1 Mozart's leap in the dark

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The first book devoted entirely to Mozart's Requiem, by Albert Hahn, a small-town music director in northern Germany, describes the work in this way: 'Now . . . we find ourselves in the beautiful morning light, led there by the inspired composer who through his passionate art banishes the loneliness of the barbaric night after long years of struggle'.[1] Hahn's account attributes to the Requiem a character that was commonplace for much of the later nineteenth century and most of the twentieth as well. Abert, Saint-Foix, Bruno Walter and countless others describe the work as consoling, the pious personal expression of a dying genius. For Eric Blom, the Requiem alternates 'noble grandiloquence' with 'heart-searching supplication' while Karl Geiringer describes it as 'a composition as transcendental as it is human . . . it leads us gently towards peace and salvation'. Einstein wrote that, whoever composed the later parts of the work, 'The total impression remains. Death is not a terrible vision but a friend.'[2]

No doubt these characterizations derive in part from Mozart's famous letter to his father of 4 April 1787, barely a month before Leopold's death:

> As death, when we come to consider it closely, is the true goal of our existence, I have formed during the last few years such close relations with this best and truest friend of mankind that his image is not only no longer terrifying to me, but is indeed very soothing and consoling! And I thank my God for graciously granting me the opportunity . . . to learn that death is the *key* which unlocks the door to our

[1] Albert Hahn, *Mozart's Requiem. Zu besseren Verständnis bei Aufführungen mit einer neuen Uebersetzung, nebst einer Nachtrage und den Resultaten eines Vergleiches der Breitkopf und Härtelschen Partitur mit den Original-Manuscript der k. k. Hofbibliothek zu Wien* (Bielfeld, 1867), p. 62: 'Nun . . . aber befinden wir uns schon in des schönen Tages Morgenhelle, welche durch das von begeisterten Künstler geleitete und durch eifrige Kunstfreunde gepflegte Vereinswesen der barbarischen Nacht langer Jahre siegreich entgegenarbeitet'.

[2] Hermann Abert, *W. A. Mozart* (Leipzig, 1919–23), vol. 2, pp. 700–29; Georges de Saint-Foix, *W.-A. Mozart. Sa vie musicale et son œuvre. V: les dernières années* (Paris, 1946), pp. 281–301; Bruno Walter, *Theme and Variations* (New York, 1946), p. 32; Eric Blom, *Mozart* (London, 1974), p. 181; Karl Geiringer, 'The Church Music', in H. C. Robbins Landon and Donald Mitchell (eds.), *The Mozart Companion* (London, 1956), p. 375; Alfred Einstein, *Mozart: His Character, His Work*, trans. Arthur Mendel and Nathan Broder (New York, 1945), p. 369.

> true happiness. I never lie down at night without reflecting that – young as I am – I may not live to see another day.[3]

This letter, reprinted in virtually every Mozart biography since 1828,[4] is freighted with biographical implications: not only does it show us a sympathetic, human Mozart but its nobility strengthens us to accept his own premature death with the courage and trust we believe the composer himself must have displayed – a courage and trust evident in the Requiem. But does it really reflect Mozart's attitude towards death? In November 1771 he witnessed a hanging in Milan but this elicited no particular reaction from him.[5] And when Leopold's favourite poet, Gellert, died in 1770, Mozart wrote to his sister: 'I have nothing new except that Herr gelehrt [Herr learned, a pun on the name Gellert], the poet from Leipzig died, and since his death has composed no more poetry'.[6] Voltaire's death prompted Mozart to write, 'that godless arch-rascal Voltaire has pegged out [*crepirt*] like a dog, like a beast'[7] and when the court violinist Joseph Hafeneder died in 1784, Mozart wrote that he was sorry chiefly because it would mean extra work for his father teaching the boys at the Chapel House.[8]

By the same token, early accounts of the Requiem say nothing about its consoling character. Ignaz Arnold, in his *Mozarts Geist* of 1803, noted the work's 'gloomy seriousness and dark melancholy' while Christian Friedrich Schwenke looked in vain for the 'pious humility of expression proper to such a solemn appeal to the mercy of the Redeemer'.[9] During the so-called *Requiem-Streit* of the 1820s, Gottfried Weber asserted that the Confutatis could not be by Mozart because it 'emphasizes, *con amore*, the egotistical baseness of the words and by the ferocious unison of the stringed instruments maliciously incites the Judge of the World to hurl the cursed crowd of sinners into the deepest abyss'.[10] Hans Georg Nägeli, in his *Vorlesungen über Musik*, objected to the many violent changes of key and arbitrary alternations of major and minor that turn the Kyrie fugue into a 'barbarous confusion of sounds'.[11]

