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An Essay Review: Mozart as seen in contemporary German-language biography

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The two scenarios

Let us consider two brief description of one man's life. The first – we'll call it Scenario I – goes like this:

> "He was born into a musical family in Salzburg in the middle of the 18th century. His extraordinary musical gifts surfaced early, both as a performer on the piano and violin and as a composer. With his talented piano-playing older sister and his teacher-father, the young lad travelled widely in Europe, performing in the major cities and courts. At the age of 25, he went to Vienna to seek his fortune as a freelance musician. The first years were crowned with success. He was in demand as a pianist and as a composer, especially of opera.
>
> But then his public lost interest in him and his music-making. He grew poorer and poorer and was finally reduced to writing piteous letters begging for money. His last years were ones of poverty and rejection. Overlooked, snubbed, forsaken, he died a few weeks short of his 36th birthday and was buried, without ceremony, family or friends, in an unmarked pauper's grave."

Scenario II is in fact much the same down to "He was in demand as a pianist and as a composer, especially of opera.", but then it reads like this:

> ". . .His success afforded him a considerable income and he and his wife lived comfortably, always with two or three servants to assist in a household that knew frequent pregnancies (there were six in all). Then a troubled period came upon the Habsburg monarchy – war without, insurrection within -- and the people of Vienna, its musicians included, faced hard times. The freelance musician experienced periods of uncertain income and, with a prolonged illness of his wife, unexpected expenses. He turned to friends for loans to help. With time his financial situation improved again. He was in the midst of a busy and productive period when he suddenly took sick and died. Following a funeral service attended by family, patrons, and friends, he was buried in the manner customary for persons of his class."

Bibliographic notes are found at page 15, the INDEX, at page 16.

Both of these scenarios concern the man who has come to be called Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (even though he himself usually used "Amadé" and never used "Amadeus" except jokingly). In this essay review, we look at how the romantic myth of the first scenario is changing in the direction of the second, in the direction of a more factual, less anecdotal and pathetic appreciation of the life Mozart lived.

At the center of this review are three Mozart biographical works by German authors, all written within the last fifty years, recent products of a continuous history of German-language Mozart biography going back to that first obituary effort by Friedrich Schlichtegroll published in 1793. The earliest of the three considered here is Alfred Einstein's *Mozart: His Character, His Work*, first published in 1945. Wolfgang Hildesheimer's work, *Mozart*, appeared in 1977 and, like Einstein's book, is available in English translation. Most recent is the book, *Mozart in Wien,* by Volkmar Braunbehrens, published in Germany a year ago; a letter from the publisher informs me that an English translation will come out in 1988.

I choose to focus on these three books partly because they reflect, in one way or another, the corpus of German-language Mozart biography, particularly that of the 19th century, that went before, and partly because two of them – those by Einstein and Hildesheimer – are among the most quoted of contemporary Mozart biographies. The book by Braunbehrens is much more recent, but it seems to me likely that it too will emerge as a standard work in the realm of Mozart biography.

<u>Alfred Einstein: *Mozart: His Character, His Work*</u>

In 1929, Einstein began his work to revise and update the Köchel Catalog of Mozart Compositions. The catalog was first published in 1862 by Ludwig von Köchel in association with the monumental biography of Mozart researched and prepared by Otto Jahn. Although there had been a first revision of the catalog at the turn of the century, by the time Einstein took up his task, it was badly in need of a thorough reworking. Einstein devoted the next eight years to preparing the so-called third edition of the Köchel catalog, printed in 1937. The work that had been started in Salzburg ended in Massachusetts, where Einstein had settled after being forced to leave Europe.

The catalog finished, Einstein decided to present the results of his personal encounter with Mozart and his music in a book.

As the title indicates, the book is in two parts. The first part (and the one that concerns us here) is the shorter, covering some one-fifth of a 500-page edition. In his preface, Einstein says: "I have sought. . .to draw as sharply defined a picture as I could of [Mozart's] character and of the personalities and events that exercised a decisive influence upon it." To do this, Einstein drew primarily upon the surviving letters of Mozart and his family and upon four earlier biographies published between the years 1793 and 1859.

In the 98 pages of the first section dealing with Mozart's "character," there are by my count 112 citations – some brief, some extensive – from the body of Mozart family letters. Where biographical details or characterizations are cited, they are taken (with few exceptions) from Schlichtegroll's obituary (1793), from a biography prepared (with Constanze Mozart's help) by Franz Xaver Niemetschek (1798, 1808), from the biography initiated by Constanze's second husband, Georg von Nissen (1828), and from the Otto Jahn biography (1856-1859), referred to above.

The picture of Mozart the man that emerges from the pages of the Einstein book is inevitably one cast in the 19th century mold:

--It is judgmental:

". . .he never learned to deal with the world." -- page 40.

