Gabriel Garvin

Hist 133A

11/24/2015

Source Exploration

The source that I will be exploring is titled “What is German?” written by Richard Wagner between 1865 and 1878. It is believed that he started in 1865 and finished in 1878. I found the source on GHDI after I looked up “music” in the search box. I have a general interest in music so I figured that would be a good place to start.

I first got a basis for who Richard Wagner was from the GHDI summary. Following a simple Google search of Richard Wagner, I was able to find out a lot about him. [Born in Germany on May 22, 1813](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Wagner-German-composer), he was mostly known for his prolific composing for opera. Most notably he is known for his epic opera, the 18-hour *Ring Cycle*. He grew up in the Kingdom of Saxony and studied music in Leipzig. During the Dresden uprising in 1849, Wagner fought for the revolutionaries who were against the Prussian Monarch as he neglected to sign a German Constitution. After the brief uprising was quelled, Wagner was forced to flee to Zurich. During this time he composed much of his prose work. Following my research on Melvyl, I discovered that a vast amount of information present on Wagner is purely from a musical perspective. That being said, Wagner also wrote several prose pieces including the source that I found.

For the source itself, William Ashton Ellis translated the version I read. The original essay was written in German. This essay was part of a collection of Wagner’s prose works titled “Art and Politics.” In particular it was in Volume 4, which was titled “Richard Wagner’s prose works.” This was published/translated in 1912 and as represented by a [Google Ngram,](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Richard+Wagner%3Aeng_2012*4%2CRichard+Wagner%3Ager_2012&case_insensitive=on&year_start=1850&year_end=1930&corpus=15&smoothing=1&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2CRichard%20Wagner%3Aeng_2012%20%2A%204%3B%2Cc0%3B.t4%3B%2CRichard%20Wagner%3Ager_2012%3B%2Cc0%3B%2Cs0%3B%3BRichard%20Wagner%3Ager_2012%3B%2Cc0%3B%3BRICHARD%20WAGNER%3Ager_2012%3B%2Cc0) Richard Wagner was a popular topic of discussion. This search led me to find the original text through an authors note in “Richard Wagner’s Prose Works.” The original text was published in the Bayreuther Blätter in 1878 and can be found on babel.hathitrust.org at this [link](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433068927544;view=1up;seq=7). The Bayreuther Blätter was a monthly periodical that Wagner had a major hand in producing the content for. The first volume of content was produced in 1878 and “Was ist deutsch?” appeared as a section of the periodical (1878, p.29). This text can be viewed both online and though a transfer from UC Riverside. This periodical was created in response to the Bayreuth festival, where many people came to celebrate Wagner’s operas. In fact, this festival still takes place today and is celebrated annually in Bayreuth, Germany (1994, p.1-28).

The original text was written in 1865, which was just after Wagner had returned to Hesse, after an 11-year hiatus in Zurich. During that time was when he wrote much of his prose works. This particular work came just after his return. Upon further investigation on Worldcat and Melvyl, I found that Ellis was not just a simple translator; he really studied the life of Wagner just after Wagner died in 1883. Unfortunately, despite multiple searches I was not able to find how long Ellis lived. He cared enough about what Wagner was writing that he put the time in to translate as many pieces as he could. From the “more information about” tab in Melvyl, I was able to find out that he published over 100 works, many about Wagner. In Richard to Minna Wagner: Letters to His First Wife, published in 1909, Ellis prefaces this source and gives some insight into the personal life of Wagner and also lends some personal interpretation into the mix. Furthermore, he also wrote an entirely original work in which he describes the life of Wagner in 6 volumes. This book was found on the library catalog and is a reprint of the original text, written between 1900-1908 (1977, p.1).

About the essay, Wagner attempts to define what a true German is. He believes that all Germans should follow a single religion, excluding Jewish people in the process. Wagner’s antisemitic views are obvious as he states that the “invasion of the Jews” is transgressing German values and invading public life. Furthermore, Wagner glorified war as a uniting force for German identity. These antisemitic viewpoints were present earlier in life in his writings such as “Jewishness in Music,” published in 1850. This establishes a longer line of influence to these antisemitic views where it was not just a one-time occurrence, rather a long line of influences.

What I did:

* Searched “Music” on GHDI
* Found and read the Wagner essay “What is German?”
* Google searched “Richard Wagner”
* Went to “More Information About” on Melvyl
* Repeated the same process for the translator William Ashton Ellis

Sources

Glasenapp, Carl Friedrich, Life of Richard Wagner / New York:   Da Capo Press, 1977-  Southern Regional Library Facility ML410.W1 G533 1977 [SRLF]

Spotts, Frederic. "Introduction." Introduction. Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner

Festival. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1994. 1-28. Print.

Wagner, R., Bayreuther Patronatverein., Allgemeiner Richard Wagner-Verein.,

Bayreuther Bühnenfestspiele. Verwaltungsrath. (18781938). *Bayreuther*

*Blätter.* Chemnitz: E. Schmeitzner.