

Personal Statement

The saying “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” typically means that not everyone will find the same things to be beautiful. I do agree with this, and think that it still applies to the arts—there will always be a difference of opinions for whether or not something is aesthetically pleasing. However, I think there is also a second meaning in the proverb. An important distinction to make is the difference between beholding and looking. You can look at art, pass it over, and think it looks pretty, but that doesn’t make it beautiful. To behold something means to see something with great attention, or observe something with great detail, more than just a glance. While looked and beheld are commonly used as synonyms, it’s crucial to understand the saying with the true definition of behold. Beauty is found in the eye of the observer. Beauty is found when it invites you to ponder. Beauty is subjective, yes, but beauty is personal and observed.

In Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labor Lost*, Act 2, scene 1, there is a very similar line to the aforementioned proverb, “Beauty is bought by judgment of the eye.” While thought to be the origin of “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” I think the following sentence is also important for the discernment of beauty in the arts, “Beauty is bought by judgment of the eye, not uttered by base sale of chapmen’s tongues.” Beauty must be personal. You cannot have meaning bestowed on you and expect to perceive beauty in the arts. You have to think about it, by yourself. If a piece of music, literature, or art makes you *think*, then it is beautiful. If a piece of music, literature, or art makes *you* think, then it is beautiful.

While reading *Macbeth* at the beginning of this course, I learned about the themes and the poetics, but I also had to ruminate with the characters and the themes and how they applied to our lives. In *Les Misérables* and *Interstellar*, the same thing happened. I learned the surface level story, but I had to really ponder about the deeper meaning. All three of these works of art are beautiful. But there isn’t one uniting theme, they weren’t created by the same artist, they’re not even from the same century! The biggest uniting characteristic of all three examples in this class was that they were able to be thought about in new, personal ways. Art, if truly observed, is beautiful. Art is personal, and if you can genuinely *behold* the art, then it is beautiful.

Visual Art

The Path Through the Irises - Claude Monet



This painting by Claude Monet is an impressionist garden scene, looking down at a winding yellow path. It's surrounded by pink, purple, and blue irises. I find most of Monet's work to be very beautiful aesthetically, and this is no exception. Impressionism focused a lot on mastery of light and shadow, and a rougher artistic process, where one would keep visible, large brush strokes. Monet skillfully uses light to make the irises look almost reflective, like it rained not too long ago on the path and the sun has shone on the flowers, making them shine. The main focus of the painting, though, is the winding path in the very center.

The path specifically makes the viewer think about the painting. Where is the path going? Where is it coming from? There is shadow at the bottom, and light at the top. This painting makes me reflect on where I am in life, how far I've come from the shadowy times of my life. It reassures me that there is light ahead. Irises also represent hope and faith, which adds to the idea that the painting represents climbing out of dark times in one's life. The irises towards the bottom of the painting seem to be darker and droopier, almost wilting. As your eyes work their way up, they become brighter, fresh, and upright. Our faith and hope bring us out of dark times, and the painting invites reflection to times in the viewer's life where they have perhaps had their irises wilt, or a time where they were able to walk further towards light and hope. Yes, I find it aesthetically pleasing, but I also was able to personally ponder about the painting, which is why I find it beautiful.

Lindisfarne Castle, Holy Island, Northumberland - Thomas Girtin



This is a watercolor piece of Lindisfarne Castle, in Northern Scotland. In the piece it looks to be a cloudy day and the sea is at low tide, and very calm and still.. The castle is the focus of the scene, with the right side seemingly lit off-paper by the sun. I find the detail in this piece of art to be astounding. It's a watercolor piece, and quite small. There is a lot of mystery in this watercolor. There is a strange white cloud to the front of the cliffs, and the faint outline of what seems to be ruins to the right of the castle. It almost looks like a photograph, which is incredibly impressive especially with watercolor.

