

# แนวคิดที่คล้ายกันในแวริเอชันส์ : บทประพันธ์เพลงแวริเอชันส์จาก ทำนองหลักของโรเบิร์ต ชูมัnn ผลงานโอปุสที่ 9 ของโยชันเนส บรามส์ LIKE MINDS IN VARIATIONS: JOHANNES BRAHMS'S VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY ROBERT SCHUMANN, OP. 9

เอริ นาคากาวา\* ERI NAKAGAWA\*

## บทคัดย่อ

บทประพันธ์เพลง Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 9 ของโยชันเนส บรามส์ ได้รับอิทธิพลจากผลงานของโรเบิร์ต และคุณภาพ ชูมัnn ซึ่งบรามส์ได้รักษาเมื่อวันที่ 30 กันยายน ปี ค.ศ. 1853 บรามส์ได้พับกับครอบครัวชูมัnn ในช่วงที่พำนักเขากำลังประสบปัญหาอย่างหนัก เป็นช่วงที่สุขภาพของโรเบิร์ต ชูมัnn ทรุดโทรมลงอย่างมาก สืบเนื่องมาจากความผิดปกติทางจิตใจ และพยายามที่จะกระทำอัตโนมัติกรรมในวันที่ 27 กุมภาพันธ์ ปี ค.ศ. 1854 ย้อนกลับไปเมื่อช่วงเดือนพฤษภาคมและมิถุนายน ปี ค.ศ. 1853 คุณภาพ ชูมัnn ได้ประพันธ์เพลง Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 20 เพื่อ nob ให้เป็นของขวัญวันเกิดอายุครบ 43 ปี แด่โรเบิร์ต ชูมัnn บรามส์ได้รับแรงบันดาลใจจากผลงานชุดนี้ จึงประพันธ์เพลงในรูปแบบเดียวกันในช่วงเดือนพฤษภาคมและสิงหาคม ปี ค.ศ. 1854 ผลงานโอปุสที่ 20 ของคุณภาพ ชูมัnn และผลงานโอปุสที่ 9 ของบรามส์ นำทำนองหลักมาจากการพับ Bunte Blätter (Colored Leaves), Op. 99 No. 4 ของโรเบิร์ต ชูมัnn ผลงานการประพันธ์เพลงโอปุสที่ 9 ของบรามส์ ประกอบด้วย 16 ตอน อุทิศให้แก่คุณภาพ ชูมัnn และแสดงออกถึงความเคราะห์ที่บรามส์มีต่อคุณภาพ และโรเบิร์ต ชูมัnn โดยมีการใช้ทำนองเพลงจากผลงานมุศก่อน รวมถึงการใช้เทคนิคการประพันธ์เพลงในรูปแบบของคุณภาพ และโรเบิร์ต ชูมัnn

คำสำคัญ : โยชันเนส บรามส์/ แวริเอชันส์/ โรเบิร์ต ชูมัnn/ คุณภาพ ชูมัnn/ แวริเอชัน

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## Abstract

Johannes Brahms's Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 9 was influenced by the works of Robert and Clara Schumann, whom Brahms first met on September 30, 1853. His acquaintance with them coincided with a most difficult period for the Schumann family. Schumann's health deteriorated due to his mental illness and he attempted suicide on February 27, 1854. Back in May and June 1853, Clara Schumann composed her Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 20 for her husband's forty-third birthday. Brahms was inspired by Clara's set of variations and wrote his own in May and August 1854. Both Clara's Op. 20 and Brahms's Op. 9 are based on the same theme: Schumann's *Bunte Blätter* (Colored Leaves), Op. 99 No. 4. A set of 16 variations, Brahms's Op. 9 was dedicated to Clara Schumann and also written to pay homage to both Clara and Robert Schumann in many respects such as the inclusion of thematic allusions to their earlier pieces and the use of compositional techniques frequently employed by them.