[3] See *LMF*, p. 907; *MBA*, vol. 4, p. 41.
[4] It first appeared in Georg Nikolaus Nissen, *Biographie W. A. Mozarts* (Leipzig, 1828), pp. 524–5.
[5] Apparently Mozart had also seen a hanging in Lyon when the family visited there in late July and early August 1771. See his letter from Milan of 30 November 1771 in *MBA*, vol. 1, p. 452: 'ich habe auf den domplatz hier 4 kerl henckensehen. sie hencken hier wie zu lion' ('I saw four scoundrels hanged in the cathedral square. They hang people here just as they do in Lyon').
[6] Letter of 26 January 1770: *MBA*, vol. 1, p. 309.
[7] Letter of 3 July 1778: *MBA*, vol. 2, p. 389.
[8] Letter of 20 February 1784: *MBA*, vol. 3, p. 301.
[9] Ignaz Arnold, *Mozarts Geist* (Erfurt, 1803), p. 418. For Schwenke, see *AMZ*, 4 (1801–2), col. 8.
[10] Otto Jahn, *Life of Mozart*, trans. Pauline D. Townsend (London, 1891), vol. 3, p. 373.
[11] Hans Georg Nägeli, *Vorlesungen über Musik* (Stuttgart, 1826), p. 99.

Fig. 1.1 Franz Schramm, *Ein Moment aus den letzten Tagen Mozarts* (*c.* 1850)

How is it, then, that the Requiem acquired its consoling character? And to what extent does this reflect only one cultural model when, in fact, there may be other critical frameworks for reading the work?

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'Someone should have painted [a picture of] the dying Mozart, the score of the Requiem in his hand' wrote Nissen in his biography of 1828.[12] In fact, they did, but only later. And what these pictures show is a transformation, not only in the representation of Mozart's death, but in the meaning of the Requiem as well.

The earliest, a lithograph by Franz Schramm titled *Ein Moment aus den letzten Tagen Mozarts*,[13] probably dates from mid-century (Fig. 1.1). It shows Mozart with the score of the Requiem open on his lap; Süssmayr

[12]Nissen, *Biographie W. A. Mozarts*, p. 564: 'Man hätte Mozart sterbend malen sollen, die Partitur des Requiem in der Hand'.

[13]Schramm's lithograph was widely disseminated in Friedrich Leybold's *Wiener Künstleralbum* (Vienna, 1857). Figures 1.1,

Fig. 1.2 Henry Nelson O'Neill, *Mozart: The fulfillment of his strange presentiment about the Requiem* (1862)

receives last-minute instructions from the composer on how to complete the work; Constanze prays at the foot of a crucifix in a room off to the side; and an unidentified stranger – no doubt the 'grey messenger' who brought the Requiem commission to Mozart in the first place – appears to be leaving through the main door. It is an intensely private scene, inhabited only by the composer, those closest to him and the spirit of death itself who, presumably having delivered his message, takes an unsympathetic leave.[14]

Henry Nelson O'Neill's *Mozart: The fulfillment of his strange presentiment about the Requiem* (Fig. 1.2) from 1862, elaborates on this scene. Mozart

1.2 and 1.4 are reproduced courtesy of akg-images London.

[14]It seems to me more likely that the grey messenger is leaving, rather than arriving. Given the traditional accounts of Mozart's last days and the Requiem commission, it makes better sense to believe Mozart already knew he was dying and that the Requiem was his swan-song – hence the grey messenger is probably not arriving with his commission but was already well known to the composer. It may be that he has just told Mozart that his final moment is imminent; but it may also stand for the last of several visits reported in early anecdotes, visits that contributed in no small part to Mozart's alleged belief in his approaching end. In any case, the grey messenger is a central figure in the story and his appearance is a sign of the grander narrative, whether he is arriving or leaving. Another nearly contemporary painting, William James Grant's *Mozart Composing his Requiem on his Deathbed*, is similarly private, including only the composer and his wife.

once again has the Requiem on his lap; Constanze and Süssmayr are there too, as well as Sophie Haibel, Constanze's sister. The 'grey messenger' has disappeared but four men read through the work for Mozart. A cello and a violin lie silent at the foot of the bed. This picture purports to represent a gathering at Mozart's house on 4 December 1791, a gathering first reported in the 1827 obituary of Mozart's friend Benedikt Schack:

> As soon as he had completed a number, he had it sung through, and played the instrumental accompaniment to it on his piano. On the very eve of his death, he had the score of the Requiem brought to his bed, and himself (it was two o'clock in the afternoon) sang the alto part; Schack, the family friend, sang the soprano line, as he had always previously done, Hofer, Mozart's brother-in-law, took the tenor, Gerle, later bass singer at the Mannheim Theatre, the bass. They were at the first bars of the Lacrimosa when Mozart began to weep bitterly, laid the score on one side, and eleven hours later, at one o'clock in the morning . . . departed this life.[15]

O'Neill's painting may be 'factual' and 'true to life' but it is more active, more crowded than Schramm's. And Thomas Shield's lithograph of *c.* 1880 (Fig. 1.3) is more crowded still: in addition to Mozart, Constanze and Süssmayr, the performance of the Requiem is now accompanied by a small orchestra. It is no longer a private performance and Mozart's death is no longer a private death: both have gone public. It is, rather, the death of the artist. Or at least this is what a final picture, an anonymous oil painting from the end of the century (Fig. 1.4), shows. Here is the most remarkable transformation of all: not only does Mozart *conduct* the work – he is a nineteenth-century director-artist, not an eighteenth-century participant-performer – but there are no singers.[16] The Requiem, finally, has become a work of absolute music and the essence of the Romantic spirit.[17]

This pictorial transfiguration of Mozart's death from the private to the public, and of the Requiem from sacred to secular absolute music, mirrors the performance history of the work. Almost from the beginning of

[15] *MDL*, pp. 459–60; as given in translation in *MDB*, pp. 536–7.

[16] Though treated only briefly here, these pictures of Mozart can also be interpreted in the context of nineteenth-century 'death' art, generally. See, for example, Philippe Ariès, *L'homme devant la mort* (Paris, 1977) or, specifically concerning Napoleon, Suzanne Lindsay, 'Mummies and Tombs: Turenne, Napoléon, and Death Ritual', *The Art Bulletin*, 82 (2005), pp. 476–502. The importance of nineteenth-century 'death' art also extends to the early days of photography; see *Le Dernier Portrait. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 5 mar-26 mai 2002* [exhibition catalogue] (Paris, 2002).

[17] In general, see Daniel K. L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge, 1999). The Requiem, of course, was not the only sacred work or text to be secularized in the nineteenth century, as the example of Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* (or later Verdi's Requiem) shows.

Fig. 1.3 Thomas Shield, Untitled (*c.* 1880)

the nineteenth century, the Requiem was performed by choral societies and in concert halls across Europe. It was given at Covent Garden in 1801, by students of the Paris Conservatoire in 1804 and in Mannheim, Braunschweig, Leipzig and Frankfurt. A performance in Breslau was prefaced by two movements from Haydn's 'Trauer' Symphony; in Berlin it was given with the overture to Gluck's *Alceste*.[18]

The appropriation of the Requiem as secular (and as a work manifesting the German spirit) did not go unchallenged. When it was given in German at Leipzig in the spring of 1801, an anonymous correspondent for the *AMZ* wrote:

[18]For the Covent Garden performance, see [J. Ashley], *The Requiem . . . as performed under the direction of Mr. Ashley at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, during Lent 1801* (London, 1801). For performances elsewhere, see *AMZ*, 6 (1803–4), col. 507; 7 (1804–5), col. 429; and 11 (1808–9), col. 624. Additionally, see Thomas Bauman, 'Requiem, but no Piece', *19th Century Music*, 15 (1991), pp. 151–61 and esp. 157, in addition to the performances cited by Hermann Abert (see n. 22).

Fig. 1.4 Artist unknown, Untitled (*c.* 1900)

> Connoisseurs will in any case prefer to hear this work with the original text, not only because Mozart here more than anywhere was bound by each individual word of the text – realizing the enormity of his vision, the darkness of his ideas, the authentically gothic ways in which they are combined – but also because it probably cannot be realized adequately in any barbaric modern tongue . . . We cannot put it any other way – it is transformed into a Protestant (or if you prefer, 'enlightened') parody.[19]