". . .his relations with women formed a chain of inadequacies, and in them we have further evidence that he was not fitted to deal with the actualities of life." -- pages 72-73.

"Constanze Weber. . .owes her fame to the fact that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart loved her. . . .But this does not mean that she deserved either his love or the fame it brought her." -- page 80.

--It seeks to justify deviations from an external standard of behaviour:

"He was a child and always remained one; childishness is sometimes necessary to a creator for purpose of relaxation, and to conceal his deeper self." -- page 40.

--It personalizes history and events.

In short, Einstein's summation of Mozart's "character," of his nature as a man, tended to perpetuate the *Mozartbild* – Mozart as we perceive him – given form and currency by the century before. But even as he wrote in the late Thirties, attitudes were changing and Wolfgang Hildesheimer, among others, would come along to offer a new look at the Mozart phenomenon.

Wolfgang Hildesheimer: *Mozart*

Einstein came to his book on Mozart by way of long years of work as a musicologist deeply involved in Mozart's music. Hildesheimer also came by way of Mozart's music, but as an enraptured amateur who, irritated by the romanticized Apollonian Mozart transmitted by earlier biographers, decided it was time to set the record straight, as he saw it. Two personal circumstances determined his approach: he was a professional author, a novelist of considerable acclaim and accomplishment; and he had been through psychoanalysis. It obviously had been a transfiguring experience in his life and he was eager to bring this experience to his reading of the Mozart "enigma." He wants, he says (page 11), ". . .to restore the enigma that is the man."

The book evolved out of a series of lectures that had begun in 1956. It has no chapters or chapter headings and resembles, rather, an extended letter, that of an informed and knowledgeable person extemporizing on a theme of interest to writer and reader alike. Or, as Hildesheimer puts it, "I would like, as far as clarity permits, to pursue free associations without being bound to a formal structure" (page 29).

The book clearly shows the wide reading and interests of Hildesheimer, whose range of sources far exceeds that used by Einstein in his biographical section. This book-length essay (some 360 pages in its English translation by Marion Faber) is roughly chronological in approach, with frequent asides for psychologizing and for commenting on those Mozart compositions – the later operas especially – of particular interest to Hildesheimer.

In seeking to justify his emphasis on a psychoanalytical approach, Hildesheimer writes:

> ". . .it is impossible to understand any figure of the past, let alone a genius, if one has never attempted self-understanding. Since there is surely not much affinity between the psyche of a genius and that of his interpreter, the latter must apply the perceptions of psychoanalysis as he himself has experienced it." (page 6)

Driven by his "unceasing and active reverence for Mozart," Hildesheimer wants, he says, to strip the Mozart portrait clean, "to cleanse and restore a fresco which has been painted over repeatedly in the course of centuries." And he excoriates those biographers who ". . .pass over bizarre elements, leave out what seems to them unessential, explain away what is embarrassing. . .[who] stretch the image in every direction, upward and (especially) downward, smooth it out and arrange it until it corresponds to a vague Apollonian ideal and idol. . ." (page 12)

Neither historian nor researcher, Hildesheimer was simply a noted German novelist who had gone through psychoanalysis. The application of objective, quantifiable research methods and a comprehensive historical framework to the problem of Mozart biography would fall to others, such as Volkmar Braunbehrens.

Volkmar Braunbehrens: *Mozart in Wien*

Braunbehrens too wants to get behind the anecdotes, the myths and moralizing of earlier Mozart biographies. Unlike Hildesheimer, however, he conceives the undertaking as one that requires, in addition to the concentration on Mozart himself, an understanding of the times and circumstances surrounding Mozart's life. As he notes in his foreword, the book is "simultaneously the biography of the decade of Josephism in Vienna" – the period from 1780 to 1790 when Joseph II reigned alone, following the death of his mother and co-regent, Empress Maria Theresa.

The author focuses on Mozart's last eleven years, those spent in Vienna after the 25-year-old pianist and composer had cut himself free from the employ of Archbishop Hieronymus Colloredo of Salzburg and set about making a career as a freelance musician. In doing so, Braunbehrens weaves together the events and activities of Mozart's life and the political, economic, and social undertakings of the reform-minded Joseph II.

The exposition proceeds chronologically through eight chapters. The first sets the stage for understanding the circumstances in which Mozart decided to remain in Vienna after he had been summarily summoned there in March 1781 by the visiting Archbishop. Particular emphasis is given to what the decision meant in the relationship between the careful, circumspect father – still part of the Archbishop's retinue in Salzburg – and the son, eager for a greater freedom, a wider stage.

The chapters alternate between those which move the chronology forward and those which pause to examine some aspect of the times in detail. An example: a chapter on the salons of the nobility and the affluent bourgeoisie describes the milieu in which Mozart – proud, ambitious, conscious of his own worth, eager to succeed – moved and made his way. And in almost every chapter, there is an *Abschweifung*, a

set-piece or cameo devoted to an intensive examination of a particular circumstance ("How much does a musician earn?") or a significant personality (such as Lorenzo Da Ponte).