**Keywords:** Johannes Brahms/ Variations/ Robert Schumann/ Clara Schumann/ Variation

## Introduction

Johannes Brahms grew up in Hamburg and started his piano lessons at the age of seven. Young Brahms was interested was not only in music but also in reading. He spent every penny he could afford on books and became deeply captivated in the world of Romantic poetry. He called himself "Johannes Kreisler, junior" after the principal character of his favorite novel *Kater Murr* by E. T. A. Hoffmann as his alter ego.<sup>1</sup> By the age of sixteen, Brahms clearly knew that the path he should follow was not as a pianist but as a composer.<sup>2</sup> In March 1850, he sent some of his compositions to Robert Schumann at his hotel in Hamburg where he came for concerts with his wife.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, Schumann, who had much to do, returned them unopened.

The year 1853 was the crucial turning point of Brahms's life. The unknown musician left Hamburg on April with Eduard Reményi, a talented Hungarian violinist who asked Brahms to join him on a concert tour. They visited the renowned violinist Joseph Joachim in Hanover in late May and played Brahms's own compositions for him. A lifelong bond of friendship between Brahms and Joachim was formed in just a few days.<sup>4</sup> Then in Bonn, Brahms met J. W. von Wasielawski, who had recently been concertmaster of Schumann's orchestra in Düsseldorf. Carrying Wasielawski's letter of introduction, Brahms visited Robert and Clara Schumann in Düsseldorf on September 30, 1853. According to Geiringer: "Robert and Clara's diaries are filled from cover to cover with accounts of Brahms; hardly a day passed on which his playing or his work was not mentioned in words of the highest praise."<sup>5</sup> The name of Brahms instantly became known after Schumann hailed the young composer in his article "Neue Bahnen" (New Paths) for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*.

Unfortunately, Brahms's arrival and rapid success coincided with a most difficult period for the Schumann family. In less than a half year after Brahms met Schumanns, a catastrophe occurred in Robert Schumann's life. His mental disorder became unbearable and he threw himself into the Rhine on February 27, 1854. Brahms rushed to Düsseldorf, arriving on March 3, and next day Schumann was taken to an asylum at Endenich near Bonn.<sup>6</sup> Brahms did his very best to help his wife Clara, who was expecting her eighth child in a few months' time,<sup>7</sup> and looked after the children, helped the household accounts, and visited Robert in hospital as Clara was forbidden from seeing him by the doctors.<sup>8</sup>

1. Karl Geiringer, *Brahms: His Life and Work* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 23.

2. Karl Geiringer, *Brahms: His Life and Work* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 22.

3. Jan Swafford, *Johannes Brahms* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 56.

4. Jan Swafford, *Johannes Brahms* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 56.

5. Jan Swafford, *Johannes Brahms* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 56.

6. Jan Swafford, *Johannes Brahms* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 109.

7. Karl Geiringer, *Brahms: His Life and Work* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 42.

8. Stephen J. Smith, "Eloquence, Reference, and Significance in Clara Schumann's Opus 20 and Johannes Brahms' Opus 9" 139 (DMA diss., University of British Columbia, 1994), 37.

## Variations on the Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 9

Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 9 was his first independent set of variations after he wrote the slow movement in theme and variations from in the first two Piano Sonatas, Opp. 1 & 2. The variations are based on the fourth piece of Schumann's *Bunte Blätter* (Colored Leaves), a collection of 14 short piano pieces written between 1834 and 1849. Schumann assembled and published them as Op. 99 in 1852. No. 4 was written in 1841, one year after the marriage of Robert and Clara Schumann.

Clara wrote a set of variations on the same theme in June 1853 to celebrate her husband's forty-third birthday. Brahms was inspired by her variations when she played for him in May 1854, and started writing his own as a tribute to both Schumanns.<sup>9</sup> Like Clara's, Brahms's Variations, Op. 9 is in F-sharp minor and begins with the exact re-stating of the *Bunte Blätter* theme as in Example 1:



Example 1: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, b. 1-8  
Source: Johannes Brahms. *Variationen für Klavier*, page 1

