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*Richard Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck*

By Richard Wagner

Translated by William Ashton Ellis



The Wagner Library

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## About this Title

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[vii]

## Introductory

To be added.



[1]

## ZURICH

1852 to August 1858

[2]

[3]

1.

Herr and Madame Wesendonck are most kindly requested to join us on Sunday at dinner-time.

*R.S.V.P.*

FAMILIE WAGNER.

2.

Busy in the kitchen, my wife advises you to take the carriage, which you would probably have made use of even had the weather been fine; further, that it will be extraordinarily warm in our abode.

All which is to signify that we have no intention to give you up yet.

3.

Many thanks for the kind invitation, which I unfortunately shall be unable to obey.  
Fare you well!

4.

Esteemed Lady!

God will guard you henceforth from my rudenesses; for you certainly perceive by now that it was no idle whim of mine when I often dreaded accepting your kind invitations lest my nasty temper might torture my good friends as much as it torments myself. If in the future, also, I become more abstinent in this regard—and ought I not to end by being so, after experiences like those of yesterday?—rest assured that it is simply to earn your pardon through presenting myself to you in a better light.

[4]

I hope to hear from your husband to-morrow at Basle that at least your precious health has suffered no ulterior harm through my unruly tongue. (01) With this heartfelt wish your kind indulgence is besought by

RICHARD WAGNER.

Zurich, March 17, 1853.

5.

[Easter 1853.]

Fairest good-day!

My poor wife has become quite ill; consequently I accept to-morrow's invitation for myself alone.

Presumably you are not at home to-day; otherwise I should have inquired toward evening.

At my house everything is dull and dismal, despite the growing "gaiety" of the apartments.

I hope things are going right well with you, and that you are keeping Easter-day [March 27] with joy.

Many kind regards to all!

Your R.W.

6.

Friday morning.

The Herweghs have invited themselves for this evening.

If you think it would help you to recover from the exertions of your last invitations, it would much delight us if you consented to take part in our entertainment.

Kindest regards.

R.W.

7.

Here's syrup, for yesterday's ice. (02)

[May 29, 1853.]

[5]

8.

Esteemed!

You gave me permission to inquire to-day whether you would be able to come to us again this evening. In case of a favourable answer, I would suggest your passing a couple of quiet hours with us till 10 o'clock: I would invite nobody else, not to spoil this sacred evening in any way.

Hoping for a kind consent,

Your RICHARD WAGNER.

June 1, 1853.

9.

[To Herr Otto.]

Your disposals are excellent, best friend: I thank you for them from my heart.

To enter my fresh indebtedness in a manner worthy to arouse your confidence, I am paying an old debt to-day: (03) please give your wife the accompanying sonata, my first composition since the completion of Lohengrin (six years back!).

You soon shall hear from me again: but first send us news how you're faring yourselves.

Your RICHARD WAGNER.

Zurich, June 20, 1853.

10.

The best of good-mornings!

Getting on pretty well.—Sincerest thanks for all kindness [6] !—I propose going proudly on foot to the rehearsal. If it must be, however, I accept the carriage for 1/4 to 2. You would follow soon after.

I meant to send the accompanying yesterday!

Auf Wiedersehen!

11.

The best of good-mornings!

Just skim a little of this book [A. Schmid's biography of Gluck, 1852]. It is badly written, and one is compelled to skip all where the author thinks anyway needful to trot out an opinion of his own; yet the facts, particularly from Gluck's Paris period, are highly interesting; moreover, this passionate, yet entirely self-centred Gluck, with his calm vanity, large savings, and embroidered court-dress, has something quite amusing and refreshing about him in his old age.—

Only, make a big skip at the beginning.

12.

Homer was stealing out of my library.

Whither? I asked.

He replied: To congratulate Otto Wesendonck on his birthday.

I answered: Do't for me, as well!

RICHARD W.

March 16, 1854.

13.

With the present weather-outlook and west winds, will you be travelling?

Merely a question. (04)

Your R.W.

[7]

14.

Is it necessary to remark that my question of yesterday, touching a trip, to-day requires no answer?

R.W.

15.

As Herr and Madame Wesendonck seem to have abandoned that footing of intimacy whereon they would drop in on us of an evening uninvited, I suppose we must ceremoniously inquire whether they perhaps could deign to take us unawares to-day, or—in case certain Professors have been given this day for imparting their learning to the gentleman and lady—whether we might expect a similar surprise to-morrow?

16.

My Lady!

Frau Heim cannot sing before Tuesday, (05) —so for to-morrow (if show you must have) a simple piano-evening.

I shall see you soon!

Your R.W.

17.

