pages of *The Globe*. That it comes tacked onto what is otherwise a piece of political reporting is instructive: that opera was often a key diplomatic tool and that if the reporter felt the need to recount the evening in full, it is that because he assumed that readers would be interested. Would the poor review serve as an indication of the state of the negotiations? Additionally, this appearance also gives us some insight into how opera, prior to the invention of sound recording, could still be a transcontinental affair. It would be two more years before *Tannhäuser* would receive its North American debut in New York and another thirty before Toronto would see a fully staged Wagner opera (Morey 1998, 33). Yet precisely because the written word is not bounded by time and space, text such as reviews could present audiences far away their first glimpses of an opera. When access to live opera is limited—as it was in 1857—such accounts are charged with the potential to not only supplement but to transform and overtake the original.

At mid-century, opera in Toronto did not have a long history: the first performance of Grand Opera, a staging of *Norma*, had only occurred in 1853 (Cooper 1983, 118). There were no local opera schools producing a reliable stream of homegrown talent, or theatres that could accommodate the opulent productions often seen in Europe. In addition, unlike in New York, there was no major wave of German immigration to spur demand (Morey 1998, 26).<sup>1</sup> As such, a staged production of Wagner in Toronto would have to wait until 1887. Despite this, between the first mention of Wagner in *The Globe* and the Toronto premiere of *The Flying Dutchman*

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that immigration played no role in the growing interest in Wagner, but rather that it was significantly bolstered by other homegrown means. For an overview of the many channels through which the Germanic canon became widespread in Canada, see Keillor 1997.

thirty years later, residents had various opportunities to acquaint themselves with Wagner, glimpses of which we can catch by tracking the references in contemporary newspapers. For this article, I will be surveying mentions of Wagner in *The Globe*, focusing on the years 1875 and 1876. To do so, I conducted a keyword search of both Wagner, Bayreuth, and all his operas using the digitized archive of *The Globe*. To counteract some of the limitations of keyword search, I manually looked through the papers in the weeks surrounding the Ring cycle, as well as all the “Art” columns I was able to find, a strategy which turned up several additional mentions. Still, my research was largely based on keyword search and not a fully comprehensive survey of the two years in question.

Founded in 1844 by Scottish immigrant and later Father of Confederation George Brown as an organ of the Reform Party, *The Globe* had established itself as the leading newspaper of the country by 1872. Between both its daily and weekly publications, *The Globe* could boast a circulation of over 45,000 copies, almost double the next leading competitor, the *Witness* from Montreal (Rutherford 1982, 49). Though readership was later overtaken by rivals throughout the 1880s, the newspaper retained its position as one of Canada’s premiere producers of news at the turn of the century. In 1936, *The Globe* merged with the *Mail and Empire* (1895–1936) to form *The Globe and Mail* and continues to publish under this banner to this day.

I have chosen the years 1875 and 1876 for three reasons. First, spurred by rapid urbanization, developments in communication and transportation technologies, growing literacy rates as well as the rising middle class, the latter half of the Victorian era marked the emergence of Canada’s first truly mass medium. As such, the 1870s serve as a transition decade from the older tradition of partisan, largely geographically bounded publications spread over four densely packed pages, to that of the modern newspaper with a front page dedicated to the top stories of the day, display advertisement, editorials, and sections dedicated to sports and entertainment (Rutherford 1982, 115–155). Taking a closer look at coverage throughout these years allows us to see some of this transition in action.

Second, 1875 marks the debut of a semi-regular “Art” column in *The Globe*, part of the aforementioned trend towards distinct columns and pages catering towards niche interests. Prior to this, music coverage appeared sporadically throughout the paper’s pages, as part of advertisements, reviews, snippets of news, or the paper’s “miscellaneous” section. Starting on April 7, 1875 and published somewhat inconsistently every five to fourteen days thereafter, music-related news and reviews under about 300 words typically appear under the “Art” heading

on page 2 or 3. The column consists of a mix of reviews, notices, and art-related gossip and news. Though theatre and the fine arts do receive coverage, music is by far the art form with the heaviest amount of reporting. In October 1879, the feature splits into two, with the Art column more tightly refocused on the fine arts (appearing approximately one to two times a week) and the newly created “Music and the Drama” becoming an almost daily feature.<sup>2</sup> As was common practice, all articles remained anonymous unless they were excerpted from music journals or magazines with explicit authorship—even then attribution remains sporadic.