Brahms initially composed only fourteen variations (of a total of sixteen) and presented them on June 15, 1854 to Clara, who was just recovering from the birth of her son Felix on June 11.<sup>10</sup> The manuscript of this work bears the title Little Variations on a Theme of His, dedicated to Her.<sup>11</sup> After composing the variations, Brahms requested and received a manuscript copy of Clara's variations on the same theme, and continued to ruminate on the two sets of variations.<sup>12</sup> Then on August 12, 1854, which was Clara's Name Day, he wrote two additional variations and inserted them as the tenth and eleventh variations of the final version.<sup>13</sup> At the head of the manuscript of the tenth variation, Brahms wrote a mysterious inscription "Rose und Heliotrop haben geduftet" (Rose and heliotrope were fragrant).<sup>14</sup> The rose is the flower for June, the birth month of Robert, while the heliotrope is a symbol for eternal love or devotion. We could easily conjecture that Brahms meant by the title that both Robert and Clara had blossomed in the tenth variation, in which he employed a unique technique discussed below.

9. Nancy B. Reich. *The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 232-233.

10. Nancy B. Reich. *The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 38.

11. Karl Geiringer, *Brahms: His Life and Work* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 210.

12. Stephen J. Smith, "Eloquence, Reference, and Significance in Clara Schumann's Opus 20 and Johannes Brahms' Opus 9" (DMA diss., University of British Columbia, 1994), 40.

13. Karl Geiringer, *Brahms: His Life and Work* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 210.

14. Li-chin Lai, "Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 20 by Clara Schumann: An Analytical and Interpretative Study" (DMA diss., Temple University, 1992), 82.

In bars 265-267 at the end of the variation, he inserts a fragment of the main theme of Clara's Romance Variée, Op. 3 (1831-33) in the inner voice and juxtaposes it with the distinctive melodic line in the soprano voice, which was the bass in the original Schumann's theme (Example 2).



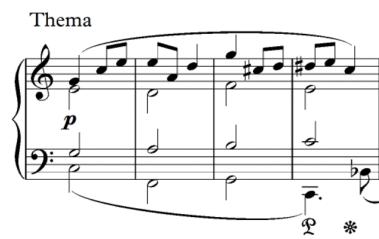
Example 2: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 10, b. 264-267  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 14

Example 3 below is the main theme of Clara's Romance Variée, Op. 3:



Example 3: Clara Schumann Romance Variée, Op. 3, b. 6-9  
Source: Clara Wieck. Clara & Robert Schumann Klavierwerken ~Die Fährte der Liebe, page 8

Thematic juxtaposition was the technique that Schumann utilized in his Impromptus, Op. 5 (originally written in 1833), borrowing the theme of Clara's Romance Variée, Op. 3 and superimposing it on top of his own bass theme as in Example 4.



Example 4: Robert Schumann Impromptus, Op. 5 (1850), b. 17-20  
Source: Robert Schumann. Impromptus Opus 5 Fassung 1850, page 1

Brahms discovered that the theme of Clara's Op. 3 could be inserted also in her variations of the same Robert's theme. Although Clara had completed her variations in June 1853, as Brahms communicated this discovery to Clara,<sup>15</sup> she added it to the autograph in August 1854.<sup>16</sup> The allusion of the Op. 3 theme appears in the coda of Variation 7 in Clara's Variations, Op. 20 (Example 5).



Example 5: Clara Schumann Variations, Op. 20, b. 202-205, Var. 7  
Source: Clara Schumann. Wieck-Schumann Ausgewählte Klavierwerke, page 72

On September 14, Clara wrote in her diary: "Brahms has had a splendid idea, a surprise for you, my Robert. He has interwoven my old theme with yours – already I can see you smile."<sup>17</sup> Nancy B. Reich stated: "For Clara, the quotation may have recalled the glowing days of her childhood; for Brahms it was a gesture to honor both older composers."<sup>18</sup>

Schumann's Bunte Blätter, Op. 99 No. 4 includes two patterns of a five-note motive: the so-called "Clara's motive": C#-B-A-G#-A and C#-B-A-G#-F#. The former is derived from Clara's name: C (L) A (R) A, and the latter is descending five notes, both of which frequently appear in the works in Robert and Clara Schumann. In the Brahms's Variations, Op. 9, although he modifies the original theme in most of 16 variations, "Clara's motive" is retained in every variation that does not present the original shape of Schumann's theme as seen in the following 12 examples.



