

“Pourquoi me réveiller?” (Oh, why awaken me?) WERTHER , Act III, music by Jules Massenet, libretto by Édouard Blau, Paul Milliet and Georges Hartmann, 1892, based on Goethe’s, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.

SYNOPSIS: Werther, the quintessential Romantic hero, is a lonely poet, alienated from society, and deeply in love with Charlotte, who is married to his best friend, Albert. Although she returns his love, she does not admit it, even to herself, and remains faithful to Albert. After a long absence, Werther returns and Charlotte visits him. He reads her an emotional poem by Ossian—in a desperate attempt to convey his feelings to her, as he contemplates suicide.

WERTHER (*holding a copy of the poem*)

Toute mon âme est là...
(*He reads.*)

My whole soul is in it...

"Pourquoi me réveiller,
ô souffle du printemps?,
pourquoi me réveiller?
Sur mon front je sens tes caresses,
et pourtant bien proche est le temps
des orages et des tristesses!
Pourquoi me réveiller, ah!
ô souffle du printemps?"

"Oh, why awaken me,
you breath of early spring?
Oh, why awaken me?
On my brow I feel your caresses,
although now quite near is the time
of great tempests and bitter sadness.
Oh, why awaken me, ah!
you breath of early spring?"

Demain dans le vallon
viendra le voyageur
Se souvenant de ma gloire première...
Et ses yeux vainement
chercheront ma splendeur,
Ils ne trouveront plus
que deuil et que misère!
Hélas! Pourquoi me réveiller, ah!,
ô souffle du printemps?"

Tomorrow in the vale,
the voyager will come.
He will recall the glory I once knew...
And his eyes, in vain,
will seek out my renown,
they'll find there nothing more
than grief and lamenting!
Alas! Oh, why awaken me, ah!
you breath of early spring?"

--From "Bel canto, the French Connection," a course for *Lifelong Learners at UC Santa Cruz*, ©2011 Miriam Ellis