

Answer to Simmias by J. Morris

Simmias, if I remember rightly, has fears and misgivings whether the soul, being in the form of harmony, although a fairer and diviner thing than the body, may not perish first.

Plato, Phaedo

This happened to me once: I wrote a chaconne for orchestra (these were my student days), I scored the thing, took pains, and heard my phrases begin to soar above their grounded bass. And then I lost the pages, God knows how. Those precious, scribbled staves just disappeared beneath the waves of senior-year disorder. I wasn't daunted, though. I could still hear it, the music in my "head," my "thoughts," my "mind": unscientific terms: had I dropped dead that day, the probing scalpels would have failed to find a single quaver in my brain. Yet they were there, I heard it, wrote it down again – improved it, even, took it closer to what I had in mind.

Now please imagine your soul as music. You live out your years becoming rhythm, harmony, the structure of what you are. Then comes the final measure, the whole-note rest of death. The printed score – your blood and bones and breath and DNA – will decompose, will disappear as quickly as my first-draft chaconne. What of the music? How can you live again? A greater mind must needs remember you and let you play forever, each thematic line perfected

and finally sounding true. Heaven is sounding
impossible these days, with every quantum
of matter mathematically weighed and accounted for.
But it's no more, or less, miraculous
than what I have in mind.

And so, da capo:

the choirmaster smiles and gives the downbeat,
the angels pluck you out upon their lyres
while voices far more absolute, more lovely
than any you imagined sing the burden,
as light as life. Simmias, let us pray:
Remember us, O Lord. Keep us in mind.