Third, perhaps in part because of the newly minted arts column, coverage of Wagner grows rapidly during these two years. From 1857 through to 1874, Wagner and his operas appear about 18 times. Many of these mentions are incidental in nature, such as a passing mention of Wagner in a biographic feature on the Prince of Bismarck in 1871 (“Prince Bismarck,” 1871, 3). Even a report of Wagner’s failed production of *Tannhäuser* in Paris in 1861 seems more concerned with the wine the composer was sent in consolation than the music (“Miscellaneous Items,” 1861, 1). Four years later, Wagner’s fortunes seem not to have improved, with the following appearing under the “Miscellaneous” section:

Wagner, the Musical transcendentalist and the hero of the future, has been banished from Bavaria by his patron and best friend, the King. Arrogance, impudence and extravagance, were the cause. The King allows him, however, a pension. (“Miscellaneous Items,” 1865, 4)

How seriously readers are to take this “hero of the future” becomes much clearer when we consider the general composition of the Miscellaneous section, which seems designed primarily to entertain rather than inform. The odd assortment of random facts (“Facts about Tobacco”), scandalous hearsay (“A woman near Paris murdered her daughter, and then ate her breakfast with the bloody knife she had used for that purpose”), stale jokes (“Why is the Atlantic cable, in its present condition like a schoolmaster? Because it’s supported by buoys—boys”), and occasional piece of actual news (“Capital punishment is abolished in Austria”), bears striking resemblance to the context collapse we are familiar with from social media feeds. Such relegation tells us something of how Wagner was still largely thought of as a curiosity. The only lengthy treatment of Wagner throughout this period, a reprinting of an excerpt from the *Atlantic*

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<sup>2</sup> A one-off column also titled “Music and the Drama” was published three years prior on January 5, 1876, but does not appear to be related.

*Monthly* (1857–)<sup>3</sup> titled “Wagner and the Pianist Bülow” on March 30, 1872, is not particularly flattering to the composer, describing some of his antisemitic views and propensity for eccentric dress.

In 1875, however, the tides appear to turn both in terms of awareness and esteem: Wagner appears an astonishing 25 times in a single year in *The Globe*; the following year, there are 24. What I would like to do then is to examine the references to Wagner throughout these two years in order to better understand how, Wagner and his art were translated and transformed through paratext on its journey across the Atlantic to Toronto, and how reception consequently changed. *The Globe* provides a window on two fronts: first, the article gives us clues to the types of contexts in which a Torontonians might encounter Wagner and how those encounters were facilitated and filtered by material means; second, newspapers reports are themselves paratexts, feeding off real-world events and repackaging them for audiences to consume. Especially in a context when access to Wagner was otherwise limited, we might assume that such coverage both reflected and helped shape public opinion of Wagner in the city.

## Paratext and parasite

In order to think through how opera and media intersect in often subtle ways, I will be turning to media theory and in particular, drawing on the concept of “parasite” as developed by Michel Serres. In French, “parasite” refers not only to insects or unwanted leeches, but also to noise. Serres plays with this dual meaning by recasting the parasite, not as an unsolicited intrusion but rather what creates the condition for communication in the first place. Instead of a bivalent mathematical model, defined by the transmission of a message between sender and receiver, with noise acting as an impediment, Serres (2007) posits a trivalent alternative by making two related observations: first, that any exchange of information involves excluding or suppressing a third party; second, that all communication requires a channel for the signal to travel through, one which, even at its most transparent, filters and shapes the transmitted message (185). The parasite is this third party or space, what is in between points A and B, both interrupter and intermediary. As the perpetual third, the parasite feeds off its hosts, while simultaneously being necessary for their survival. Thus, from Serres’ perspective “there is no system without the parasite.” As Bernhard Siegert (2015) explains: “For Serres, then, communication is not primarily

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<sup>3</sup> The magazine is currently published under the shortened title *The Atlantic*.

information exchange, appeal, or expression, but an act that creates order by introducing distinctions; and this is precisely what turns the means of communication into cultural techniques” (23). The parasite invites us to consider these moments of disruption and how they inevitably create a new system of relationships.