Because of the sense of mystery, and the amount of detail, the painting is almost crying out to be truly beheld. What are those ruins to the side? Why wasn't the source of light included in the piece? What are the people at the bottom of the cliffs seeing? Do they think the castle is grand, or are they looking out onto the reflection of the castle in the water? There are endless questions to be asked about the piece, which is why it is beautiful. It's masterfully made, intricately painted, but it also allows the viewer to reflect about both the painting and their own life. If the viewer so desires, the painting can become very personal, and there can be a great amount of edification to be gained from the true beholding of the piece.

Music

Carillon de Westminster - Louis Vierne

Louis Vierne is not the most well-known composer, as he mainly wrote for the organ, which isn't the most popular instrument. He was the head organist at Notre Dame de Paris, and famously died at the console. Out of his works, "Carillon de Westminster" is probably one of the most famous ones. You are pretty much guaranteed to know the melody. It's the ever-famous "Big Ben" or "Westminster Bells." Vierne was one of the original French Improvisationists, and takes the melody and builds on it. The French Improvisation style for the organ can sometimes make people uncomfortable, and perhaps it doesn't always sound nice. One of the more recent examples of this was the reopening of Notre Dame de Paris, where Olivier Latry (now the organist at Notre Dame) also played in the French improvisation style. It involves a lot of dissonance, a lot of notes that maybe don't sound very nice together. Towards the end of "Carillon de Westminster" there is a section where there are many dissonant chords all in a row, and then it is broken up by a pedal melody, and the pattern continues until the end, where there

are 3 chords in a row. The first is dissonant, the second is dissonant, and the third brings you home. “Carillon de Westminster” is also meant to mimic, well, a Carillon. A carillon is a bunch of bells that are played with your fists and feet, similar to an organ, but without pipes. The ringing doesn’t stop quickly, so essentially every note you play has the previous note sounding, so the dissonance in the piece is accurate to the instrument that Vierne was mimicking. The French Improvisation style is actually quite meaningful. It’s meant to awaken the organ, thinking of the instrument as a living thing, and thinking about how playing it can bring the organ itself closer to the heavens. The dissonance in the piece can invite further thinking about how you can personally bring yourself closer to the heavens despite any dissonance you may have in your life.

Pas de Deux from the Nutcracker - Tchaikovsky

The most famous part of “Pas de Deux” starts about 3 minutes in. There is a minor section, ending quite abruptly, played with the brass section and a timpani. It’s loud, kind of scary, and provides a very beautiful contrast to the following phrase. There is a G major scale that is played by the woodwinds and strings. It continues in this pattern and builds up towards the climax—almost 4 minutes in. It’s just a descending G major scale, played by essentially the entire orchestra (except the piccolo, which has a wild part in the background). It’s so simple, and that’s what makes it beautiful. The simplicity allows you to reflect on moments in your own life that haven’t been necessarily extravagant, but have still had a positive emotional impact. It allows you to realize that the simplest things can be the most profound, and gives you a new perspective towards experiences in your life.

Piano Concerto No. 2, movement 2 - Rachmaninoff

Rachmaninoff’s second Piano Concerto is possibly one of my favourite pieces of music ever written. Rachmaninoff wrote it to overcome writer’s block over the course of 3 years. You can tell at the beginning that he was not happy when he wrote the piece. By the time we get to the second movement it becomes a little happier, with what I can only describe as a sweet piano part that seems to float off the keys. The first movement was angry and a little loud, but the second one is quiet and sweet, building up to a beautiful, contradictory section. It is melancholic but offers such immense relief and joy. Rachmaninoff has the ability to really captivate his listeners, and the second movement takes you on a journey through both his emotions, and your own. The music seems like it is breathing, and one can become in sync with the orchestra and the piano soloist. It invites reflection into times where you have felt melancholic and relieved, or calm after a moment of anger. It’s personal and poignant, and there is little prolonged dissonance, and it creates quite an emotional piece of music that I find incredibly beautiful.

