

***Mahler Variations***

Theme

Variation 1

Variation 2

Variation 3

Variation 4: Beethoven

Variation 5: Elvis

Variation 6: Mozart

Variation 7: Eric Rohmer

Variation 8: Bach

Variation 9: Schoenberg

Variation 10: Webern

Variation 11: Goldberg

Variation 12

Variation 13: Bellini

Variation 14: Antonioni

Variation 15: Fugue

Variation 16: The Minor Third Bird

Variation 17: Chorale Prelude

Variation 18: The *Lulu* Dance (Berg)

Variation 19: Proust

Variation 20: Sheep on a Hillside

Variation 21: [Silence]

Variation 22: Mahler

Coda

Variation 19: Proust

*These words — the first six sentences of Proust's In Search of Lost Time — aren't sung in the quartet. But even so they're set to music. The melody in the Proust variation, moving from instrument to instrument, would be a setting of these words, if it happened to be sung.*

Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure. Parfois, à peine ma bougie éteinte, mes yeux se fermaient si vite que je n'avais pas le temps de me dire: " Je m'endors. " Et, une demi-heure après, la pensée qu'il était temps de chercher le sommeil m'éveillait; je voulais poser le volume que je croyais avoir encore dans les mains et souffler ma lumière; je n'avais pas cessé en dormant de faire des réflexions sur ce que je venais de faire, mais ces réflexions avaient pris un tour un peu particulier; il me semblait que j'étais moi-même ce dont parlait l'ouvrage: une église, un quatuor, la rivalité de François Ier et de Charles Quint. Cette croyance survivait pendant quelques secondes à mon réveil; elle ne choquait pas ma raison, mais pesait comme des écailles sur mes yeux et les empêchait de se rendre compte que le bougeoir n'était plus allumé. Puis elle commençait à me devenir inintelligible, comme après la métempsychose les pensées d'une existence antérieure; le sujet du livre se détachait de moi, j'étais fibre de m'y appliquer ou non; aussitôt je recouvrais la vue et j'étais bien étonné de trouver autour de moi une obscurité, douce et reposante pour mes yeux, mais peut-être plus encore pour mon esprit, à qui elle apparaissait comme une chose sans cause, incompréhensible, comme une chose vraiment obscure.

*For a long time I'd go to bed early. Sometimes, with my candle barely out, my eyes would close so quickly that I wouldn't have time to say to myself, "I'm asleep." And a half hour later the thought that it was time to go to sleep would wake me; I'd want to put down the book that I'd think I still held in my hands and blow out my light; I hadn't stopped, while I was asleep, turning over in my mind the things I'd been reading about. But these thoughts would take an unusual turn; it seemed to me that I myself had become whatever the book was talking about; a church, a quartet, the rivalry of François the First and Charles the Fifth. This belief would persist for a few seconds after I awoke: it didn't come as any kind of shock to my mind but would weigh like scales on my eyes and would stop them from seeing that the candle was no longer lit. Then everything would begin to become unintelligible to me, like, after a reincarnation, the thoughts of a previous life; the subject of the book would detach itself from me, I'd be free to link it to myself or not; all at once I'd recover my sight and I'd be quite astonished to find darkness all around me, sweet and restful to my eyes but perhaps even more for my mind, to which it seemed like something without any cause, incomprehensible, like something truly dark.*

*(translation by Greg Sandow)*