To expand on this point, I want to pull in the idea of the paratext. Originally introduced by literary theorist Gérard Genette (1997), paratext refers to materials which are adjacent to, but not officially part of, a given media text. These can include indexes, covers, and credits, but also texts which are more clearly outside of textual boundaries, such as advertisements, interviews, or even contextual knowledge such as an author’s nationality or their gender. They can appear before the original text, such as in the case of an advertisement or much later, in the case of anniversary prefaces of reprinted books. In addition, as Jonathan Gray (2010) adds, paratexts can also encompass texts which escape authorial control, such as fan theories or industry genre designations which seek to extend, analyze or categorize a text in differing ways and thus change our understanding. Paratexts often work as “thresholds,” an “airlock” of sorts, which admit us into a primary text (Gray 2010, 25). Typical paratexts in this regard include titles and cover art, or introductions and opening credits. They prime us to read and understand texts in certain ways and as such are integral to meaning making. This priming function means that paratexts “constitute a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction” (Genette 1997, 2). Even before we watch or read or listen to the first moments of a text, we have already some guidelines on how to understand and interpret it. In fact, paratexts also play a key role in what we choose to consume in the first place, primarily, though not exclusively, in the form of advertisement, extending the threshold function beyond the original text. Media industries are well attuned to this fact, as Gray (2010) points out, spending millions of dollars each year on advertisements and promotions (7). In some cases, when we decide not to proceed to the main event, our judgment and impression of a text can be formed through paratext alone.

In these instances, paratexts do more than simply prime us for entry: they can also serve to interrupt or even overtake the original. Gray (2010) points to the importance of temporal flow, for example, when considering media consumption (91). Interruptions, whether self-imposed (putting down a book to continue later) or administered from the outside (waiting for the next episode to come out), are often filled by paratext such as reviews, behind-the-scenes materials and informal speculation online or in person. In some instances, paratexts become primary and not secondary to media consumption. Gray gives us the example of the parody, but we might also consider the case of children’s programming which is often little more than an excuse to sell

toys, or communities organized around fan fiction. Paratexts thus take on many important roles, and to ignore them is to ignore how media consumption unfolds in the real world.

How then are paratexts linked to the concept of the parasite? Gray provides an initial connection when he argues

that paratexts are not simply add-ons, spinoffs, and also-rans: they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them, just as we ask *paramedics* to save lives rather than leave the job to others, and just as a *parasite* feeds off, lives in, and can affect the running of its host's body, a paratext constructs, lives in, and can affect the running of the text. (Gray 2010, 6, emphasis original)

Gray sees the parasitic function as two-fold: first the aforementioned dependence on its host for its initial existence, but additionally that paratext can be transformational. I would take this one step further: as Serres (2007) argues, parasites are by their very nature always in some ways productive, by operating as “exciter” to a larger system (191). By introducing difference, they immediately change a system's state. I would thus propose that paratexts are not *potentially* transformative: they exist as such by default. Gray drops the metaphor of the parasite almost as soon as it is invoked, but there are other parallels we can tease out.

First, for both paratexts and parasites, “what is essential is neither the image nor the deep meaning, neither the representation nor its hall of mirrored reflections, but the system of relations” (Serres 2007, 8). In short, each presupposed that media exists as part of larger systems and that these relations are not simply incidental but rather fundamental to how the receivers understand and decode texts. In addition, just as the parasite can be either an invited guest or unwanted intruder (Serres 2007, 16), so do paratexts exist both within and outside authorial control in the form of commentary and fan interpretations, as well as more overt reworking. Most importantly, while Serres identifies the relationship between host and parasite as operating as a one-way flow, the direction of this flow can, and often does reverse, with the host taking on the role of parasite and vice versa (Serres 2007, 5): we see this reversal at play, for example in the existential dependence on advertisements for a film to survive or when paratexts become the focal point of fandom.

Paratext and parasite are a useful entry point into discussing opera, in part owing to the logistical barrier of accessing live opera on demand. How easily you will be able to go to the opera house is a function of time, location, and the whims of any given opera company director. This

difficulty is exacerbated in the case of Wagner because of the large casts and orchestras required by the score, which make productions expensive and challenging to miniaturize. Because of this, paratext such as recordings, reviews, and opera handbooks not only provide a way to access opera after hours, but also work to fragment, overtake and transform opera in various ways. Yet even when experienced live, paratext and parasites are an integral part of the opera experience. From program notes to pre-performance talks, opera is almost always explicitly framed with auxiliary paratext. Wagnerian opera—with its reputation for being more challenging overall—is particularly prone to this instinct to prime patrons. Wagner himself is at least partially responsible for this impulse, producing a steady stream of paratext to explicate his art, including at times detailed program notes. In order to pick through some of the complexities, I would like to reflect on some of the ways that Wagner media acts as paratext and parasite and the noise introduced into the system as a result.