The biographies and the myths

It is evident that these three books represent three different approaches to Mozart biography. Symptomatic of the differences is the fact that

1) Einstein could write "Mozart was not interested in politics. . . .There is not a word in his letters. . .about the French revolution, which began while he was still alive; it did not touch him (pages 98, 100)",

2) Hildesheimer did not find the subject worth addressing, while

3) Braunbehrens regards it as absolutely essential to an understanding of Mozart to know that he followed political developments in Vienna, France, and elsewhere in Europe with keen interest ("All of his Viennese operas contained so much political dynamite that they just barely managed to scrape by the censor or evade society's condemnation." -- page 12).

What each of the books has in common is the need to deal with the weight of Mozart biographical tradition coming out of the 19th century. Einstein wrote largely in conformance with this tradition; his is Scenario I. Hildesheimer, on the other hand, declared his intent to reform the tradition and, in some respects, he did: it is certainly no idealized or heroic Mozart who emerges from his pages. And yet in the process, Hildesheimer not only reinforced Scenario I, but he also came ultimately to depend upon it. Which makes it all the more interesting to contemplate with what effect Braunbehrens has challenged Scenario I and moved to put Scenario II in its place.

Let us look at three elements important to the Scenario I and how each of these authors (and some others) deals with them.

Poor Mozart

There is no element so vital to the Mozart myth as that of his ultimate descent into poverty. From this theme flow sub-themes and variations: downfall, rejection, ruin, burial in a pauper's grave, to name a few.

Consider the following:

-- Einstein writes (page 68): "As a freelance he was a complete failure after only a few years. . . .His compositions were bought by publishers at ridiculous prices, for he had to let them go quickly in order to get his hands on immediate cash."

-- In 1922, Ludwig Schiedermair had written (quoted in Pahlen, page 354): "Once Mozart was back in Vienna, his economic plight grew worse and began to assume the most dubious forms. His salary from the court and the sums he got from his students no longer sufficed. Debts piled up, the situation at home went from bad to worse."

-- Hildesheimer writes (page 19): "He was perhaps not the first poor artist, but, sociologically at least, he was the first free one, and poor as a result of his freedom. Ultimately, he was destroyed by this very freedom."

-- In Act Two, Scene 10, of *Amadeus*, playwright Peter Shaffer puts it this way: "Salieri: (to Mozart) How do you fare today?
Mozart: Badly. I have no money and no prospects of any."

So pervasive and persistent is the leitmotiv of Mozart's latter-day poverty that you would think there is simply no basis whatsoever for any other view. Seized with the issue, Braunbehrens opts for the straightforward methodology of taking the sums of money Mozart is known to have received in his last eleven years (the ones, particularly 1788-90, that give rise to the poverty theme) and setting them in a coherent historical framework.

First, Braunbehrens systematically organizes the various sources of Mozart's income as a freelance musician and composer in Vienna: commissions for compositions, such as operas; income from concerts where he appeared both as performer and composer; royalties from publishers; and fees from his piano and composition students. In addition, from 1787 on, Mozart received an annual salary as *Kammerkompositeur* to the Court. With this framework in place, he then looks in detail at each year, 1781 through 1791. I quote here from the three "critical" years mentioned above:

Year	Item	Amount	Total
1788	*Don Giovanni* in Vienna	225 gulden (or florins)	
	Fees and royalties (concerts, Students, publishers)	?	
	Benefit concert with Händel's *Pastorale*	?	
	Kammerkompositeur salary	800	
	Subtotal	1025	
	Borrowed from Michael Puchberg	300	
	1788 total		1325
1789	Trip to Berlin: 2 golden containers with money	1285	
	Fees and royalties	?	
	Salary	800	
	"Received from abroad" (?)	450	
	Subtotal	2535	
	Borrowed from Puchberg	450	
	Borrowed from Hofdemel	100	
	Subtotal	550	
	1789 total		3085
1790	*Così fan tutte*	900	
	Frankfurt journey	165	
	Salary	800	
	Subtotal	1865	
	Borrowed from Puchberg	610	
	1790 total		2475

There is documentation of some sort for each of these figures, although not every figure is understood (for example, the sum of 450 gulden "received from abroad" in 1789). The presence of items with question marks is a reminder from Braunbehrens that the total yearly sums probably were exceeded by income from sources that existed but cannot be documented.

