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Reactions to Two Seemingly Dissimilar Works of Art

As someone without a great deal of knowledge or familiarity with music or art, the extent of my artistic experiences has essentially been limited to observing and appreciating works of art. Two of the works I especially enjoyed in recent years, Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* and Gabriel Garcia Marquéz's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, appear to be, on the whole, vastly different. These differences begin with the most fundamental ones, that they represent two separate forms of art: a piece of music and a work of literature, and that the artists are trying to express different types of content. However, despite these differences, my reactions to them were fundamentally the same.

I began listening to Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* without much more than the most cursory familiarity with the work. I had not read the program, which outlines the narrative story of the symphony, nor was I familiar with the structure of the composition. Even so, I was able to appreciate the music on a basic, aesthetic level. For example, I found myself struck by the compelling melodies of the first movement, and how the movement began with a soft, slow introduction then repeatedly developed into passionate outbursts. I recognized the elegance of the second, dance movement, and the mysteriousness of the fifth movement. Each movement seemed to be filled with emotion, and I was able to recognize this in a general sense, even though I was not aware yet of the meaning of the work as a whole. I was also intrigued by the use of so many varied tone colors, which I later learned were the result of the symphony being written for a much larger orchestra than traditional and using a number of unusual combinations of instruments to create new sounds. Whereas I would occasionally find my concentration drifting when listening to other

works where the tone color was essentially the same throughout the piece, this symphony managed to keep my interest, despite its length, by being so varied both in tone color and in other respects. Finally, I noticed how, even though each of the movements had a different sound, one melodic theme recurred in each, suggesting that this was not just a collection of unrelated pieces of music but a coherent story.

After listening to the symphony once, intrigued by it, I spent some time reading about it, which made many things clearer. I was able to better understand the structure of the work. This was especially important because my lack of experience listening to music had occasionally left me feeling somewhat lost at times; with a bit of clarification, I was able to pick up on more details I would have otherwise missed. What proved even more significant, however, was reading the program associated with the symphony, which revealed the composer's intentions in creating the work. Whereas I had previously only recognized the emotions of each movement in a general sense, I learned from the program that it was telling the story of a musician dominated by his love for a woman; with that knowledge, I could better understand how they fit together to form a story. This knowledge also made it possible for me to recognize more details in the music: for example, I found that the sudden loud beat at the end of the fourth movement represents, in a quite literal symbolism, the execution of the character by guillotine, or that the strange, unnatural sounds of the fifth movement were conjuring the bizarre atmosphere of a witches' sabbath. With this context in mind, I could begin to comprehend the symphony on another level, beyond simply its aesthetic value. I could understand that its purpose was to tell a story embellished with musical depictions of emotions, which made it considerably more interesting to me.

Another work of art I recently enjoyed was of a considerably different form: Gabriel García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is a novel written in Spanish, though the version with which I am primarily familiar is a translation. Much like my reaction to Berlioz's symphony, I found myself first appreciative of the work on an aesthetic level. Most immediately, the tone of the

sentences was compelling, and the storyline was certainly intriguing. Without going into too much detail, the story centers upon the marriage of a young local woman, Angela Vicario, to a rich foreigner; this marriage fails when he discovers on their wedding night that she is not a virgin, and as a result her family suffers a massive loss of honor and must seek to regain it. To do so, Angela's two brothers, Pablo and Pedro Vicario are then obligated to seek revenge upon the man they believe to be responsible, Santiago Nasar, and they do so in the extreme, stabbing him repeatedly until his death. However, what I found even more intriguing was that Marquéz quite clearly foreshadows the outcome from the very beginning of the novel: even the first sentence begins with "On the day they were going to kill him," referring to Nasar. In most novels the author creates suspense, causing the reader to wonder what will take place in the ending, whereas here there is no such ambiguity. This unusual literary device made the novel more interesting to me, as I found myself reading on, curious as to why the author would have written the novel in this way.

Once I had finished reading the novel and had contemplated it for a bit, I could then understand what the meaning contained within it was. The author is using the novel to comment on the nature of the honor system in the society he depicts. He depicts the brutal murder of Nasar in order to show the irony of the barbarism that can be committed in the name of honor. This killing is tolerated by the novel's society as an acceptable response, and indeed expected of the two, but Marquéz criticizes this standard, demonstrating that it is not just: both the narrator, who is investigating the incident some years later, and the magistrate who reviewed the murder case find themselves troubled by the lack of evidence of Nasar's guilt, but even so it is hardly questioned at all whether the murder is justified. By doing so, Marquéz shows that this notion of revenge in the name of honor is one common to the society at large rather than a character flaw in the two men, and that it is flawed because it resulted in an unjust, barbarous death. I recognized that the focus of the novel, therefore, is on expressing points that make an argument; rather than expressing them directly, the author uses the storyline to illustrate an example of the argument and force the reader to ponder its significance. With this understanding of its purpose, the novel seemed more

meaningful to me; when I learned that it was based in part on actual events that took place in a small town in Colombia, it gained even more relevance. Rereading it with this in mind, I could identify and appreciate more details. For example, I understood that the reason for the narrator's indifferent attitude and the continual foreshadowing of the ending was to create a sense that Nasar's death was an inevitable result of the society's values, and I was able to notice allusions to the crucifixion of Christ in the stabbing that further suggested it was unjust. In this sense, as with Berlioz's symphony, I was able to appreciate Marquéz's novel more thoroughly once I understood its context.

It is clear from the descriptions above that these two works are fundamentally quite different. Not only do they represent two quite different forms of artistic media — music versus literature — they also differ greatly in their purpose, as I understood them: Berlioz's symphony seeks to tell a story enriched by vivid musical depictions of emotions, whereas Marquéz's novel seeks to tell a story and use it to make an argument, in a sense almost like an analytical essay. In spite of this, my reactions to the two works were practically the same. I was able first to enjoy the aesthetics of the works, enjoying the development of melodies or the tone of the words, and upon learning more about the works and understanding their intent, I could appreciate them further. It is, I believe, the ability to be appreciated in these senses that defines a work of art in general.