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## Should Mozart Have Been Psychoanalysed? Some Comments on Mozart's Language in His Letters

*Walther Graumann in Freundschaft gewidmet.*

The voluminous literature dealing with Mozart's life and work,—which had already impressed Kerner, who compared it to a "pyramid growing to gigantic proportions" (33),<sup>1</sup>—prompted the late Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *cri de coeur*, in his introduction, that most of Mozart's biographies tend to "fluctuate between apology and eulogy" (11). To reconstruct a complex character two centuries after his death can be no easy undertaking, particularly if one takes into account that in Mozart's case the available material, rich as it is, is still incomplete, since a number of letters relating to Mozart, including some of his own, have been lost, destroyed or "ruthlessly" (Anderson xiii) altered—a reference to G. N. Nissen's "ruthless manipulation"—and that even those letters that we can read may be misleading, if they are accepted uncritically and without paying attention to relevant facts in the background. Hildesheimer, for instance, has maintained that some of Mozart's letters read more like a libretto than the product of a spontaneous impulse (86); Mozart's letter to the Abbé Bullinger (3 July 1777), asking him to prepare his father Leopold for the news of the death of Anna Maria, Leopold's wife, possesses a trace of "half-heartedness" (66), and Mozart's own letters to his "Vatter" and "Papa" present a "touch of hypocrisy"—"purposeful hypocrisy" (Hildesheimer 139). They leave, moreover,

"many questions open" (Carr 52), prompting some biographers to fill gaps with their own questionable conjectures. Taken at face value these letters can be, and indeed have been, used as proofs of the sensibilities and deeply felt humanity of the writer. Carr, for instance, views Mozart's two letters to his father on the occasion of the death of his mother as an "overwhelming" expression of "Mozart's compassion" with his father's and sister's grief, "completely revealing his character," his surprisingly "clear vision," "stoic acceptance of death" and deeply rooted "Christian conviction that death is not the end." This is not the picture which emerges from Hildesheimer's interpretation, but it is well in keeping with the ethereal image of the all-encompassing genius that the Romantic Period created and the writers of the "eulogy" school, to adhere to Hildesheimer's terminology, have propagated, despite the fact that this view leads them to ignore or dismiss the more earthy aspects of Mozart's complex personality to the extent that some of Mozart's letters simply were not published until comparatively recently. The "apologists," on the other hand, were well aware of the seeming discrepancy between Mozart's musical genius and some "strange" or "regrettable" (Hildesheimer 83) facets of his extra-musical life. They had been warned already by Niemceczek, one of Mozart's early biographers, that "this, as an artist so rare a human being" was "not also a great man in other circumstances of life" (qtd. in Einstein 49) and by Kümli, the painter, that Mozart was "a damned queer little man" (Schenk 253). This does not quite fit in with the picture that Heer conjures up in his somewhat jingoistic language two centuries later of Mozart, the "eternal child," whose "fundamental strength in life" derived from the "Austrian mother courage of Anna Maria Pertl" and the "manly character of the German father from Augsburg" (61). While Joachim Preisler, the Danish actor, visiting Mozart in 1788, could express his admiration because "everything that surrounded this splendid man was musical," other contemporaries only agreed that Mozart was musically gifted, but "in other ways boorish and unrefined" (Stephoe, "Mozart as an individual" 107).

These "deficiencies" prompted attempts to explain them away by viewing them as expressions of Mozart's failure to outgrow some traits of his puberty—indications of his "infantility, undoubtedly," as Hildesheimer put it (122), which persisted throughout his life as seen even in

his last letters. The grown-up, despite the occasional reference also to the adult side of Mozart's personality (Stone 393-4; Elias *passim*) reflected in his letters by "their spontaneousness, their wit, their extreme gaiety, their profound poignancy, their humanity and timelessness" (Anderson xiii), is still viewed as presenting character traits and the mind of "the child, not just child-like, but also childish" (Einstein 45). Such a view, which may well have its roots in one of his sister Nannerl's affectionate remarks, does not quite fit in with Mozart's susceptibility to female charm, his penchant for beautiful clothes, good food and "copious draughts" (Hutchings 1975) of punch, his reputation as a card player and gambler and his enjoyment of dancing, fencing and riding. These are more the features which one expects in a Don Giovanni—