Proceeding in this way, year by year, Braunbehrens concludes that Mozart's income – that for which there is at least some evidence – for the years in Vienna amounted to at least 20,000 gulden, supplemented by some 1,500 gulden borrowed from Puchberg and others. One way to comprehend what this means is to compare Mozart's estimated income over these ten-plus years with other income levels in late 18th century Vienna. In his cameo on "How much does a musician earn?," Braunbehrens provides a detailed basis for seeing Mozart's income in relation to that of other musicians and composers in Vienna at the time, as well as that of other social groupings. His conclusion: Mozart had a higher-than-average income compared with other musicians, his income was comparable to that of the middle- and upper-middle bureaucracy, and this at an exceptionally young age for such an income.

But if that is so, something must be wrong. Why, then, was he importuning his fellow Mason, Michael Puchberg, for loans and running up a debt with him that ultimately amounted to some 1,500 gulden? Why did he feel driven to pledge his worldly possessions as security for a 1,000-gulden note in October 1790? If Mozart had such an income, how can Hildesheimer write that 1789 was "a time for him of oppressive poverty" (page 19)? What happened to turn the reality (as Braunbehrens sees it) of a successful and moderately well-off pianist and composer into the myth of the poverty-stricken artist, forlornly struggling to make ends meet all the while composing one masterwork after another on an empty stomach?

Is it because we have a fondness (even a need?) for the "artist starving in the garret" myth? Is this the way people wanted to see it, despite the available evidence? The major source for the emergence of the traditional view is the series of letters, beginning in 1788 and extending irregularly into 1791, from Mozart to Puchberg. It is clear from these letters (and other sources) that, with 1788, Mozart entered a period of financial uncertainty, when his expenses (and Mozart was a man who liked to dress and live well) were running ahead of his income.

But it was more than that: 1788 was a period of uncertainty for all Vienna. The war with Turkey was at its height, the emperor was in the field with the troops, society life in Vienna was curtailed, and a musician's chance to make a living was diminished. Reluctant (as most people are) to lower his standard of living, Mozart elected to turn to Puchberg for cash to tide him over. Although he received less than he asked for, Mozart's immediate needs were apparently taken care of by the 300 gulden Puchberg lent him and, from August 1788 until well into 1789, the letters to Puchberg ceased. Mozart's financial situation appears to have improved; the explanation, Braunbehrens suggests, may lie in the possibility that Mozart profited from the presentation of three "Casino" concerts at which the last three symphonies, all finished in June and July of 1788, would have been performed.

The equilibrium in his financial situation did not last, however, and in 1789 the letters to Puchberg resume. In 1789 and 1790, Mozart borrowed another 1,060 gulden, at a time when his known income from other sources amounted to 4,400 gulden. What had happened? At some time in June or July of 1789, Constanze Mozart, then about halfway through her fifth pregnancy (the baby, a girl, was born on 16 November but lived only an hour), developed a serious open wound on her leg, one that threatened to affect the bone. Braunbehrens writes:

> "The bills for doctors and medicines must have been enormous. For one thing, medical insurance did not exist; for another, nothing was too expensive to cure

> his wife so far as Mozart was concerned. Once the acute phase of her sickness was over, then came the prescribed follow-up treatments of sulphur baths, and that meant a prolonged stay in expensive Baden. . . .We have, of course, no knowledge of just what Constanze Mozart's medical care and the subsequent taking of the waters cost. Whatever it was, it appears to have brought Mozart to an almost hopeless shortage of cash." (page 352)

The concern with his wife's health and with his finances lasted well into 1790 and probably affected his musical output as well. Apart from the opera *Così fan tutte* and the last two "Prussian" string quartets, 1790 was a slim year for the normally active composer. But by the end of 1790, Mozart's situation had stabilized once again. Constanze was better (and pregnant with the sixth child, Franz Xaver, born 26 July 1791) and Mozart's prospects had improved. He threw himself back into his work, both as a performer and composer. It was at the end – on 5 December 1791 - of this busy and financially restorative year that Mozart, "who even as a youth had had attacks of rheumatoid arthritis, caught rheumatic fever and, as a result of the sickness and of the methods used to treat it, died." (page 434)

To conclude: Much of Mozat's income during the Vienna years can be documented; less documentable is his outgo, but the evidence suggests he lived essentially at the level of his income. Years came when his income failed to keep up with the outgo. Partly the result of a decline in income, it resulted also from unexpected increases in expenses. His wife's illness is a known reason; were there others, such as gambling debts or unsuccessful financial speculations? Buffeted by unanticipated cash demands and parlous times, Mozart burrowed from friends to tide him over. Later, even as his prospects were improving, his concern for his financial situation would persist. But it is one thing to be strapped for cash and anxious about where tomorrow's money is coming from. It is quite another to be actually living in "oppressive poverty." From his examination, Braunbehrens concludes that "In any event, Mozart was far removed from poverty." (page 156)

Unrecognized and **unloved**

Another integral element of the romantic picture of Mozart, especially in his last years, is that of increasing isolation, of society's growing aversion to him, of ultimate neglect and abandonment. This goes hand in hand with the view of Mozart's inexorable descent into destitution. On page 68 of his book, Einstein writes: "Between 1787 and 1790, there were no commissions for operas. It became more difficult to produce subscription concerts. . . .Pupils became scarcer and scarcer, so that a year before his death he had to beg his friend and fellow-Mason, Puchberg, to let people know that he could accept more pupils – actually, he had only two left."

