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*Prologue to a reading of the  
"Götterdämmerung" before a select audience in  
Berlin*

By Richard Wagner

Translated by William Ashton Ellis



The Wagner Library

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## About this Title

### Source

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By Richard Wagner

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[305]

## Prologue to a reading of the "Götterdämmerung" before a select audience in Berlin

DESIROUS of your closer attention to a work which may have chiefly attracted your notice as a musical product, I believe I shall best attain that end by reading out a portion of the dramatic poem on which it is founded; for I thereby hope to shew you not only the character in which I view that work myself, but also that feature which compelled me to devise a plan of reproduction quite foreign to the habits of our Opera-house and its public.

People talk of innovations made by me in Opera: for my own part I am conscious of having, if not achieved, at least deliberately striven for this one advantage, the raising of the dramatic dialogue itself to the main subject of musical treatment; whereas in Opera proper the moments of lyrical delay, and mostly violent arrest of the action, had hitherto been deemed the only ones of possible service to the musical composition.

The longing to raise the Opera to the dignity of genuine Drama could never wake and wax in the musician, before great masters had enlarged the province of his art in that spirit which now has made our German music acknowledgedly victorious over all its rivals. Through the fullest application of this legacy of our great masters we have arrived at uniting Music so completely with the Drama's action, that this very marriage enables the action itself to gain that ideal freedom—i.e. release from all necessity of appealing to abstract reflection—which our great poets [306] sought on many a road, to fall at last a-pondering on the selfsame possibility of attaining it through Music.

By incessantly revealing to us the inmost motives of the action, in their widest ramifications, Music at like time makes it possible to display that action itself in drastic definition: as the characters no longer need to tell us of their impulses [or "grounds of action"—*Beweggründe*] in terms of the reflecting consciousness, their dialogue thereby gains that naïve pointedness (*Präzision*) which constitutes the very life of Drama. Again, whilst Antique Tragedy had to confine its dramatic dialogue to separate sections strewn between the choruses delivered in the Orchestra—those chants in which Music gave to the drama its higher meaning—in the Modern Orchestra, the greatest artistic achievement of our age, this archetypal element goes hand in hand with the action itself, unsevered from the dialogue, and in a profounder sense may be said to embrace all the action's motives in its mother-womb.

Thus, besides the restoration of its naïve pointedness, it became possible to give the dialogue an extension covering the entire drama; and it is this that enables me to read to you to-day in guise of a bare dramatic poem a work that owes its origin to nothing but the feasibility of carrying it out completely in music: for I believe I may submit it as a play in dialogue to the same judgment we are wont to invoke with a piece indited for the Spoken Play.

The quality I thus have claimed for my work not only emboldens me to shew it you from this one side without alarm, but has also been my principal reason for the unusual steps I am taking to place it before the German public in its entirety; in the one case as in the other I wish to commend it, not to an assemblage of opera-lovers, but to a gathering of truly educated persons earnestly concerned for an original cultivation of the German Spirit.