Vivan le femmine! Viva il buon vino!  
Sostegno e gloria d'umanita

—rather than in the innocent "eternal child" which Elias, like Heer, saw in Mozart. Even if, as Hildesheimer has pointed out, Mozart kept on composing while engaged in some of these trivial activities—he was apparently singularly restless and indefatigable—the fact that a romantic genius, capable of reaching the emotional heights which were Mozart's in his music, also "passionately" (Hildesheimer 276) loved playing billiards and skittles, was perceived by some of his later admirers as an unwelcome surprise and an unpleasant "embarrassment" (Einstein 47). And if that was the case, what was one to say of his "singularly outspoken" (Anderson xiii), "notorious" (Einstein 46, 94), "infantile" (Hildesheimer 115, 120), "inimitably bawdy and whimsical" (Schenk 229) letters to his cousin Anna Maria Thekla, the "Bäsebriefe" which ". . . illuminate an important facet of Mozart" that "until late into the twentieth century had been met with silence, paraphrased or trivialized as an embarrassing side issue . . ." (Hildesheimer, Preface 7).<sup>2</sup> These letters, "unparalleled for forthright, coarse exuberance" (Schenk 206) were seen as expressions of Mozart's persistent "dark and filthy humor" and "verbal coprophilia" (Elias 136), and his "fecal fun and anal eroticism" (Hildesheimer, Preface 7) throw, in the words of Stefan Zweig, who in 1931 sent one of these letters to Sigmund Freud, "a psychologically very peculiar light on his [Mozart's] eroticism which, more than in any other eminent person, shows infantilism and passionate coprolalia" (Hildesheimer 118;

Cremerius 77). It was only to be expected that sooner or later also conflicts rooted in the toilet training of the young child (Elias 135) would be invoked to explain some of these traits, although a more mundane interpretation would probably have focussed more on the prominent role which the Mozarts' portable toilet must have played in the coach travels of the young genius.

But are these attempts at psychoanalytic interpretations correct, or even justified?<sup>3</sup> Constanze Mozart certainly would not have thought so. Although she considered the Bäsle letters as "lacking in taste," she nevertheless found them "very witty" (Hildesheimer 117). Lacking in taste, but very witty? The ambivalence expressed here probably reflects the change in the taste and the "refinement" spreading to, and in, the rising middle class (Eibl and Senn 14-15). But Constanze's comment touches also on an important aspect of Mozart's personality and writings, one of the few features on which his biographers seem to agree: his love of "fun" and his wit and humor (Eibl and Senn 98) bubbling over in some of his letters—not exactly a "sublime" (Hildesheimer 122, 125) type of humor, or one having the elegance of some of Goethe's "unseemly" (Johann 20) poems, but one produced by a "phantasy frothing over into exaggeration, frolicking in wit, fun, jokes and roguishness" (Eibl and Senn 13), sometimes "embarrassing," "unruly and untamed," and finding on occasion even an outlet in table-jumps and somersaults (Hildesheimer 281),—in other words the type of "Stammtischhumor" (Hildesheimer 126) of the milieu with which Mozart was familiar and in which he felt most at home. Elias has compared the clown in Mozart to Pagliaccio, and to Petrushka, but Nannerl's not unkindly meant designation of "Hanswurst,"<sup>4</sup> or Mozart's own picture of himself as the "Narr" and "poor fool," seem more appropriate. Important from our point of view here, however, is the fact that Mozart's almost compulsive jocularly was greatly helped, indeed fostered, by a "constantly increasing ease in the articulation of a phenomenal mobility of mind" (Hildesheimer 14) and his mastery of language, and of languages. While, as has already been pointed out, some of his letters read like a libretto, others are almost a translation of musical thought, variations of a theme, into words. They are characterized by an extraordinary verbal facility expressed in the formation of chains of associations and rhymes, prompted by this or that word or, perhaps better said, sound—the verbal equivalent of his mastery of creating musical

variations and sequences. It is this verbal phantasy, this indulgence in "alphabet-orgies" (Hildesheimer 124) and playing on words (i.e. sounds), coarse or not, this verbal variant of his "ability to generate euphonia and rhythm by the disparate and seemingly arbitrary combination of sounds" (Hildesheimer 127) that better explains Mozart's tendency of stringing together also in his letters words with word plays and twists, meaning with irrelevance and incomprehensibility, than his "psychoinfantilism" (Kerner 34) and presumed failure to "mature." Interestingly enough Benz (247) has pointed to the parallels with this mode of writing (but not of language!) in the work of Clemens Brentano (1778-1842), who also used "rhymes and verbal tinkling and eternal jokes and foolery," or "the play on words for their own sake" (Böckmann 1956), to cloak in life what became apparent in his art, an interpretation which has also been advanced as a motive for Mozart's verbal style (Hildesheimer 278-81; Elias 94). It may be well to keep these considerations in mind when assessing the recent assertions that Mozart's "scatological and 'bizarre' letters" indicate that he was afflicted by "Tourette's syndrome" (Simkin 563-7).