A sub-theme of the neglect motiv is that Mozart, snubbed by the nobility and the bourgeoisie that previously had supported him, responded by turning more and more to "bad company." In his biography published in the middle of the 19th century, Otto Jahn had written:

> "One can well understand how the pressure of outside circumstances, the growing misery at home, and the bitter feelings over the failure of all his efforts could make Mozart, who was anyways easily stimulated and always welcomed a good time, even more ready to let himself be drawn into a whirl of pleasure-seeking."

On page 182 of his book, Hildesheimer writes:

> "*Figaro* was to be the beginning of his ruin. The upper classes. . .did not feel offended exactly, but they didn't much like it: the reaction began more with sneers than with indignation. . . .Following its model, the nobility, the bourgeoisie began to avoid Mozart too. At first this developed slowly. . . .The subscription lists to Mozart's concerts gradually shrank, until in 1789 only one name was on the list: Gottfried van Swieten. After 1790 Mozart was not merely overlooked but snubbed."

And this is what Peter Shaffer did with that in *Amadeus* (the beginning of Act Two, Scene 12):

> "Van Swieten: (gravely) This is not good, Brother. The lodge was not created for you to beg from.
> Mozart: What else can I do?
> Van Swieten: Give concerts, as you used to do.
> Mozart: I have no subscribers left, Baron. I am no longer fashionable.

These correlated themes – poverty and neglect – are especially important to Hildesheimer's argumentation. On page 20, he writes: "In his last year,. . .he no longer played host to musicians or music lovers. . . .(Mozart) managed to repress his insight into his ever more discouraging situation: society's failure to respond, his growing isolation." And on page 27:

> "So our picture of the Mozart of the final Viennese years is of a man trying, unceasingly, to communicate with a world ever more indifferent to him. Frustrated, his own voice weakens and the world no longer takes any notice of him at all. He disappears from it, and his circle grows smaller."

But for Hildesheimer, it wasn't just that the society of Vienna withdrew itself from Mozart. Page 184:

> "It does seem certain that one of the reasons for his growing isolation was his own failure to meet society's expectations. . . .an unconscious drive, probably long latent, came to the surface and tempted him to stop living according to the rules imposed on him from the outside. He began to 'let himself go.' "

And what does <u>that</u> mean? Turn to page 284:

> "Undesired and ultimately unloved, he ended up in unrespectable company that, for us, is veiled in darkness. There is no more light to be shed on the mystery of the last months."

Thus, for Hildesheimer, Mozart's life was a tragedy and Mozart, a tragic figure. But it was not simply the calamity of a great artist cut down at the height of his powers by a banal, unexpected illness:

> ". . .tragic, rather, is the increasing lack of recognition, ever more rarely alleviated by a connoisseur, the nearly consistent neglect that Mozart had to bear and did indeed bear with unexampled dignity and self-control. That it broke him is self-evident. . ." (page 283)

For Hildesheimer, an interpretation of Mozart's life admits of no other conclusion, for, as he writes on page 282, ". . .the tragic nature of his life is an essential component of our admiration for him. . ." This is an extraordinary statement; what does it mean? Is Hildesheimer saying that, for him to be able to admire Mozart, he has a need to see his life as tragedy? No "tragedy," no admiration? And if that is so, haven't we suddenly learned far more about Hildesheimer and the needs of his psyche than we have about Mozart?

The question is worth asking because evidence makes it possible to see the circumstances of Mozart's last years in a different light, one where the "tragedy" is that of Mozart's sudden death, not 36 years old, at a time when things were good and getting better.

The Braunbehrens biography approaches Mozart and the events of his life – particularly those following the premiere of *Figaro* on 1 May 1786 – in a much broader historical perspective. For Hildesheimer, the "neglect" theme becomes so deeply personalized in Mozart alone that it works like a magnet, causing all other events in his life to be aligned to it. Braunbehrens, on the other hand, sees the question of "neglect" in a different context.

We must begin, he suggests, with an understanding of the historical situation. Only a year after *Figaro*, while Mozart was busy composing the score for *Don Giovanni*, Austria had gone to war with Turkey. The war did not go well, and indeed at this point many things were not going well for Joseph II. There were problems in the Netherlands, with the Hungarians, throughout the monarchy. Even in Vienna itself, there were disturbances. Resistance to the war was increasingly open, caused by the economic sacrifices demanded for its support. More and more, the nobility left Vienna, and those who remained were less and less inclined to underwrite the earlier level of cultural activity, such as maintaining the *Adelskapellen* – the private orchestras of the nobility – in the numbers that had existed in better times.