Un Sospiro - Liszt

Liszt was one of the most prolific composers of the Romantic period, and his pieces are widely played, but “Un Sospiro” is one of his lesser known works of music. Sospiro means “sigh” in Italian, and the piece truly evokes a feeling of a sigh. It’s light, airy, and the notes are slurred together with the damper pedal, which makes it quite a nice piece to listen to. One unique thing about “Un Sospiro” is that the melody is played with both the left and the right hands—the left

hand in a constant arpeggiated form, coming up to where the melody travels in stepwise motion, to play every other note—and it makes it feel like breathing in and out. It also invites further thinking, especially when there are mode switches. It is sometimes major, and sometimes minor, and both encapsulate the feeling of a sigh. It made me think about times in my life where I have sighed out of relief and contentment, and other times where I was disappointed or angry. The piece invited personal reflection, which fits my definition of beautiful.

Prélude, Fugue et Variation - César Franck

If you can't tell already, I quite like French romantic organ music. César Franck was part of the French school of organists, and actually taught Vierne, so their music is quite similar. The Prélude, Fugue et Variation (typically abbreviated to PF&V in the organ world) is stylistically different from much of Franck's work. It's quite lyrical, especially in the Prélude and Variation. The Fugue is not a true fugue, because it is also lyrical. But the fugue section still offers layering of the melody, but one voice stands out more than the others. It's a very melancholic piece, but ends with a picardy third—a major chord. Franck wrote it during the revivalist period within the romantic era, wherein many composers tried to reinvent and revive Baroque music. He argued that non-liturgical music—like a prelude and fugue—can still provide spiritual support and be uplifting in a church setting. I think that knowing that the PF&V was meant for spiritual uplifting invites further thinking about how it can fulfill Franck's goal. This week was Holy week, so I've been thinking a lot about Jesus Christ's final days in His ministry, and I think that the PF&V can provide a support to the story of Holy week, with the mode changes. There are parts that sound happy, and there are parts that sound sad, and it ends in a quietly triumphant manner. It indirectly tells the story of Christ's ministry, the Prélude as the buildup to Holy week, a section tinged with melancholy. There is a triumphant section between the Prélude and Fugue, which could be interpreted as Palm Sunday, and the Fugue and Variation could be interpreted as the rest of Holy week. It provides a support to the story and an opportunity to reflect on what Christ offers to you personally.

Literature

Brave New World - Huxley

I've read my fair share of dystopian books. However, in all of them, there is usually some element of restriction. I learned from the book review of *Brave New World* that there isn't restriction or coercion of the citizens of the fascist state. There is a surplus of decadence, happiness, and perceived freedom, so that the citizens descend to fascism without knowing or caring. I learned that in this society, immoral behavior is encouraged, unlike *The Handmaid's Tale* and *1984*. It keeps the population numb and willing to endure their tyrannical government. There were some low reviews out there, mostly from people who don't like classics, as they called the book boring, hard to understand, and that it made them uncomfortable. However, I think that art (literature included) is supposed to make you uncomfortable, and allow you to learn about the state of the world.

I want to read this book because I heard the premise and was able to make connections to our own world. It's a society conditioned to seek ease and happiness, and I think there are so many

things in our society that train us to seek the easiest path, the most comfortable route. Two of the biggest things that came to mind were Generative AI and our smartphones. I think that I want to read this book in order to learn about the dangers of seeking ease, and perhaps see where characters go wrong in order to avoid similar things in my life.

Count of Monte Cristo - Dumas

I didn't know anything about *The Count of Monte Cristo* before this assignment, other than that it was highly recommended. It showed up on almost every book-related social media post I saw, so the amount of recommendations swayed me as well. It's become very popular over the past few years, and after reading a thorough review, I can see why. It follows the story of a young man framed for the crime of being a Bonapartist, sent to a prison island for 14 years. After his imprisonment, he starts getting revenge on the people who wronged him, and rewarding the people who supported him. It's described as a "swashbuckling adventure", which sounds quite interesting. The reviewer said that she personally likes revenge stories, but that she didn't quite agree that Edmond Dantes should have gotten quite so much revenge. I think reading it may allow for reflection in my own life to see where I can be more forgiving.

