DIE GOTTERDAMMERUNG

Richard Wagner; The fourth (and last) "music drama" of the Ring of the Nibelung

Prelude: Erda's three daughters, the Norns, are spinning the rope of fate. When it ominously breaks, they descend back to their mother. Siegfried and Brünnhilde dwell within her ring of fire. The Valkyrie urges her husband on to deeds of valor, and receives the Ring as his pledge of fidelity as he leaves for a journey down the Rhine.

Act One

Alberich's son Hagen advises Gunther and Gutrune, rulers of the Gibichungs, that marriage will improve their dominion, and he suggests Brünnhilde for Gunther and Siegfried for Gutrune. He drugs Siegfried and recruits him to win Brünnhilde for Gunther. The Valkyrie Waltraute begs Brünnhilde for the Ring, which will end the immortals' torment. Brünnhilde refuses to relinquish her husband's love token. Bursting through the ring of fire, Siegfried, disguised through the Tarnhelm's power as Gunther, claims his new bride and wrests the Ring away from her.

Act Two

Alberich appears to his sleeping son, Hagen, and commends him on his endeavor to regain the Ring. Hagen summons the Gibichungs to welcome back Gunther and his new bride. In trading places, Siegfried has neglected to give Gunther the Ring. Seeing the Ring on his finger, Brünnhilde confronts Siegfried, but he is confused, and remembers only winning the Ring from the dragon. Brünnhilde believes her husband guilty of duplicity, and, swearing on the same spear Siegfried has used to swear his innocence, vows murderous vengeance with Gunther and Hagen.

Act Three

Siegfried, out hunting with Hagen and Gunther, happens upon the Rhinemaidens, who toy with him over the Ring. Rejoining the hunting party, Siegfried recounts his life story, which becomes more detailed as he drinks the antidote offered by Hagen. When Siegfried confesses his love for Brünnhilde, Hagen kills him for perjury. While trying to prevent Hagen from seizing the Ring, Gunther is also murdered by Hagen. Siegfried's body is then taken back to Gibichung Hall. Brünnhilde takes the Ring from his finger, ignites his funeral pyre, then leaps onto her faithful horse, Grane, and into the flames. As fire engulfs Valhalla and the Rhine bursts its banks, Hagen jumps into the river in pursuit of the Ring. He is pulled under by the Rhinemaidens who hold the Ring aloft in triumph, as a new era begins.