Braunbehrens writes (page 335):

> "These political developments probably accelerated the dissolution of the heretofore numerous *Adelskapellen*. A decline in Vienna's concert life seems likely, even though we have only a limited knowledge of concert activity in detail, and practically no statistical data. This is a subject for more research, for in practically every Mozart biography we read: in these years, Mozart lost the support of the nobility; his works were no longer performed; Mozart was no longer able to give concerts; and as a result he perished, poor and forgotten. The source for this summary judgment is never specified, and yet through tireless repetition a flood of legend has emerged and come to be regarded as common knowledge. Nevertheless, one thing is certain – the thesis of Mozart's fall from favor with the nobility and of his reduction to poverty is false.
>
> "It is false, because among other reasons, it unacceptably personalizes what was in fact a general problem for the cultural life of Vienna caused by the impact of the Turkish war on the economy. During the war with Turkey, Mozart didn't have it any worse than the other musicians in Vienna. Indeed, all musicians had to put up with a reduction in the number of opportunities to perform and consequently with their chances to earn money. This affected the

salons of the nobility as well as the public concert life and, given the political circumstances, is hardly to be wondered at.

> "And yet even so, in the years from 1788 to 1791, Mozart came to experience various demonstrations of the favour he enjoyed, demonstrations made manifest in commissions for new works from the Court (the Emperor's *Nationaltheater*) as well as from wealthy nobility (Baron van Swieten's circle of friends). . . .The year 1791 was in fact to be one of his most productive years, one when most of his works were the result of commissions. . . .In sum, it is fair to say that Mozart was able to hang on to important friends and even to add to them in these years of crisis."

This judgment made, Braunbehrens leaves the "neglect" theme behind and moves on to flesh out the picture of Mozart's activities and circumstances throughout the last years. He notes, for example, that Baron van Swieten had founded a society of like-minded nobility in 1786 to promote the annual performance of large oratorios and, in 1788, had asked Mozart to take over direction of the performances. "We should not forget," comments Braunbehrens, "that Mozart by this time enjoyed a European-wide reputation, one matched only by Haydn and Bach."

And on the matter of that subscription list with only van Swieten's name on it (mentioned in a letter Mozart wrote to Puchberg in July 1789), Braunbehrens sees the statement as one made for effect and not to be taken seriously:

> "That a subscription list circulated in July only had van Swieten's name on it doesn't tell us much; the reason is this: concerts almost never took place in the summer months from June to September because in this time the nobility had all gone to the countryside, and Mozart knew that full well."

Braunbehrens does not suggest that the last years were without problems for Mozart. Even though Constanze's health was better and his prospects had improved, a fundamental change had occurred in Vienna that affected everyone, Mozart and his friends and patrons included. In February 1790, Joseph II had died. Despite his shortcomings – he was notorious tightwad – Joseph II nevertheless was interested in music and the theater and he had repeatedly seen to it that Mozart was furnished with commissions. The new emperor, Leopold II, found himself confronted with problems on every hand, a legacy from his brother; he had little interest in the cultural matters so dear to Joseph II. With his new broom, he summarily swept out Mozart's patron van Swieten, he let Da Ponte know he was no longer welcome in Vienna, and, in 1791, he even caused Antonio Salieri to resign his position of responsibility at the opera.

The last months of Mozart's life were ones of adjusting to the new circumstances. He clearly wasn't going to make much headway with the new monarch. Indeed, he was lucky to hang on to his sinecure as *Kammerkompositeur*. It was in this time of political change and professional uncertainty that Mozart began to have periods of poor health. Braunbehrens writes: "It is evident that the new situation affected his physical condition." These were not Mozart's happiest days, perhaps, but did he really experience them as days of "increasing lack of recognition"? Did he live these final weeks and months through constantly burdened by the thought that he was "undesired and ultimately unloved"? Was Mozart's world really "ever more indifferent to him"?

On 7 October 1791, Constanze left Vienna for Baden and later that day Mozart sent her a letter. He wrote:

> "Now about my day;--right after you sailed away I played two games of billiards with Herrn von Mozart (the one who wrote the opera for Schickaneder).—then I sold my nag for 14 ducats.—then I got Joseph to call *Number One* to bring me some black coffee, all the while puffing away at an excellent pipe of tobacco; then I instrumented almost the whole rondo of Stadler's piece. . ."

Braunbehrens suggests this is a picture of Mozart to keep in mind along with all the others: six weeks before the fatal illness struck, relaxed and in good humor, playing billiards against himself, successfully negotiating the sale of his horse, marking the occasion with a cup of coffee and a pipe before settling down to put the finishing touches on the last movement of the clarinet concerto (K622) written for his friend, Anton Stadler. If this picture is a valid one (and not, as Hildesheimer would have it, just an example of a dissembling Mozart in misery trying to cheer up Constanze and himself as well), then it is one that hardly fits with a Mozart in his last days "broken" by an all-enveloping isolation and neglect.