What should I do to cheer you up—poor invalid? I gave the programme [Philh.] with the translations to Eschenburg [professor of English at Zurich]: but how shall *that* profit [8] you? Otto must at once procure you "Indian Legends edited by Adolf Hohtzmann, Stuttgart." I brought them to London with me: their reading has been my only pleasure here. All are beautiful: but—*Sawitri* is divine, and if you wish to find out *my* religion, read *Usinar*. How shamed stands our whole Culture by these purest revelations of noblest humanity in the ancient East!—

At present I'm reading a canto of Dante every morning ere I set to work: I'm still stuck deep in Hell; its horrors accompany my prosecution of the second act of *Walküre*. Fricka has just gone off, and Wodan must now give vent to his terrible woe.

Beyond this second act I shall in no case get here; I can work but very slowly, and each day brings some fresh upset to contend with.—

My London experiences are determining me to withdraw from public music-making altogether, for some years to come: this concert-conducting must have an end. So don't let our Zurich gentry put themselves to any expense on my account! I now need total inner equilibrium, to complete my big work; for which, as a grotesque chimera, I fear this eternal outrageous contact with the inadequate and insufficient might easily put me out of sorts.

—To enliven yourself, just reckon up how many fugues ought to appear in my London oratorio, whether \* \* \* \* should wear white or black kid-gloves, and if the Magdalene should

carry a bouquet or fan. When you have settled these important points, we'll go into it farther.

To-day is my fourth concert: the A major symphony (which at any rate will not go anything like so well as at Zurich), and with it a number of lovely things I never dreamt of having to conduct again in my life. However, I'm fortified for it all by the certainty that this—will have been the last time.—

[9]

Best wishes to Otto, whom I heartily thank for his last kind letter: if it really amuses him, I'll write him once more. Is Marie [sister of Frau Wk] not coming to you soon?—

To-morrow, after the concert, I shall write my wife: she won't have any mighty news to give you, though.

Kind love to Myrrha too [the Wesendoncks' little girl]! Farewell, and—keep your spirits up!

London, April 30, 1855.

## 18.

[July 8, 1855.]

I fear my good old faithful friend—my Peps—will pass away from me to-day. It is impossible for me to leave the poor thing's side in its last hours. You won't be cross with us, if we beg you to dine without ourselves to-day? In any case we shall not leave [for Seelisberg] till Wednesday: so that we can still make up for what we miss to-day.

You surely will not laugh if I am weeping?

Your R.W.

Sunday morning.

## 19.

[September 1855?]

I am not well, and presumably shall have to keep my wife's birthday [Sept. 5] a prisoner to the house.

Cordial thanks for your kindness!

## 20.

Take notice:—

Wednesday:

Othello

Ira Aldridge. (06)

Tickets should be booked in good time.

(The top of the morning!)

R.W.

[10]

## 21.

If the Familie Wesendonck will give Heinrich of the Hotel Baur that errand, they can obtain my wife from the theatre too; otherwise they must put up with my single self.

By the way, I, too, know English.

R.W.

## 22.

Dear Friend,

My wife has just told me a happy thought of hers, which leads me to address you quite a big petition.

It is a matter of making one more effort to obtain a life- lease of the Bodmer property at Seefeld, near Zurich. Were it to succeed; I should be relieved of all cares about an estate of my own, and for a mere rent I should arrive at the same enjoyment I am seeking. This place is let at present as a summer residence to a family by the name of Trümpler; so that the Bodmers would have to be persuaded to give these ancient tenants friendly notice and let me have the place for life, or perhaps for a term of ten years.

So far as we know, it is rather a habit than a requirement of the Trümpfers, to occupy the Bodmer place, and if the Bodmers themselves were *glad* to let us have it, I have no doubt they would find no difficulty in inducing the Trümpfers to stand back. Therefore it is merely a question of winning the Bodmers to my wish in earnest; and my wife, whom I have commissioned to make overtures to Frau Bodmer, desires the help of a third person who should tell that lady all the ingratiating things which neither she nor I can say: and to act as that third person, honoured friend, my wife considers nobody more fitted than yourself. So the heartfelt prayer goes up to you, to write Frau Bodmer and try to win her to my part. For that—my wife thinks—it might be advisable if you laid stress on my great want and need of [11] such a quiet country home as her estate affords; perhaps also—so thinks my wife—if you pricked the lady's pride a little, and pointed out to her the honour it might conceivably bring her, to have her premises supply me with a fostering haven for my future art-creations.—

What do you say to it? Will you undertake it?—

On my approaching return to Zurich I should very much like to see this affair, which exercises me so urgently now, brought so far forward that I might take a swift decision. (07)

Need I say how much it would please me to be able to bid good-day to you as well [as Otto] at Berne?

Many hearty greetings from

Your RICHARD WAGNER.

Mornex, August 11, 1856.

## 23.

[September (?) 1856.]

Most faithful of all Protectresses of the Arts!

