

2022 Classical Literature Scholarship—1st Place

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Moment of Harmony

The classical education experience is one of yearning for higher revelation. The goal, I have found, is to purposefully be caught off guard by a moment of synapses. When approached humbly and submissively, it is an experience of beauty. J. W. Sullivan's, *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development*, is an exploration of beauty, suffering, numbing, and immense stimulation. The book follows the life of Beethoven and analyzes his music to track his spiritual journey. In other words, it is everything that classical education is: a connection and relationship between the arts, science, and conscience. Through this book, my approach to a classical education has altered greatly. In order to reach higher revelation, I must expand my education to all realms of beauty.

We as students of the classical school should be obliged to be involved in all aspects of the arts. To be engaged in a singular aspect of God's gifted intelligences is a betrayal of the classical education gift. Even within a single route of the arts we must expand and flex to reach higher revelation. In reference to discussions of language, Sullivan engages:

Even such words as love and hate, dealing with emotions to which mankind has always paid great attention, are merely portmanteau words. Within their meanings are not only differences of degree, but differences of kind. To conclude, because the word 'beauty' exists almost in isolation, that it refers to some definite quality of objects, or that it is descriptive of some one subjective state, is to mistake a deficiency in language for a key to truth (10).

As we discuss feelings, emotions, and words, we must recognize that they live different lives within different moments. Never are words meant the same way. This is most explicit as we experience beauty. To hyper-focus on one form of beauty, is to cheapen the purpose and the gift of beauty.

As a pupil in the classical school, I am accustomed to interpreting and making sense of words, actions, and people. Although that is uplifting and important, it is restricting. If that is the only way I search for higher revelation, I have failed. The concrete is important. But without an understanding of tone and feeling, it has no realm to be laid upon. Sullivan points out, “The uniqueness and isolation of musical experiences is such that they cannot be either interpreted or described” (18). That is the value of expanding your classical experience. I believe that we must dive into realms that cannot be sequenced or organized. The moments of impulsive synapses often happen when we cannot “interpret” or “describe”. They happen when we gain experience with tone. The tone of truth has more momentum than words of truth. Just as the Word of God is necessary, the Holy Spirit is what moves us to live them. Sullivan says, “What Beethoven wanted to express did not belong to that ‘universe of discourse’ with which language primarily deals” (81). The fact that Beethoven wasn’t able to express everything through words shows that there are truths that can only breathe in other forms.

I have pondered, if classical education tends to inform us on philosophy, what can other arts inform us on? As I have expressed, they can teach tone, feeling, etc. But Beethoven believed they could move the human experience in a deeper way. Sullivan summarizes Beethoven’s words by saying:

Music can no more express philosophic ideas than it can express scientific ideas. And nothing that Beethoven wanted to express can be called philosophy. The states of

consciousness he expresses, his reactions to perceptions and experiences, are not ideas.

Beethoven was not interested in ideas for their own sake - as affording an intellectual, detached view of life, a view aiding understanding and prophecy - but only for the states of the soul to which they testified (82).

Philosophy is not the aim of music. The purpose of musical ideas is not to understand ideas. The purpose is to shed understanding on the “states of the soul”. As we educate ourselves, we cannot get stuck on ideas. I believe we need to understand less and feel a little more.

At Maeser, I have learned and lived principles of empathy, love and sacrifice. Through reading all forms of literature I have become a little more like Jean Valjean, Aeneas, and Elizabeth. But I cannot say that those experiences have made up the entirety of my education and development. This book allowed me to recognize that my moments of higher revelation have happened in art galleries, recitals, and grand concerts. Every aspect of a classical education works in harmony. We must allow it to do so.