A **pauper's** grave

Consider:

--In the front of the English edition of Einstein's book, it says: "At the age of five he began composing keyboard minuets. . .went on to write such effortless masterpieces as the 'Jupiter' and *The Magic Flute*, and died in Vienna in 1791 -- to be buried in a pauper's grave."

--Or take the utterance of the "Salieri" character in *Amadeus* (Act Two, Scene 16): "Generous Lord Fugue [an allusion to van Swieten] paid for a pauper's funeral. Twenty other corpses. An unmarked grave."

These represent, of course, a further playing out of the "poverty" theme, with an "unloved" obbligato: Mozart's corpse sewn in a sack and tossed into a mass grave in a potter's field (= "poverty"), with no one present except the grave digger and not even a cross to mark where he was buried (= "unloved").

This is one of those cases where myth and reality seem to have much in common, but one thing is lacking: contemporary understanding of an historical event. Or as Braunbehrens says (page 436): "It is not the historical events that change with the passage of time, but rather our understanding of them and their interpretation." He then proceeds to delineate the amply documented funeral and burial reforms instituted by Emperor Joseph II. Even though justified by him on both hygienic and economic grounds, these reforms were among the most contested and resented of his numerous decrees.

Under a decree of 23 August 1784, cemeteries had to be removed to the city outskirts from their previous location in the courtyards of churches in the center of town; to accelerate decomposition, the body was to be sewn in a sack and placed in the grave in the sack (and not in a coffin); if several bodies were to be buried at the same time, they would all be buried together; if a memorial to the departed was desired, it could be mounted in the cemetery wall but not in the courtyard.

The protest against these rules – particularly the one requiring burial only in a sack – was so great that Joseph II subsequently was forced to relent and to allow burial in a coffin if the relatives insisted. Although these procedures did not apply to the nobility and the well-to-do (who anyways had their own private burial grounds), they did directly affect the great majority of the people and were in force into the 19th century.

With this as background, Braunbehrens turns to the case of Mozart's last rites. The funeral took place at St. Stephen's cathedral in the center of Vienna. The entry in St. Stephen' register shows that Mozart received the customary so-called third class funeral. In addition to the usual funeral fees, an extra sum of money was paid for use of a wagon. This was necessary if a coffin was used and is evidence that Mozart was buried in his own coffin and not just thrown in a mass grave sewn in a sack. There is nothing to suggest that the funeral ceremonies and Mozart's subsequent burial differed in any significant respect from that of other Viennese of his social class.

The origin of the "pauper's grave" legend, Braunbehrens suggests, is to be found in the customs and attitudes of a later time, particularly those of the 19th century, when people couldn't imagine the circumstances of Mozart' s rites as signifying anything else except poverty and indifference. Braunbehrens points out, by the way, that under Joseph II, there were in fact no "pauper" burials; every citizen had a claim on the usual third-class rites and, if the family had no money to pay the fees, the ceremonies and burial would be provided gratis (which, the author notes, was the case with the person whose name comes just before Mozart's in the register at St. Stephen's.)

In 1787, the cemetery that formerly surrounded the grounds at St. Stephen's in Vienna's inner city had been moved some four and a half kilometers to the Landstrasse District. It was a good hour's walk away from St. Stephen's. Regulations prescribed that the transport of the dead could take place only after six in the evening; at this time in the month of December in Vienna, it is already dark. The actual burial would only take place some time the next day. For these reasons, the custom of accompanying the body to the cemetery had, in the years since the relocation of the graveyard to the outskirts, largely died out.

And so it was that, after Constanze, Baron van Swieten and the other mourners had paid their last respects at the ceremonies held in St. Stephen's, the body of Wolfgang Mozart in its coffin went unaccompanied to the graveyard, to be lowered into the ground at St. Mark's cemetery – not because he was "undesired, unloved, and forgotten," but because that is just the way it was in Vienna in 1791.

To conclude

The discussion of the three biographies in terms of the three Scenario I elements necessarily leaves large areas of each book unexamined. Each of the authors has much to say that is of interest and value to the person who would engage with Mozart and his music. The strength of the Braunbehrens biography lies in its well-researched presentation of the historical setting in which Mozart lived and worked; there is only incidental discussion of Mozart's music as such. Both Einstein and Hildesheimer, on the other hand, devote themselves at some length to individual Mozart compositions; indeed, this is the main purpose of the Einstein book.