## Wagner in Toronto

In considering the mediating effect of the parasite, I want to start in the place where mediation is the less obvious: listings and reviews for concerts. In 1875, *The Globe* published both for two concerts which featured a selection from Wagner: the first by the Mendelssohn Quintette (1849–1895) on April 13, and the second, by the Beethoven Quintette<sup>4</sup> Club (1873–1875) assisted by vocalist Mrs. Carter on June 18. Both quintettes hailed from Boston, with some overlap in membership throughout their existence, though I will be focusing here on the Mendelssohn Quintette which was the more famous (Dowell 1999, 87). Credited by Roger Phelps (1960) as “the first professional group organized in [the United States] which devoted itself *exclusively* to the performance of chamber music” (91, emphasis original), the group toured extensively across the United States and Canada—even venturing so far as Australia—and were frequent visitors to Toronto (See Dowell 1999).<sup>5</sup> They performed in the city on April 13, 1875, at the Music Hall, with tickets available for purchase from the Nordheimer music store for \$1 each. In the lead-up, *The Globe* published three advertisements, one each on April 3 and April 10—the latter including the

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<sup>4</sup> Though later sources sometimes use “quintet” as a spelling, contemporary sources appear to prefer “quintette” for both chamber groups.

<sup>5</sup> Dowell documents a large number of the Quintette’s concerts in Toronto but misses several of the club’s earlier visits, likely because they were using the *Toronto Mail* as their primary source for listings in the city, which only began publication in 1872. The earliest record I have found is a short review published on May 20, 1870, under “city news.”



full program for the evening—before finally including a reminder the morning of the concert as part of the “City News” section. This final mention speaks favourably of the program and points to as “particularly worthy of mention” Franz Schubert’s Grand Quintette in C and the Bridesmaids’ Chorus from *Lohengrin*, though the author expands on the qualities of the Schubert quintette but not on the Bridesmaids’ Chorus. The Wagner is notable, but not enough to warrant further discussion.

These references to Wagner tell us several things: first that while there was some Wagner being heard in the city, the music often travelled through circuitous paths to get there. Material conditions had a role to play here, as the expansions of the transportation networks, first with the opening of the Erie Canal and later, expansion of rail networks, made touring to Canada much easier for US-based ensembles (Cooper 1983, 105). As Morey (1988) notes, Toronto was at this point still struggling to establish a permanent orchestra in the city, instead relying on touring orchestras and chamber groups to provide musical backing to its chorus societies. This dependence is frequently lamented in reviews, with reviewers noting that quality orchestral and chamber music is heard relatively infrequently in the city. Both quintettes are representative of this trend with Wagner finding a host in the musicians travelling to the city, detouring first through Boston.

Second, the types of selections are instructive. At this point in time, Toronto did not have access to fully staged productions of Wagner, instead relying on orchestral excerpts or instrumental reductions. Interestingly, the advertisement published on April 10 for the Mendelssohn Quintette not only provides the program for the evening (with the Wagner listed as the final selection), but also specifies that the Bridal Chorus is arranged by member Thomas Ryan (1827–1903). There is also no vocalist listed unlike several of the other pieces, despite the fact that the Bridal Chorus, as the name implies, is not a purely instrumental passage. To travel to Toronto, a transformation was required.

While it is easy to think of the fragmentation of media as a distinctively modern phenomenon, these two concerts point to how fragmentation was very much the norm in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is particularly interesting because of how adamant Wagner was that the strength of opera lies in the union between voice, music and drama and in his explicit resistance to composing musical numbers that could be easily extracted. Despite this, Wagner was ultimately a pragmatist, authorizing transcription, selling scores and arranging concerts of his own work. Beyond official channels, there was also a proliferation of unauthorized transcriptions. Thus, if opera companies

capable of producing Wagner were few and far between, orchestral and other instrumental renditions posed far fewer barriers for entry. As a result, arrangements helped tame Wagner and made it much more portable. This is a case in which hosts such as sheet music, and human networks which were necessary to transport Wagner to Toronto, required a transformation of the parasite. Arrangements—neither paratext nor original—served this function. In addition, beyond public concerts, Wagner’s music might have been even further decontextualized in domestic settings. It is difficult to know for sure whether Wagner was resonating in the drawing rooms of the city, but there are clues: for example, Morey (1998) notes that a performance by local Wagner enthusiast William Waugh Lauder (1858–1931) of excerpts from the Franz Liszt transcription from both *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* in 1877, speaks favourably to the ability to procure sheet music within the city (27). Similarly, a notice on April 6, 1875, notifying readers of “four important books on music” including “*Wagner’s Autobiography and Essay*, edited and translated by Mr. Burlingame” (“Literature,” 1875, 3) makes implicit the assumption that the books would be of interest to the city’s music enthusiasts.