My sister [Clara Wolfram] is obliged to keep her bed: if you are not a victim to the same

necessity, I beg you to dispose of the vacant cover, or else to save it (something of a consideration in these hard times, with the silk-crop failure!). In the former event I would propose (without dictating) Boohm.— (08)

Your R.W.

[12]

The house is about my ears, through your speaking disrespectfully of Rienzi yesterday!—

## 24.

[Autumn 1856?]

Would it entertain you, perhaps, to see what my Weimar Councillor has brewed about my poem?

Various hints which I had given him are strewn with marvellous fidelity amid his own galhimathias; which makes the thing fairly amusing. (09)

Much satisfaction is wished you by  
Your much dissatisfied

R.W.

## 25.

O happy swallow, wouldst be mating,  
Thyself thou build'st thy brood a nest;  
In quest of quiet for creating,  
I cannot build my house of rest!  
The peaceful home of stone and pine—

What swallow'll build that nest of mine?

## 26.

All in order. Will you be coming over for the last act of the Walküre?

I—hope so.—

[May 8, 1857, evidently referring to a matter of some two months previously, Wagner tells Liszt of a private rendering [13] of "the big last scene from 'Die Walküre'" with Frau Pollert as Brünnhilde, himself as Wotan, and Th. Kirchner as accompanist: "We did it three times in my rooms," i.e. the Zeltweg flat, from which he moved out the middle of April; see p. lviii sup.—Tr.]

## 27.

Herewith the music-journal (10) and a letter of Princess Wittgenstein's, which please return to me when read.

I am to give you my wife's best wishes.

R.W.

28.

May 21, 57.

I have naught to say to the father of my country: if he were to presume to call upon me in my swallow's-nest, I should shew him the door. His colours are white and green; this for Baur. (11)—

The Muse is beginning to visit me: does it betoken the certainty of your visit? The first thing I found was a melody which I didn't at all know what to do with, till of a sudden the words from the last scene of Siegfried came into my head. A good omen. Yesterday I also lit on the commencement of act 2—as Fafner's Rest; which has an element of humour in it. But you shall hear all about it, if the swallow comes to inspect her edifice to-morrow [his birthday].

RICH. WAGNER.

29.

To be continued...

## Notes

### Note 01 on page 7

A clue to the above may be found in Letter 95.—Tr.

### Note 02 on page 8

Accompanying a few bars of a polka, whereon stands the date. [Cf. *Life of R. Wagner*, iv. 132.—Tr.]

### Note 03 on page 9

As is to be gathered from a fragment dated June 11, published in the *Letters to O. Wesendonck*, Herr Otto had just advanced a sum of money. The "composition" is that afterwards issued as "Album Sonata" (see *Life*, iv. 131 and 448).—Tr.

### Note 04 on page 9

A joint excursion to Glarus, Stachelberg, and the Muotta-Thal had been arranged. [Footnotes unsigned are the German editor's.—Tr.]

### Note 05 on page 10

At the Zurich Subscription Concert of Tuesday, January 23, 1855, when Frau Heim sang songs by Schubert, and Wagner conducted Mozart's *Zauberflöte* overture, Beethoven's C minor symphony, and his own revised *Faust* overture?—Tr.

### Note 06 on page 11

"The African Roscius" (1805-66).

### Note 07 on page 12

It came to nothing, for Wagner writes Herr Otto three weeks later: "Here you have the B.'s letter back; please give your dear wife my best thanks again for her attempt at intervention.—Once more I feel much and deeply humbled," etc.—Tr.

### Note 08 on page 13

Wilhelm Baumgartner. Frau Wesendonck adds a note concerning "a beautiful poem" delivered by Gottfried Keller at the Schweiz. Musikfest, 1867, in memory of B.'s then recent death. She further explains that she had warmly defended *Rheingold* and *Walküre* against Minim's admonition to return to the style of *Rienzi*.

### Note 09 on page 13

Liszt, August 1, 1856: "Franz Müller will visit you at Mornex the middle of this month, and bring you his work on the Nibelungen." Wagner finished his Mornex 'cure' Aug. 17, met Otto at Borne on the 18th, and returned to Zurich next day; where he not only found his sister Clara, but also that his "Weimar Regierungsrath and red-hot enthusiast had arrived, bringing novelties foretold by Liszt." Clearly, then, our no. 24 refers to an ensuing MS. revision, for Müller's *Ring*-book was not published until six years later.—Tr.

Note 10 on page 13

Probably the *Neue Zeitschrift* of April 10, 1857, containing Wagner's article *On Franz Liszt's Symphonic Poems*, which originally formed a letter to Pss Wn's daughter (February 15, 1857). The last clause would seem to refer to the birth of little Karl, April 18.—Tr.

Note 11 on page 14

Expecting King John of Saxony at his Hôtel du Lac, Baur had inquired as to the correct colour for decorations.