[19] *AMZ*, 3 (1800–01), col. 478: 'Der Kenner wird allerdings gerade diese Komposition am liebsten mit dem Originaltexte hören; denn nicht nur, dass Moz. sich hier mehr als je auch an das Einzelne der Worte des Textes gebunden hat, so würkt gerade das Gigantische seiner Bilder, das Düstre seiner Ideen, das Aecht-Gothische in deren Zusammenstellung – ja selbst das mit Worten nicht zu Schildernde im Klange der

More pithily, E. T. A. Hoffmann wrote: 'The *Requiem*, performed in the concert hall, is not the same music: it is the appearance of a saint at a ball!'[20]

But appropriated it was and not only by choral and philharmonic societies for public concerts. Before long, the Requiem came to represent the celebration of death in general, of both the great and the small: in Berlin it was given during a period of mourning for the Queen Mother; at Leipzig it was played in honour of General Maçon, the Imperial French governor of the city; and a performance in Prague in 1801 to honour a local music patron, one Freyherr von Ledebour, made such an impression that 'a few days later two citizens requested that it be performed at memorial services for their relatives'.[21] More than that: the Requiem came to symbolize the death of greatness, the death of art, and the death of the human spirit. It was a musical centrepiece at the funerals of Heinrich von Collin, of Weber, Beethoven and, later, Napoleon.[22]

This celebration of death as a manifestation of the human spirit, as an event to be glorified for its profoundly *human* character, was a new idea. For much of the eighteenth century, death had been something to fear. One strain of thinking, best represented in Edward Young's poem *Night Thoughts* of 1742, encouraged aspirations towards a 'good' death, one in which an appropriate, moral life is led and death foreseen and properly prepared for. Widely translated and admired,[23] Young's work was intended to serve as a 'catalyst in the cultivation of hopes of eternal life':[24] Lessing regarded it as a masterpiece of the sublime, while Goethe acknowledged its influence on his *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. A more virulent strain, however, saw death as horror. In his poem 'The Grave' of 1743, Robert Blair wrote:

barbarischen Vulgaten-Diktion, Etwas, das wohl in keiner neuern lebenden Sprache ganz wiedergegeben werden kann . . . – wir können es nicht anders ausdrücken – sie ist eine *in's Protestantische* (oder, wenn man lieber will: in's Aufgeklärte) *übersetzte* Parodie'.

[20] [E. T. A. Hoffmann], 'Alte und neue Kirchemusik', *AMZ*, 16 (1814), cols. 612–13: 'Das *Requiem*, im concertsaal aufgeführt, ist nichts dieselbe Musik; die Erscheinung eines Heiligen auf den Ball!' Bauman, 'Requiem, but no Piece', notes that while Hoffmann seems to be complaining about the sorry state of Viennese church music, in fact he advocates that it become more like 'absolute' instrumental music, and that the one viable model for this among contemporary Viennese church music – or at least the work most closely approaching the ideal of 'absolute' music – was the Requiem.

[21] *AMZ*, 3 (1800–01), col. 466.

[22] See Hermann Abert, *W. A. Mozart* (Leipzig, 1919–23), vol. 2, p. 729. That the Requiem continues to be a universal sign of death and mourning is evident from its numerous performances at memorial events for victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

[23] The earliest German translation, by Johann Arnold Ebert, was published in 1751–2; further editions appeared in 1753 and 1756, as well as a different translation, by C. B. Kayser, in 1752. *Les Nuits d'Young*, a free adaptation and translation by Pierre Prime Félicien le Tourneur, appeared in 1769.

[24] John S. Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (Phoenix Mill, Gloucestershire, 2000), p. 7.

> *. . . The grave, dread thing!*
> *Men shiver when thou'art named: Nature appall'd*
> *Shakes off her wonted firmness. Ah! How dark*
> *Thy long-extended realms, and rueful wastes!*
> *Where nought but silence reigns, and night, dark night.*[25]

Blair's gothic vision was equally potent, inspiring images of graveyards, solitary mourners, night scenes and ruined abbeys, even if it was short-lived. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, such horrific scenes were overtaken by images of Arcadian memorial gardens that sought to banish decay, decomposition and graveyards, a trend already evident in the late eighteenth century: Cajus Lorenz Hirschfeld's *Theorie der Gartenkunst* advocated, on English models, the introduction of memorials in the form of urns, columns and buildings in gardens. This was a reaction not only to earlier images, but to the unsanitary, malodorous, chaotic conditions of burial as well and it resulted in schemes such as those of René-Louis Marqui de Girardin's *Elysée for Jean-Jacques Rousseau* at Eremonville, later a model for Henrietta Caroline of Hesse-Darmstadt's *Herrengarten* and an inspiration for Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Etudes de la Nature* of 1784.[26]