Thus, in these articles, we can glimpse a secondary track of reception, one centred on the domestic sphere in which Wagner’s work was fragmented, decontextualized, and commoditized. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a key driver of this process was the proliferation of print culture. Matthew Blackmar (2012) demonstrates how the success of Wagnerian sheet music, especially for the piano, in the US predates widespread availability of staged performances and paved the way for the Wagner mania of the 1880s and 90s. Some of these arrangements, like the Liszt piano transcriptions mentioned above, were relatively faithful but firmly in the realm of the virtuosic; more common were tuneful extracts arranged with the amateur in mind. Because sheet music cannot transmit sound or image, and instead encodes instructions for a potential sonic event, the score and actual performance practices can only ever exist in parallel to each other (Treitler 1993). Arrangements widen this gap even further, straddling the divide between original and paratext, by transforming the music through extraction, omission and simplification. If Wagner’s theory of *Musikdrama* was disparaging of the practice of treating opera as a series of individual musical numbers hastily strung together, sheet music publishers and arrangers held no such scruples, lifting his more musical passages and branding them as musical “pearls” or “gems,” reworking them, however awkwardly, into pre-existing dance forms such as “Quadrille,

Galop, Polonaise, Waltz, Polka—and, incredibly, Seguidilla” (Blackmar 2012, 33).<sup>6</sup> Here, the demands of the host shaped the transmission of Wagner, acting at times like a game of broken telephone.

While low-brow reworkings of Wagner might appear antithetic to the propagation of his music, James Parakilas (1995) makes the point that it is precisely through the process of domestication that the music canon is formed. Thus, rather than see these imperfections as noisy intruders, we can understand them as essential to the system as a whole. After all, “we know of no system that functions perfectly, that is to say, without losses, flights, wear and tear, errors, accidents, opacity—a system whose return is one for one, where the yield is maximal, and so forth. Even the world itself does not work quite perfectly. [...] Everything happens as if the following proposition were true: it works because it does not work” (Serres 2007, p 12–13). Making concessions in the name of domestication was thus integral to the success of Wagner’s music.

In this way, extracts such as the overture from *Tannhäuser* and the Wedding March from *Lohengrin*, could become musical hits in themselves largely divorced from the dramatic and intellectual baggage of Wagnerism with a capital W. For example, *The Globe’s* report of a high society wedding in New York makes not one, but two mentions of Wagner: the first, “a selection from the opera of ‘Lohengrin’” played as part of an opening program preceding the ceremony, and “the famous ‘Wedding March’ from Tannhauser”<sup>7</sup> as the newlyweds walked out of the church into their carriage (“A Fashionable Wedding,” 1876, 4). We can imagine the fashionable Toronto bride making note of the musical selection for use at her nuptials. Rendered portable through the act of transcription and arrangement, Wagner’s music was thus able to assume a variety of roles and functions outside of the opera house.

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<sup>6</sup> Though the first wave of transcriptions were largely authorized by Wagner, as his popularity grew, so too did the appetite for unauthorized arrangements. Many—though not all—of these more creative transcriptions fall into that latter category.

<sup>7</sup> This is likely a mistake on the part of the journalist, as *Tannhäuser* has no wedding march. There is a grand March (act 2, scene 4), which had some popularity as a stand-alone concert piece, but considering that it is prefaced as THE famous Wedding March, the Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin* seems much more likely. I would speculate that the operas of origins were accidentally swapped, with the opening selection perhaps consisting of either the Pilgrim’s Chorus or the Overture, both of which were frequently performed in concert settings.

