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Emma Sutton

**Foreign Bodies:
Mark Twain, Music and
Anglo-American Identity**

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Foreign Bodies: Mark Twain, Music and Anglo-American Identity

In spite of the cosmopolitan views on which he prided himself, he thanked heaven that he was a New Yorker, and about to ally himself with one of his own kind.

—Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*¹

In Mark Twain's 1880 novel *A Tramp Abroad*, his naive American travelers seek out one of the obligatory 'sights' of the late nineteenth-century European tour—an opera by Richard Wagner:

Another time, we went to Mannheim and attended a shivaree, —otherwise an opera,—the one called *Lohengrin*. The banging and slamming and booming and crashing were something beyond belief. The racking and pitiless pain of it remains stored up in my memory alongside the memory of the time I had my teeth fixed. ...

I have since discovered that there is nothing the Germans like so much as an opera. They like it, not in a mild and moderate way, but with their whole hearts. This is a legitimate result of habit and education. Our nation will like opera too, by and by, no doubt. One in fifty of those who attend our operas likes it already, perhaps, but I think a good many of the other forty-nine go in order to learn to like it, and the rest in order to be able to talk knowingly about it. The latter usually hum the airs while they are being sung, so that their neighbours may perceive they have been to the opera before. The funerals of these do not occur often enough.²

1. *The Age of Innocence* (London: Virago, 1982), 45.

2. *A Tramp Abroad* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 83–84, 87.