Example 6: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 2, b. 49-50: C#-B-A-G#-A  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 2



Example 7: Brahms Variation, Op. 9, Var. 4, b. 85-87: C#-B-A-G#-A  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 4

15. Stephen J. Smith, "Eloquence, Reference, and Significance in Clara Schumann's Opus 20 and Johannes Brahms' Opus 9" (DMA diss., University of British Columbia, 1994), 30.

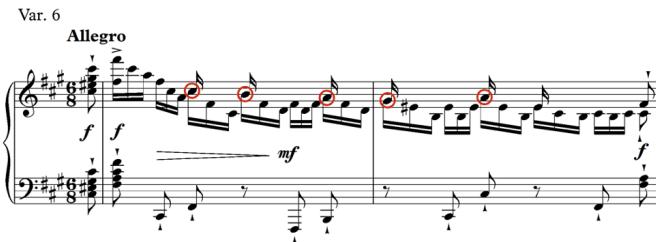
16. Nancy B. Reich. *The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 313.

17. Berthold Litzmann. *Clara Schumann: An Artist's Life, Based on Material Found in Diaries and Letters*. vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 81.

18. Nancy B. Reich. *The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 233.



Example 8: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 5, b. 116-117: C#-B-A#-G#-F#  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 5



Example 9: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 6, b. 152-153: C#-B-A-G#-A  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 6



Example 10: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 7, b. 178-179: C#-B-A-G#-A  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 9

Variations 9, 10, and 11 are written in different keys.



Example 11: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 9, b. 215-217: F#-E-D-C#-D(B) in B minor  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 12

Var. 10

**Poco Adagio**

Example 12: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 10, b. 236-239: A-G-F#-E-F#  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 13

Var. 11

**Un poco più animato**

Example 13: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 11, b. 269-271: C-B-A-G#-A  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 15

Variation 12 goes back to F-sharp minor. The last two notes of the descending five-note motive are swapped.

Var. 12

**Allegretto, poco scherzando**

Example 14: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 12, b. 296-297: C#-B-A-F#-G#  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 16

Var. 13

**Non troppo Presto**

Example 15: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 13, b. 318-319: C#-B-A-G#-A  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 17

Var. 14 **Andante**

Example 16: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 14, b. 338-342, C#-B-A-G#-F#  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 18

In Variation 16, the last variation, written in F-sharp major, the motive starts an A-Sharp but incompletely, missing the third note, an F-sharp.

Var. 16

Example 17: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 16, b. 398-401: A#-G#(-F#)-E#-F#  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 22

Besides having Schumann's Bunte Blätter, Op. 99 No. 4 as the main theme of his variations, Brahms makes some other allusions to the music of the older composer. Variation 9, for example, is a clear emulation of the fifth piece from Schumann's same opus, and is even in the same key, as can be seen Example 11 and Example 18.

**Schnell.**

Componirt 1838.

Example 18: Schumann Bunte Blätter, Op. 99 No. 5, b. 1-2  
Source: Robert Schumann. Piano Music of Robert Schumann, Series II, page 209

In Variation 2, the bass line from the original theme is varied in dotted rhythm, which also shows some resemblance to the fifth piece of the revised version (1950) of Schumann's Impromptus, Op. 5 (see Example 6 and Example 19).



Example 19: Schumann Impromptus, Op. 5 (1850), No. 5, b. 1-4  
Source: Robert Schumann. Impromptus Opus 5 Fassung 1850, page 4

Moreover, the first piece of Schumann's Op. 5 may be modelled on Variation 16, the last variation of Brahms's Op. 9, in both of which the main element of interest with octaves in the bass line; it is decorated by sparse, syncopated chords, hinting at the theme indirectly (see Example 17 and Example 20).