## Global Wagner

Beyond these smaller-scale performances, *The Globe* also reported on international performances, demonstrating the entanglement between Wagner's music and larger technological networks of print media and, as I will discuss below, telegraph lines. The principal sources of opera news in *The Globe* came from London, the United States and Continental Europe. While the newspaper did report on stories from Africa, Asia, and South America, often mirroring the contours of the British empire, music from these continents is largely silent, reflecting the hegemonic position of the Western art tradition. Of the 46 articles which mention Wagner in 1875 and 1876, 13 appear under the "Art" heading. Frequently, however, I also found mentions of Wagner filed under geographic headings, such as "City news," "United States," "Great Britain," or "Continental" (understood here to mean Europe). This is especially the case in 1876, during which only 2 articles appear under "Art." These headings, paratext in their own right, help make visible complex geographic networks in which Wagner's music flowed as well as the mental maps of editor and reader: opera was not cordoned off exclusively as part of the arts but told us something of place.

For Wagner, the locations are clustered in four main geographic areas: the United States (New York and to a lesser extent, Chicago), Vienna, London and finally, Bayreuth. For our purposes, I will be concentrating on these final two. Rather than deploying an art correspondent overseas, *The Globe* regularly clipped and quoted content from foreign newspapers and music journals, working as an aggregator and gatekeeper of art news. At times excerpts were quoted verbatim, other times paraphrased ("*The London Telegraph* reports..."), ranging from a couple of sentences to over 2000 words. Because of this practice, even news about Bayreuth was often first filtered through American and English press before arriving to Toronto: interest in the composer must then partly be considered as an extension of these pre-existing political, cultural and technological ties to both countries. This is consistent with developments in Quebec, in which Wagner's music travelled to Montreal in two distinct streams: the first originating in Germany filtered through the travelling troupes in the US, and a second originating in France (Lefebvre 1994, 61). In Toronto, this second stream is, unsurprisingly, largely British rather than French in character.

The most extensive foreign coverage, both in number and in length, comes from London, with nine separate articles either filled under "Great Britain" or otherwise referring to opera in London. Two thirds are concentrated on the London premiere of *Lohengrin* in 1875. Canadian

interest might have been bolstered by the appearance of Emma Albani (1847–1930), Canada’s first international operatic star, in the starring role of Elsa for the Covent Garden production.<sup>8</sup> The coverage in *The Globe*, however, does not emphasize her role: it is only in the following year, when Albani took on Elizabeth in *Tannhäuser* and (some) of the novelty of Wagner had died down, that *The Globe* talks of Wagner using Albani as the main point of reference (“Art,” 1876, 3). Such an approach demonstrates the close ties to British culture that many Canadians retained. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most Torontonians felt no real contradiction between holding the identity of both British and Canadian at the same time, a loyalty that “was strengthened by an increasingly complex web of family, cultural, commercial, and professional networks that linked the British in Britain with the British overseas” (Buckner & Francis 2006, 7). Frequent updates from the London opera scene were but one tool that helped maintain this connection.

Though Wagner’s music had been performed in England prior to this occasion, the *Lohengrin* premiere drummed up a flurry of coverage. The renewed interest in the opera, almost 25 years after its debut in Germany, can be attributed to a handful of factors: first, the public was better primed to appreciate Wagner by the founding of the first London Wagner Society in 1872, and the publication of the first sizable English treatises on Wagner (Cormack 2009, 28); second, *Lohengrin* would be premiered by *both* of the city’s leading opera companies, stoking the continued rivalry between opera impresarios James Mapleson (1830–1901) and Frederick Gye (1810–1878). The race would eventually be won by Gye, who premiered the opera on May 8 at Covent Garden<sup>9</sup>—the rival production took place a month later on June 12 at Drury Lane. As a result, the Wagner opera became the musical event of the season (Rodmell 2013). In total, Londoners had the chance to hear *Lohengrin* an astounding 17 times in a single year.

The coverage in *The Globe* spans from initial rumours (“Art,” 1875a, 3), to two reviews each of both the Covent Garden and Drury Lane productions, and one lengthy description of the antics of Wagner’s patron King Ludwig of Bavaria, framed in light of the upcoming *Lohengrin* premiere (“Great Britain,” 1875, 3). *The Globe*’s reporting reflects the mixed reception by the London press: in an article presumably written by an exasperated *Globe*’s arts editor, the paper complains that “the effect of its rendering on the London critics has been such as to make them

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<sup>8</sup> For more on Emma Elbani see Cooper 1983, 287–299; Lefebvre 1994.