Einstein was first and foremost a music-researcher. For the discussion of Mozart's "character" that serves to introduce Mozart the composer and his music, Einstein was generally content to use the Mozart letters and the biographical works of the past as source material. The value of the Einstein book, which extends to the present, is rooted in its careful and critical exposition of Mozart's music. He is an informed and thoughtful guide to Mozart's development as a composer and to the broad reach of his music. And yet, even here, the book shows its age. It is more than fifty years since most of the book was written and, in that time, much new research on Mozart's music has been accomplished. Lacking a new revision, one that incorporated the most recent research both in its biographical and its musical sections, Einstein's book must inevitably be relegated to the bookshelves as a venerated relic of two hundred years of Mozart literature.

As for Hildesheimer, his effort to write a psychological biography of Mozart is at once a success and a failure. Its success lies in the vigor with which Hildesheimer opened up the realm of Mozartean correspondence and insisted that we be receptive to the full context of its composing and not settle for the superficial written word. His idea that, just as in his music Mozart sometimes was "composing against the text" (page 321), so in his letters "his self-documentation which he, of course, never thought of as such, is. . .no conscious reflection of his emotional state" (page 349) -- this idea is a useful expansion of the critical approach to this major source for Mozart studies.

In the last analysis, however, Hildesheimer's book fails, for two reasons:

--First, it is constructed on a set of "facts" and judgments that turns out to be wrong in significant respects and thus leads Hildesheimer astray in the application of his psychoanalytical approach. For example, Mozart's *Ein musikalischer Spass* provides him with the occasion to elaborate two whole pages (207-209) of psychological interpretations, reaching even to the death of Mozart's father and the composition of *Don Giovanni* as well; all this psychologizing, however, is based on a non-fact (as Alan Tyson demonstrated in a 1985 article).

--Second, despite his declared intent, Hildesheimer is ultimately unable to objectify his approach to Mozart. As one "psychological insight" succeeds another, the reader's conviction grows that the portrait that emerges has far more to do with the psyche of Wolfgang Hildesheimer than with the psyche of Wolfgang Mozart.

The biography by Braunbehrens is not only the most recent of the three, but it is also the only one written by an author at home in historical research. Its approach is scholarly and analytical. The tone of personal urgency and revelation that makes Hildesheimer's book so fascinating to read is hardly to be found in Braunbehrens. In its place – and, for this reviewer, fundamentally more satisfying – is the sense of wide-ranging historical inquiry, the discovery of relationship among facts not previously thought to be related, a dedication to rational and thoughtful interpretation. It is a book that is careful to identify what it is that we know, what we can reasonably infer, and what we do not know about Mozart and his life in Vienna. And here, "life in Vienna" means just that – a palpable feel for what it must have been like to be a subject of Emperor Joseph II and to live in the busy, crowded inner city of late-Eighteenth century Vienna.

The picture of Mozart that takes shape in the pages of the Braunbehrens book has, it seem to me, a greater claim on reality than that offered by either Einstein or Hildesheimer. But beyond that, it is ultimately more supportive of that act of imagination required of each of us, you and me, as we seek to form some personal understanding of the man – and of the intellect – capable of conceiving and composing, say, *Idomeneo* and *Le nozze di Figaro*, the E-flat, G Minor, and C Major symphonies, the 1784-86 piano concertos, the "Haydn" string quartets, and the great C Minor mass, to mention but a few.

Bruce Cooper Clarke, October 1987

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Bibliographic notes

The three Mozart biographies discussed in this essay review are:

Alfred Einstein, *Mozart: Sein Charakter, sein Werk* (Frankfurt am Main 1968); published in English as: *Mozart: His Character, His Work* (London 1973), translation by Arthur Mendel and Nathan Broder.

Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Mozart* (Frankfurt am Main 1977); published in English as: *Mozart* (London 1982), translation by Marion Faber.

Volkmar Braunbehrens, *Mozart in Wien* (Munich 1986); published in English as: *Mozart in Vienna – 1781-1791* (New York 1990), translation by Timothy Bell [BCC note, 2005: not in print when this review was written].

Other books used in preparation include:

Kurt Pahlen, *Das Mozart Buch* (Zürich 1985)

Gernot Gruber, *Mozart und die Nachwelt* (Salzburg 1985)

Nikolaus Harnoncourt, *Der musikalische Dialog* (Salzburg 1984)

Peter Shaffer, *Amadeus* (New York 1984)

Alan Tyson, "Notes on the Genesis of Mozart's *Ein musikalischer Spass, KV522*," in *Festschrift Rudolf Elvers zum 65.Geburtstag*, ed. Ernst Herttrich und Hans Schneider (Tutzing: Hans Schneider Verlag, 1985), pp-505-518.

The page references in the text apply, in the case of Einstein and Hildesheimer, to the English-language editions; in all other cases, to the books as published in German.

The textual citations from Einstein and Hildesheimer are taken from the English-language editions; the English translations of excerpts from Braunbehrens and Pahlen are the work of the author.

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