It was out of these memorial gardens, and the view that burial grounds could 'become a means of social engineering, promoting reason and calm',[27] that the modern cemetery arose. An official decree of 12 June 1804 drew up rules for the construction of French cemeteries, prohibiting them in churchyards and towns, and ordering them to be built outside urban limits, planted with trees and shrubs. The cemetery – and death – was banished, distant from physical, everyday reality, a haven of peace and repose. Père-Lachaise became the prototypical nineteenth-century funerary garden. (In Vienna, Joseph II instituted similar reforms as early as 1784, removing graveyards beyond the city limits, but these reforms grew more out of economic and public health concerns than philosophical or social-engineering ones. Paradoxically, one of his regulations served only to increase the sense of horror associated with death, abandoning the corpse to nature: 'The only objective in burial is to promote decomposition as soon as possible, and there is no greater hindrance to this process than burial in coffins. Thus it is recommended for the present that bodies be sown unclothed [and buried] in linen sacks.' This generated such a storm of protest that in 1785 Joseph issued a court circular reading: '[People] go to great lengths to ensure their

[25]Robert Blair, 'The Grave', facsimile (with William Blake's illustrations), ed. Robert Essick and Morton Paley (London, 1982).
[26]See Annette Richards, *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque* (Cambridge, 2001) and Matthew Head, 'Music with "No Past"? Archaeologies of Joseph Haydn and *The Creation*', *19th Century Music*, 23 (2000), pp. 191–217.
[27]Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, p. 24.

bodies will decay slowly after death, and thus remain stinking carrion for as long as possible. So I no longer care how they want to be buried.')[28]

There is a broader context within which these concerns can be situated: the debate over the immortality of the soul. Moses Mendelssohn's *Phaedon, oder die Unsterblichkeit der Seele* of 1767, a vigorous defence of immortality, was widely read; even Mozart owned a copy.[29] But this was not the only view. Arguments denying immortality had already asserted themselves in the seventeenth century. Thomas Hobbes argued that to believe in immortality was to forsake not only rational thought but Nature as well, while David Hume proposed that man's fear was proof enough that death ends all: Nature would not imbue us with such horror unless there was something to fear.[30]

The French *philosophes* similarly rejected the idea of immortality. For them, death was an unpleasant natural accident and immortality a priestly lie that inhibited the achievement of a better life in the here-and-now. This was not to deny immortality altogether, or at least some form of immortality: Condorcet, in his *Outline of the Progress of the Human Mind*, may have been the first to promote the idea that the prolongation of life, the achievement of immortality, was not a function of belief in religion but of belief in Man and his capacity to extend natural, vital forces.[31] Here, at least, is a point of contact with Kant, even if he rejects Condorcet's notion of a similarity between the achievement of moral perfection and the processes of nature. In his *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant asserted the existence of immaterial natures, including the soul, as well as his belief in moral perfectibility through practical reasoning of moral experience.[32] And in the *Critique of Pure Reason* he wrote that while virtue ought to produce happiness, this was not the case; instead, 'virtue is attainable only if there is infinite progress, hence there must be another life'.[33] Since the achievement of the highest good is the necessary object of a moral will, this obligation must be

[28]See Volkmar Braunbehrens, *Mozart in Vienna 1781–1791*, trans. Timothy Bell (New York, 1990), pp. 415–16. Joseph II's burial reforms are also discussed in Johann Pezzl's contemporaneous *Skizze von Wien* (Vienna, 1786–90); see H. C. Robbins Landon, *Mozart and Vienna* (New York, 1991), pp. 122–3. Concerning the historical development of cemeteries in general, see Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. H. Weaver (New York, 1982), pp. 491–556, and Richard A. Etlin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetery in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA, 1984).

[29]*MDL*, p. 589; *MDB*, p. 602. In fact, Mozart's letter to his father of 7 April 1787 paraphrases Mendelssohn.

[30]In particular, see 'Of the Immortality of the Soul', in David Hume, *The Philosophical Works*, ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (London, 1882), vol. 4, pp. 399–406.

[31]Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain* (Paris, 1795), pp. 358–63.

[32]Felix Gross (ed.), *Kant's Sämmtliche Werke* (Leipzig, 1921), vol. 1, p. 106.

[33]Jacques Choron, *Death and Western Thought* (New York, 1963), p. 145.