<sup>9</sup> The company in question is currently titled the Royal Opera but was known in the 1870s as the Royal Italian Opera. As the name suggests, *Lohengrin* was performed in Italian by both Mapleson and Gye, demonstrating the dominance of Italian opera at the time.

contradict one another, even in matters on which it might have been thought they would have agreed” (“Art,” 1875b, 2). To emphasize the disjointed accounts that *The Globe* was receiving from its overseas sources, on July 10, the art column features two contrasting excerpts from reviewers of the Drury Lane production (“Art,” 1875c, 2). While these passages address the interpretation of Wagner’s music, others grapple more directly with the underpinning philosophical principles. In particular, the article of June 15 takes the time to provide the general outlines of the plot before quoting Ebenezer Prout (1835–1909) writing for *The Academy* discussing the importance of the leitmotifs and staging (“Art,” 1875b, 2). Though agreement over Wagner’s artistic merits were in flux, we can see writers working to untangle a clear narrative.

By 1876, however, the London press appears much more united in its praise of Wagner, with *The Globe* acknowledging that even those who do not enjoy his works “admire his genius and the dramatic spirit of his works” (“Great Britain,” 1876, 7). The buzz was now from an even bigger event: the premiere of the Ring cycle at Bayreuth. The planning stages of the festival start trickling into newspapers several years prior to the event itself, initially treated as somewhat of a curiosity, such as this report from 1869, filled under “miscellaneous”:

Wagner has finished the third part of his “Nibelungen,” an opera of such gigantic proportions that it will take several nights to act. One scene in it requires an aquarium, so that the characters—mermaids and mermen—may swim about and skip from rock to rock, and dive beneath the depths, singing all the time. (“Miscellaneous,” 1869, 4)

As the 1870s advance, however, *The Globe* begins to take Wagner more seriously, aided in part by the introduction of the telegraph into arts reporting. Canada saw its first telegraph lines installed in December of 1846: by the following year, lines connected Toronto to Halifax via Montreal, and New York via Buffalo. *The Globe* had been an early adopter of the telegraph, with them and the *British Colonist* (1858–1980) assuming significant costs for the initial dispatches from the United States (“The Telegraph!,” 1847, 2). The telegraph not only facilitated timely reporting on news within Canada and the United States, but telegraph lines based in port cities also allowed quicker consumption of European news as the final leg no longer had to be completed by train.<sup>10</sup> Viable transatlantic transmissions began in 1865, and with that the floodgates opened. Telegraph news initially appeared under the heading “By Magnetic

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, *The Globe* uses the increased speed of arrival of European news—and not American or Canadian—to defend its investment in the technology in 1847. This is despite the fact that European news still had to first traverse the Atlantic by boat for over a week! (“The Telegraph,” 1847, 2)

Telegraph.” By 1875 there is still a separate section for telegraph news within the page of *The Globe*, but the sheer volume of information transmitted meant it has also overflowed to other sections.

James Carey (2008) makes the case that the telegraph, by widening geographic reach and through limitations imposed by costs, worked to standardize and rationalize journalistic prose. In addition, correspondent letters, previously replete with detailed description and analysis, made way for shorter, fact-oriented reports. With the introduction of wire services, news was also increasingly treated as a commodity with a quick sell-by date. Constraints of geography were now replaced with the geometry of the telegraphs wired connecting Canada to the United States and England. Yet as with all technological revolutions, this transition happened in fits and starts, with older, residual models of journalism built upon physical modes of transportation co-existing with the increasingly dominant telegraphic regime (Williams 1977, 121–128). We can see this transition in action when we compare the coverage for the London *Lohengrin* premiere, with that of Bayreuth.

Reporting on the London premiere—as extensive as it had been—was regularly delayed by over a month as the news traversed the Atlantic the old-fashioned way: by boat. The first Covent Garden performance took place on May 8, 1875: the first review comes a month later, on June 15. There is little sense of timeliness in these articles, with no dates attached to the performance, and the prose reads more like criticism than journalism. By contrast, the Ring cycle premiere, a full-fledged international media event, marked the first time that major American dailies sent journalists to Europe to cover a musical performance, with reports telegraphed back home in real time (Chan 2014, 113). Because *The Globe* did not send a correspondent and instead relied principally on the detailed dispatches of the American and British press,<sup>11</sup> coverage was not as comprehensive as it was in the major dailies in the United States. Despite this, Toronto readers were greeted with next-day features for all four operas prominently on the front page, starting with a dispatch titled “The Wagner Musical Festival: Brilliant Gathering at Bayreuth” on August 14. These telegraphed reports are short in length and generally fit the telegraphic style identified