Example 20: Schumann Impromptus, Op. 5 (1850), No. 1, b. 1-4  
Source: Robert Schumann. Impromptus Opus 5 Fassung 1850, page 1

Brahms frequently treats the bass as a thematic element in his Op. 9. In addition to the above-mentioned Variations 2 and 16, he interestingly manipulates the bass in Variation 10. The original bass of Schumann's Bunte Blätter, Op. 99 No. 4 is taken as a melodic material to the top voice, which is now supported by a new bass line: the inversion of the original bass as seen in Example 12 above. The two upside-down elements first appear simultaneously and then later in canon (Example 18).



Example 21: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 10, b. 244-251  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 13

Brahms's inclusion of canonic imitation was inspired by that in Clara's Variations, Op. 20 (Variation 6), but he wrote not just one but four contrapuntal variations in his set. Besides Variation 10, which includes a canon of the inversion a tenth lower in the alto voice (see Example 21), Variation 8 introduces a canon in the octave below played by the thumb of the left hand (Example 22), Variation 14 at the second interval above (Example 16), and Variation 15 is a sixth lower, two octaves below in the bass register (Example 23).

Var. 8

**Andante (non troppo lento)**  
*espressivo*

**p**

*col Pedale semper*

*dolce*

Example 22: Brahms Variations, Op. 9, Var. 8, b. 189-194  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 10

Var. 15

**Poco Adagio**  
*espressivo*

**p**

*sempre col Pedale*

Example 23: Brahms Variations Op. 9, Var. 15, b. 372-376  
Source: Johannes Brahms. Variationen für Klavier, page 20

R. Larry Todd remarks that: "The conspicuous use of these learned techniques is, in itself, an act of homage to Schumann, who, during the 1840s, had studies counterpoint together with Clara. . ."<sup>19</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Brahms called himself "Johannes Kreisler, junior" after the fictional character Johannes Kreisler created by E. T. A. Hoffmann. In the manuscript of his Op. 9, Brahms signed either a "B" or a "Kr" at the end of certain variations, standing for Brahms or Kreisler; "B" variations include Nos. 4, 7, 8, 11, 14, and 16 which are reflective variations while "Kr" variations,

Nos. 5, 6, 9, 12, and 13, are the more impassioned ones.<sup>20</sup> "B" variations are written mostly in p or pp in slow tempo; in contrast, "Kr" variations are in quicker tempo and three of them include f and ff. Brahms's characterization with "B" and "Kr" may recall Schumann's "Eusebius" and "Florestan" personas in different parts in *Davidbündlertänze*, Op. 6, however, it is interesting to note that Brahms had adopted "Kreisler" before he knew Schumann.

Associated with differentiation in character and tempo, Brahms provides various changes in meter and formal structure in the variations. For example, the original meter of 2/4 changes to 9/8 already in Variation 2, continuing with 6/8 (Var. 6), 4/4 and 3/4 (Var. 7), 4/16 (Var. 11), 3/8 (Var. 14), and 6/4 (Vars. 15 & 16). The structure of 24 bars in the original *Bunte Blätter* theme is retained only in five variations (Vars. 1, 3, 4, 13, and 16). Among them, Variation 1 and Variation 3 keep the theme in the left hand. The theme is disguised in Variation 4 and Variation 13, while Variation 16 retains only the bass line in the parallel major key. Among the remaining variations, Variation 8 and Variation 15 keep the original structure but due to canonic imitation, both are extended by two bars at the end. Variation 2 and Variation 7 are compressed into 12 bars and 11 bars respectively. Three "Kr" Variations 5, 6, and 12 are extended freely with a vigorous coda, the last of which ends with groups of three sixteenth notes in hemiola rhythm.

As for keys, the first eight variations remain in F-sharp minor. A surprising modulation features in Variation 3 in which remote F minor is inserted in the middle (b. 71-80). Different keys appear first in Variation 9 (B minor), Variation 10 (D major), Variation 11 (G major), Variation 15 (G-flat major), and Variation 16 (F-sharp major). The tonality of G major in Variation 11, which is the Neapolitan of the home key, is hardly recognized but its dominant seventh harmony (D7) is prolonged with a D pedal tone through the variation. Brahms transforms the D7 harmony to an augmented sixth chord, using the note B# enharmonically in bar 294. The augmented sixth chord resolves to a C-sharp major chord in the last bar, which, as the dominant chord, prepares for the F-sharp minor tonality of the following variation. The last two variations are written in the tonic major key like the third and final variations of Clara's Variations, Op. 20. Brahms chooses the enharmonic G-flat major for Variation 15 as if recalling Schubert Impromptu, Op. 90 No. 3. The tonal sequence in the last three variations, which changes from F-sharp minor, to a sudden G-flat major of a totally different color, and then to an F-sharp major of another sonority, implies a significant psychological impact to this quiet, subdued conclusion of the set for the performer.