But Mozart's peculiarities, or whatever term one chooses to apply to his unusual traits, must not be viewed in isolation, merely as his personal idiosyncrasies. They have to be seen in the context of his time and society, a point that has been briefly touched upon in several more modern publications, for instance in Landon's recent *Mozart Compendium*, but which has now been examined in depth by the late Norbert Elias. In his sociological study of Mozart, Elias describes the role and character of music and of its creator and performer, the "musician-craftsman" in general, in the "courtly society" ["höfische Gesellschaft"] of the eighteenth century, when power was still seemingly firmly in the hands of the nobility, although the attitudes and consciousness of the middle class, the "Kleinbürgertum," had begun to change significantly. However, the important change from the "art of the craftsman" produced for the ruling class, the aristocracy, according to its dictates of taste, to the "art of the free artist" intended "for an anonymous market" (Elias 58-9), for a public of the same social standing as the artist himself who was now expressing his own ideas, had not yet come into being in music. Whereas writers and philosophers in the second half of the eighteenth century had already succeeded in achieving a certain degree of independence, thanks to the

emergence of an educated reading public, musicians in Mozart's time still depended for their livelihood on patronage by aristocratic courts and their outgrowths. Music, even if it frequently was treated merely as another commodity to be delivered by the servants, did play an important part in the cultural life and the entertainment activities of these aristocratic circles, and retained its preferential position even in the changing social climate. Steptoe, for instance, illustrates this point when he refers to the growing disillusionment of the intellectuals in the latter part of the reign of Joseph II because of the neglect of the sciences and arts, with the exception of music which was as before considered an essential component of life at the courts. Germany at that time consisted of a large number of small principalities and courts which, combined with additional vacancies for church organists and conductors, offered employment opportunities to a considerable number of musicians. The musical acumen of these craftsmen at the time was to a large extent still the product of the old general tradition of craftsmanship in which the skill of the father in his craft is transmitted almost as a matter of course to the offspring who, it is hoped, will equal or surpass it, as they continue in the craft and the tradition. This characteristic of the pre-industrial society persisted and strongly flourished in Germany and, combined with the reservoir of talent represented by the number of craftsman-musicians, may well be one of the reasons (Elias 33, 37-39) for the reputation which Germany and its cultural orbit enjoyed as the home of the well-known artist-families, of which the Mozarts are the classical example. In this context it should be mentioned in passing that the profound formative effect which such an upbringing, the one-sided education of the craftsman-artist, inevitably must have had on the emergence and development of musical talent should always be kept in mind, particularly in genetic discussions about inheritance of musical talents and about the perennial biological topic, the role of "nature or nurture."

Here, however, we are concerned only with a different aspect of this adherence to traditional values and expressions, which was to a large extent a reflection of another important factor: the social standing of the craftsman, in this case the musician, at court. Despite the often quite close physical proximity in the frequently narrow confines of these courtly households, despite the accordance of sometimes quite generous privileges and even the occasional cordial personal acceptance at court of



an outstanding musician, court musicians as a group were part of the servant class with the obligations of servants, and they were treated as servants. Heer has already stressed this standing of the artist—a craftsman, a servant, who had to take his place in the antechamber of his master and at the servants' table. Court musicians were thus ranked on the same level as cooks, pastrycooks and *valets de chambre* (Elias 21-22), a circumstance illustrated by the announcement in a Viennese paper of the time of a vacancy for a musician who could sing well, play the piano and teach these arts, but who also had to serve as a *valet de chambre* (Steptoe, "Historical Background" 69). In Mozart's own life his superior at the court of Archbishop Colloredo was, of all persons, the service supervisor, Count Arco, the "Oberküchenmeister," who in the end could dismiss the obstreperous young musician with no more than a kick in the rear.