I also would like to read this book for various personal reasons. Although large books may seem daunting—*Les Misérables*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, etc.—I have found that they contain very good stories (or are said to, I have *The Brothers Karamazov* on my list for good reason). People sometimes are afraid of them because they are so large, possibly boring, but there is so much to be gleaned from the stories in the books. I also have been meaning to read more French literature recently—I read *Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Les Misérables* a few years ago but I've been wanting to read beyond Victor Hugo.

The Brothers Karamazov - Dostoevsky

The Brothers Karamazov is also a very large book, but with an entirely different tone to *The Count of Monte Cristo*. I already knew that there was a murder mystery, but the review said that the murder mystery disguises the raw philosophy Dostoevsky is exploring. There are 3 brothers who have completely different beliefs about what human nature is. The reviewer said that Dostoevsky is a master at creating contradictory characters. That's really appealing to me, because I think that every person is contradictory in some sort of way, and seeing how the desires and the actions of the characters in *The Brothers Karamazov* would allow personal reflection for any reader of the book.

Last summer I brought *Crime and Punishment* with me on a 2-day road trip to Utah. I finished it on the drive back home, and felt somewhat disappointed that I didn't own any more Dostoevsky. When I was reading it, I was incredibly conflicted over my feelings about it. It's a really good book, but it made me uncomfortable at times, because I saw myself in the main character, Raskolnikov, the psychotic murderer. It made me reflect on my own desires and actions, and I've heard that many of Dostoevsky's books are this way. I would really like to read more introspective and existentialist literature, like *The Brothers Karamazov*. I also can't really say no to a good murder mystery, which is what initially drew me towards this book.

Life Improvement

I did not quite meet all of my improvement goals over the past thirteen weeks. I didn't specifically look for cross-stitch patterns, I didn't hang out with my friends as much as I could have, but I did not miss a single day of seminary. Though I wasn't perfect about my sleep schedule, I made it on time every morning, and found that the rest of my day went a million times better when I was paying attention to the lessons taught. I also spent less time on my phone. I took five classes this semester, which barely left enough time to do laundry, which meant that I couldn't physically be on my phone, because I was doing schoolwork all day every day, except for Sunday. And I did try to hang out with my friends, but it's actually very difficult to match up schedules with people in different high schools and extracurricular activities—especially when they don't respond to your attempts at coordination.

Over the next five years, I would like to go to college, and ideally be graduating. I'm going to be a senior in high school next fall, so I have to start applications and auditions. If I get into a music school that would be great, but I am also more than happy to go to BYU (if I get in). However, school is not the only thing in life that matters. I am quite excited for this upcoming summer, because I am moving (probably, depending on the situation with Iran)! This means a lot of big changes to my social life. I am moving to Qatar, a country populated almost entirely by expats, which introduces a very international social scene. Now, I'm not saying I want to make friends with people from other countries just to say that I know someone from Tajikistan, or wherever. I want to make friends with people who have different perspectives of the world, in order to improve my own. I want to be culturally knowledgeable, which means being more internationally minded. This is (hopefully) a somewhat easy plan to follow, I just have to be more open to actually talking to people. I'd like to read more literature, both popular contemporary novels, but also classics and Shakespeare. This year, I've set a goal to read at least one work of Shakespeare a month, and I've mostly succeeded. I've also averaged 5 books a month. I'd like to continue reading around this much over the next 5 years, because I know it will be incredibly intellectually uplifting for me. I would also like to focus on my mental health. I'm not good at regularly journaling, but the times when I've been consistent, my thoughts have been more positive during the day, and more coherent and understandable. If I set small journaling goals over the next few years, hopefully I will be more consistent about it five years in the future.