

But perhaps it was only an echo...

Posted on Jul 11, Posted by [Lois Lowry](#) Category [Uncategorized](#)

The last line of THE GIVER refers to something that Jonas hears in the distance: music, perhaps, which he has never heard before.

I am thinking about music and literature because of a post that I received this morning that included a quote from E.M. Forster. While I have said that I can't use this space to get into lengthy back-and-forth conversations....I do want to thank that reader/poster for alerting me to these words from Forster:

"Not rounding off but opening out. When the symphony is over we feel that the notes and tunes composing it have been liberated, they have found in the rhythm of the whole their individual freedom. Cannot the novel be like that?"

She sent me that paragraph because of my feeble attempt to describe, in my last post, the role that I feel an author - and/or a book - should play in the mind of the reader...not to tie everything up neatly but instead to open up the world of possibilities.

Reading the Forster made me think of a lecture I heard some years ago, in Boston, by Robert Levin, the pianist, music theorist, and Mozart scholar (when still an undergraduate at Harvard, Levin composed an ending to the Requiem that was unfinished when Mozart died) He was talking (and I will mis-remember this, I'm sure; it was a long time ago) about how a piece of music often begins with a pleasant harmonious sound, a comfortable place for your ears and mind...and then, stealthily, it introduces something that the listener needs to worry about. Something is askew; there is a sense of unease, or dissonance. Then the rest of the symphony, or whatever kind of music it is, works toward the resolution of that.

I remember thinking how much like a novel that was. The writer introduces the setting, and the main character, and the important ingredients, all in a way that makes the reader feel comfortable and at home with those things. Then there is a hint....or sometimes a cymbal

clang.... that makes the reader's awareness go WHOA...and the reader then begins to follow the plot with a sense of unease, discomfort, worry...moving along, turning pages, sometimes breathless, sometimes (because the author has allowed it) with a sigh of relief tthat lasts only briefly...always waiting for, hoping for, the final resolution: the chord that in a symphony hall brings the audience to their feet, applauding, while the conductor wipes his brow, smiling with the satisfaction that he and Mozart have pulled it off once again.

But what of the symphony that leaves the audience wondering? What of the book that does that? That was the question that I grappled with in my last post, and I'm not sure it has an answer, but Forster's words...that the notes or words have been freed...in other words, have taken on an independent life...appeal to me.

My thanks to the person who called them to my attention.

Tags: Untagged