One of the consequences of this quite rigid social gap, of which the enforced "togetherness" of the servant class at their dinner table, for instance, was a frequent reminder, was the adherence by the members of this class to the traditional values of their forefathers whose sense of humor and criteria of propriety and taste were frequently markedly different from the *bon goût* of the aristocracy and their imitators in the rising middle class. This difference, with its striking expression in the everyday language of the people at large, prompted Goethe's satirical prescription for the "refinement" of this language in which

"The nasty word must now be softened here,  
The "shitty boy" is to be changed to "scoundrel,"  
and the "arse" to "rear." (Grimm and Grimm 563-4)

Although the middle class in the Salzburg (Eibl and Senn 14-15) of Mozart's time also began to show signs of "differentiation," "refinement" and primness—even Mozart complained at one time about the "stupid, coarse jokes" exchanged at the servants' table in the Colloredo household in Vienna (Schenk 284)—the everyday language used by the servants at home and among themselves was still the language of the *Grundsichte*, the peasants and small artisans, which at one time also had been the language of Hans Sachs, Martin Luther and, ironically, even of the nobility, but which, with its vibrant and pungent but "coarse" expressions, now came to be condescendingly viewed almost as a "dialect," an expression of "Salzburgian" or "South-German" exuberance. While, of

course, formative regional influences on language cannot be excluded it would be as much of a mistake to interpret Mozart's uninhibited language (Hildesheimer 57), for instance in the Bäsle letters, merely on regional lines as is Zweig's attempt to explain Mozart's "coprolalia" as an expression of his eroticism. *Vox populi*, the voice of language, as Johann defined it, with its tendency to call a spade a spade and its long tradition in Germany, emphasized by the brothers Grimm, was not limited only to one region or, for that matter, to the servant class, as Einstein pointed out when he also drew attention to the fact that in the eighteenth century "all human-animalistic functions were exercised more publicly than is the case in our more civilized sanitary times." In their detailed analysis of Mozart's *Sauereyen* [filthy talk] Eibl and Senn similarly comment on the importance attributed at the time to some bodily functions, notably digestion and excretion, which were discussed in an open "matter of course" manner, *naturalia non sunt turpia* (Einstein 47).

This trend characterizes not only the *Bäsle* letters, but can also be seen in the letters of the father, Leopold Mozart, who freely dispenses advice on the necessity of regular stools as a remedy against a variety of disorders. But the Mozarts were not unique in this respect. In 1734 Paulini reedited the apparently widely used *Heylsame Dreck=Apotheke* first published 50 years after the Thirty Years War which contains a collection of prescriptions "for almost all diseases." The main ingredients of these prescriptions were urine and human or animal fecal material. The almost mystical belief in the healing power of excreta can apparently be traced back to the use by the ancient Hebrews of urine and blood against snake bites (Paulini, Introduction), and finds its counterpart in the treatment of open wounds by the use of human urine (Paulini 232) which persisted in rural populations into the twentieth century (Eibl and Senn 48). Hermann Boerhaave (Salomon 598) in 1686 had treated in that way his own leg ulcer, and Leopold Mozart too used this "remedy," which apparently was widely practised by wounded soldiers (Paulini 232), to treat one of his open sores (Eibl and Senn 47-48). Seen against this background it should not be surprising that Mozart, the child-prodigy forced to travel for long hours in a coach with a portable toilet, throughout his life had a less "refined" approach to bodily functions, and to the invectives derived from them, than the more puritanical, reticent or genteel later admirers of his music might have wished. It is, of course, a



fundamental mistake to judge the characteristics of one period by the criteria of another time, although it was precisely this mistake which led to the abhorrence of Mozart's "animalistic" side.

Another aspect which should be considered at this point concerns the development of the German language. A necessarily cursory, but still rewarding and stimulating, glance at the German dictionary of the brothers Grimm reveals not only the derivations of some of the "vulgarieties" and their equivalents in other languages, but also the part which they played in "a large number of robust [*derbkräftig*], frequently ingenious and poetically well-turned phrases of the people, which the fine world coyly rejects. . . ." although "there are occasions . . . when in some phrases even now . . . the uncloaked word, still must escape . . . pronounced without malice and indifferently."<sup>5</sup> In his introduction to the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* Jacob Grimm points out that "Goethe too felt that an indelicate expression cannot be avoided when it has its rightful place." The changing sensibilities of the rising middle class in due course nonetheless led to changed attitudes towards language and speech. What to many had seemed perfectly natural and unremarkable when spoken in the vernacular or hollered in friendly banter now came to be seen as out of place when read in solitude or in refined circles. Eibl and Senn have emphasized this aspect in their analysis of Mozart's style, pointing out that colloquialisms spoken do not have the impact they can have when they are written or read in letters. Moreover, some of the words of the German language in time underwent changes which made them unintelligible to later generations, or conveyed a different meaning to them. The term *Weib* for instance which originally merely conveyed the simple generic opposite of *male* subsequently also acquired a number of wider meanings, including a pejorative significance which could make nonsense of Schikaneder's/Gieseke's

Mann und Weib und Weib und Mann,  
Reichen an die Gottheit an

in the *Zauberflöte*. Such considerations have not always been taken into account in the debate about what in the end almost came to be presented as a defect in the personality of Mozart, manifesting itself particularly vividly in the relationship with his cousin, revealed in the Bäsle letters.