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<sup>11</sup> Some of the reports are specifically credited to other sources, such as the New York *Herald* and London’s *Daily News*. For those without a source there are occasionally other clues, such as references to the recent London opera offerings which speak to a possible English origin.

by Carey, with unadorned prose well suited to a large audience and a focus on the “facts” rather than commentary:

London, Aug. 14<sup>th</sup>—A special to the *Daily News*, from Bayreuth, reports the performance of Rheingold prologue to Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelungen, began at even o’clock Sunday evening. Every seat in the auditorium was occupied. The audience was one of the most brilliant and distinguished ever assumed in Germany. In the gallery of the Princes were the Emperor William, Emperor Dom Pedro, Grand Dukes of Mecklenburg, Saxe-Weimar, Auhelt, and Balden and many other members of the nobility, and among the famous composers present were Liszt and Gounod. The auditorium remained in darkness throughout the performance. All the light had been concentrated on the stage. Applause was permitted only at the conclusion of the acts. The scenic effect were of great beauty, the performers admirable, and the orchestra nearly perfection. The arrangements by which, the latter was concealed from view was a success, and greatly heightened the effort. Wagner declined to appear before the curtain at the conclusion of the performance. (“The Wagner Musical Festival,” 1876, 1)

After the conclusion of the first cycle, other telegraphed reports trickle in, detailing for example a feast to be held in Wagner’s honour (“Latest by Telegraph,” 1876, 1), and later Wagner’s journey to Italy to “recruit his strength after his arduous labours at Bayreuth” (“Wagner Is about to Recruit His Strength,” 1876, 1). These elements, as well as the successive nature of the reviews work to construct the festival into a bona fide media “event,” and Wagner into a celebrity. This is no longer simply a musical festival: the newspapers transformed it into *News*.

Still, older forms of journalism continued to exist in parallel, where the timeliness is traded for the more eclectic mix of “miscellaneous” facts. Throughout the latter half of August and into September, *The Globe* continues to publish pieces on Wagner and Bayreuth both short and long. Rather than a retrospective of the event, these dispatches provided context in drips and drabs, ranging from the composition of the orchestra to a brief sketch of the town of Bayreuth, to a quick one-liner on Wagner’s mounting financial woes. Three longer articles supply additional musical assessment, but unlike with *Lohengrin*, there is no attempt to juxtapose contrasting opinions. All three pieces present glowing assessments on Wagner’s operas, concealing the more mixed reception among European critics. An otherwise uninformed reader would walk away with the feeling that Wagner very much might be the Music of the Future.

The most interesting article, however, appears on August 23. This piece, credited to the New York *Herald*, provides a description of a rehearsal of *Rheingold* as well as a lengthy summary of the opera in question. The prose is abridged, with *The Globe* editor choosing to summarize some



of the lengthier passages. Like the other two, the assessment is generally positive. Tracing the article to its original printing in the August 17 edition of the New York *Herald* reveals that it was written July 31. Thus, unlike the next day dispatches, this account almost certainly traversed the Atlantic via boat. The discontinuity is striking: why reprint an article about a *rehearsal* now over three weeks old, especially when readers already knew of the performances?<sup>12</sup> As the strict chronological telling of telegraphic news collides with the slower rhythms of journalism imposed by transatlantic travel, we can see noise inserted itself into the timeline. Consequently, Bayreuth was simultaneously a media event, with Wagner at its centre as a distinct celebrity personality, but also transformed by the newspaper into a slower paced musical revolution, one that could not be contained by linear accounts.

## Conclusion

Opera in Toronto during the 1870s was still far from the quality and quantity that existed in European capitals, or even the nearer destinations of New York and Montreal. But what I have hoped to make clear is that even prior to this, there was still very much an appetite for Wagner in the city. Paying attention to this pre-history through the pages of *The Globe* underscores the multiplicity of reception, one both created and enabled by media such as print and the telegraph. The metaphor of the parasite helps us to understand how Wagner's music was able to traverse the Atlantic and, in the process, was continually fragmented and reworked. Starting in 1887 with the city's premiere of the *Flying Dutchman*, Toronto would experience something of a Wagner golden age, with 13 productions in the space of about 25 years, including what remains the only Canadian performance of *Parsifal* in 1905 (Morey 1998). A closer look, however, reveals the moments of noise: theatre unable to accommodate full orchestras, translated librettos, cuts in the score. Even here the parasite remains.

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