The following table shows how Brahms varies keys, meters, bar length, tempi, characters ("B" or "Kr"), use of canon, and appearance of the theme and bass (right hand or left hand) in the variations.

Table 1: Comparison of Theme and 16 Variations in Brahms Variations, Op. 9  
Source: by author

variation	key	meter	bar	tempo	character	canon	theme*	bass
theme	f#	2/4	24	Ziemlich langsam			r. h.	l. h.
1	f#	2/4	24				l. h.	
2	f#	9/8	12	Poco più moto			l. h.	
3	f#	2/4	24	Tempo di tema			l. h.	
4	f#	2/4	24	Poco più moto	B			
5	f#	2/4	43	Allegro capriccioso	Kr			
6	f#	6/8	26	Allegro	Kr			
7	f#	4/4 – 3/4	11	Andante	B			
8	f#	2/4	26	Andante (non troppo lento)	B	x	r. h., l. h.	
9	b	2/4	21	Schnell	Kr			
10	D	2/4 – (1/4)	33	Poco Adagio		x	r. h.	
11	G	4/16	27	Un poco più animato				
12	f#	2/4	22	Allegretto, poco scherzando	Kr			
13	f#	2/4	24**	Non troppo Presto	Kr			
14	f#	3/8	34	Andante	B	x		
15	Gb	6/4	26	Poco Adagio		x	r. h., l. h.	
16	F#	6/4	24		B			l. h.

\*includes only those retaining the original structure of the theme.

\*\*includes repeated four bars by a repeat sign.

On September 25, 1854, Brahms wrote to Breitkopf & Härtel, requesting that his variations appear simultaneously with those of Frau Schumann.<sup>21</sup> Brahms's Op. 9 went out into the world along with Clara's Op. 20 in November 1854.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

Our encounters with people change our lives and make us grow humanly and spiritually. For Brahms, the meetings with numerous people in 1853 miraculously led the twenty-year-old nobody to become a successful composer in less than a year. His musical style was influenced by his passion for literature in his early years just like Robert Schumann. Although his acquaintance with Robert and Clara Schumann coincided with a most difficult period for the Schumann family, the three great musicians' close, beautiful relationship is reflected in Brahms's Op. 9. Julius Otto Grimm (1827-1903), who was very close to Brahms in those days, christened the work "Trost-Einsamkeit" (Consolation and Loneliness).<sup>23</sup>

The conclusion of Clara's Op. 20 and Brahms's are both written with a pianississimo but from the perspective of the performer they are quite different; Clara's Op. 20 ends her set with a

21. Nancy B. Reich. *The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 233.

22. Stephen J. Smith, "Eloquence, Reference, and Significance in Clara Schumann's Opus 20 and Johannes Brahms' Opus 9" (DMA diss., University of British Columbia, 1994), 42.

23. Jan Swafford, *Johannes Brahms* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 113.

phrase in ascending motion of passageworks as if suggesting the feeling of “hope” or “prayer” while Brahms’s last variation does not “express” much, as it only recalls the original bass line in low registers with a barely recognizable theme with sparse, syncopated chords with feelings of “resignation and acceptance.” The last variation of Brahms’s set leads one to speculate if Brahms were predicting Schumann’s ineluctable destiny at the time of this composition. Would the entrance of Brahms in Schumann’s life have been one of the causes for Schumann’s attempted suicide? Schumann’s biographer Marcel Brion quotes Schumann’s way of describing Brahms: “He must grow while I diminish.”<sup>24</sup> And would it be possible that Brahms knew how the older master had felt toward him?

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