Yet such a view, like Zweig's letter to Freud, ignores the fact that the Bäsle letters in the first place represent only a small part of Mozart's correspondence and that in the letters to his family, to Abbé Bullinger, and even in some of his compositions intended to amuse his friends, Mozart used the same, shall we say, robust style of expressing himself. But so did Leopold Mozart, so did Anna Maria Mozart, so did Rosalie Joly, the friend of the family, so did the musicians at the court of Salzburg, as we have heard from Mozart himself, and so did even Graf Arco in his comments about Mozart (Eibl and Senn 76-77). Nor was this manner of speaking or writing limited to the Salzburg circle, as the examples quoted would lead one to believe, for young Mozart felt quite at ease also in the home of the Cannabichs in Mannheim where the language in the circle of "outstanding" musicians must have been "rather loose" (Hildesheimer 132), and where Wolfgang (letter to his father, 14 Nov. 1777), urged on by Elisabeth Cannabich, "rhymed sheer filth" and "thoroughly" enjoyed this "godless" excremental banter (Schenk 202-3). One wonders what he would have thought of some of Goethe's writings had he had the opportunity to read them. Goethe's achievements in literature have placed him on a pedestal as high as is Mozart's standing in music. Yet it is not widely known that, because of their "bordello-like nakedness" (Johann 11) some of Goethe's "Roman Elegies" and "Epigrams" were only published several years after his death—for "it is well known that a German Classic Writer does not write 'unseemly things'" (Johann 22). When the young Goethe's "Hans Wurst's marriage," presenting a cast of 100 personages whose names, supplied in part by Goethe's friends, were deliberately chosen to indicate certain bodily functions and vernacular expressions, was finally published, "improprieties" were merely indicated by three dots. This practice persisted into my own high-school years when for instance the notorious exclamation from Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*, that has become probably the most widely known German quotation, was still only hinted at in print by three dots. The hidden mystery behind these three dots was a strong incentive for our minds, always searching for the—dare I say it?—"naked" truth, to get the embarrassed professor of literature to explain the mystery to us knowing "innocents." It was, in a way, our homage to Goethe. Had we, however, known about Mozart's letters, I am sure the whole class would have directed their unstinting questioning efforts towards the "Bäsle-

briefe." It is hoped—*De mortuis nil nisi vere* (Nissen, qtd. in Kerner 1)—that all these comments will underline the thesis of this essay that Mozart's "coprolalia" was probably not an expression of the Tourette syndrome, as Simkin has maintained, or of a personal quirk of his character, as it was determined by the vernacular of his time, his class, and his family. After all, a similar trend in Goethe, albeit couched in Goethe's more elegant form, has not led to suggestion that the personality of this great writer too should have been analysed by Freud, though the result certainly would have made for good reading!

## NOTES

1. Translations are my own.
2. Emily Anderson's *The letters of Mozart and his family* first appeared in 1938. In the preface she points out that the "so-called 'Bäsebriefe' now appear in unexpurgated form. Even in Germany an excessive prudishness or possibly a certain unwillingness to admit that the writer, formerly regarded as the Raphael or the Watteau of music, should have been capable of expressing himself with such grossness, has hitherto prevented their publications *in toto*." As late as 1947, these letters apparently had not been published in the language in which they were written (Einstein 47).
3. It may be of interest to point in this context to Cremerius's criticism of Zweig's ". . . superficial, inadequate and in part false depiction and treatment of psychoanalysis . . ." (66) which ". . . damaged more than it helped the way psychoanalysis was received" (65). Apparently Freud himself had pointed out to Zweig that he had not accurately presented certain essential features of psychoanalysis (57). Cremerius (53, note 11) maintains that despite Zweig's "missionary zeal" (53) it was a "fact that, apart from Freud's writings, he did not read any psychoanalytic literature."—I have so far not been able to find any reference to Freud's response to Zweig's letter about Mozart's "coprolalia."
4. Hanswurst (Hans Wurst 107) is defined by Johann as the "comic figure of the Germans," the equivalent of "Jack Porridge" of the English or of "Jean Potage" of the French. In popular lore Hans Wurst always accompanies Dr. Faustus; he is also used as a comic figure by Hans Sachs, and is a constant source of foolery at fairs—the "Faust of the low-brows" (Johann 110).
5. The Grimms quote (564) in this context Goethe's

The god of war—Ars, Ares is his name.  
And ars means art, but arse is not the same."

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