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“Now I Sit Like a Rabbit in the Pepper”: Proverbial Language in the Letters of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

ONE OF THE UNFORTUNATE misconceptions in proverb scholarship has been the false notion that during the eighteenth century “the rationalistic temper found little to admire in proverbs” (Taylor [1931] 1985:173) and that there was a “general collapse of proverbiality” (Obelkevich 1994:230). Numerous proverb collections that appeared in various languages and as polyglot wisdom treasures are clear indications that there was no unnatural break in paremiological and paremiographical work (Bonser [1930] 1967; Mieder 1982–2001; Moll 1958). It is simply not true that people of the so-called Enlightenment period had no interest in oral traditions in general and in folk speech in particular. Despite its emphasis on intellectual and rational matters, this cultural period was not void of proverbial wisdom. The Age of Reason had a popular side that was marked by a sincere interest in teaching morality, and the generational and experiential wisdom expressed in folk proverbs was indeed well suited for spreading common sense ethics and virtues, both in oral and written communication.

Little wonder that numerous proverb collections for didactic instruction appeared throughout Europe and in the United States. Authors Cotton Mather, Abigail and John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and others in colonial America and the fledgling United States of the eighteenth century employed numerous proverbs, and the continued use of proverbial language was equally widespread in the Old World. Well-known authors such as William Blake, Denis Diderot, Henry Fielding, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johann Gottfried Herder,

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Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, Johann Friedrich Schiller, Tobias George Smollett, Laurence Sterne, Jonathan Swift, and the embodiment of the age, François-Marie Voltaire, all delighted in making use of proverbs and proverbial expressions (Mieder and Bryan 1996). Such metaphorically expressed folk wisdom also played a significant role in the large correspondence written by Goethe, Voltaire, and Lord Chesterfield, for example (Pfeffer 1948a, 1948b; Calvez 1989; Mieder 2000). Proverbial rhetoric abounds in such letters, and it should not be surprising that the epistolary exchanges among members of the Mozart family are also replete with folk speech in the form of curses, formulas, rhymes, superstitions, proverbial expressions, proverbial comparisons, and actual proverbs (Seiler [1922] 1967; Röhrich and Mieder 1977; Mieder 1996).

Proverbial language in the form of proverbs as wisdom sayings and proverbial phrases as expressive metaphors (Taylor [1931] 1985:3–22, 184–200; Mieder 1998a) certainly plays a major stylistic and expressive role in the numerous letters that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91) wrote primarily to family members during his regrettably short life. These letters are invaluable for understanding his genius, since they contain revelations about his complex personal, artistic, and social existence. Mozart himself thought very little of his epistolary art, as can be seen from a revealing letter to his father on 8 November 1777: “I cannot write in verse, for I am no poet. I cannot arrange parts [figures] of speech with such art as to produce effects of light and shade, for I am no painter. Even by signs and gestures I cannot express my thoughts and feelings, for I am no dancer. But I can do so by means of sounds, for I am a musician” (363).¹ About three months later he reveals to his father on 22 February 1778 that he finds the constant pressure of writing letters (probably especially those to his demanding father) a considerable burden: “Please forgive my not writing much now, but really I cannot—I am afraid of bringing back my headache, and besides I feel no inclination to write today. It is impossible to put on paper all that we think—at least I find it so, I would rather say it than write it” (487). Later, pursued by his creative impulses and his ever-present financial worries, he writes in utter frustration on 2 August 1788 to his sister Maria Anna (Nannerl): “You must realize that I have a great deal to do. Besides, you know very well that I am rather lazy about letter-writing. So do not take it amiss, if I *seldom* write to you” (918). But be that as it may, the trans-

mitted letters are precious documents of a driven artist. "The mixture of seriousness and cheerfulness, which governs Mozart's being and creativity, breaks through clearly in these letters from his youth until his last days" (Schiedermaier 1914, I:xxvi).²

Part of this unique style is clearly made up by dozens of proverbial statements. They function not merely as colorful and metaphorical phrases, for they also express the turbulent life style of Mozart. In the following stylistic and biographical discussion of this traditional folk rhetoric, the proverbial references have been grouped under eight subheadings whose titles reveal at least in part the scope and meaning of Mozart's frequent use of proverbs and proverbial expressions: "Incantations and Curses as Proverbial Formulas," "Animal Phrases as Social Commentary," "Somatic Expressions as Emotional Indicators," "Humorous Use of Anal Folk Speech," "Scatological Humor in the Bäsle-Letters," "Proverbial Love Letters to His Wife, Konstanze," "Proverbial Phrases as Emotive Venting," and "Mozart's Fate as Expressed in Proverbial Speech."

Incantations and Curses as Proverbial Formulas

The repeatedly employed proverbial formula "Praise and thanks be to God" at the beginning or the end of letters expresses in striking simplicity that bodily and psychological well-being was not at all to be taken for granted in eighteenth-century everyday life. That does not mean that the fourteen-year-old Wolfgang does not employ the traditional formula with considerable humor at the beginning of a letter on 14 April 1770 to his mother and sister: "Praise and thanks be to God, I and my wretched pen are well and I kiss Mamma and Nannerl a thousand or 1000 times" (128). In a short postscript to a letter by his father on 2 May 1770, the young Mozart once again shows how he can communicate in a lively and jovial fashion with his mother and sister: "Praise and thanks be to God, I am well and kiss Mamma's hand and my sister's face, nose, mouth, neck and my bad pen and arse, if it is clean" (134). This statement also shows the colloquial if not coarse way of expressing oneself among the Mozart family which, to be sure, was quite the custom at that time.

Mozart's active mind is also quick to jump from divine incantations to proverbial curses, as can be seen in his letter of 15 October 1787 addressed to Gottfried von Jacquin in Vienna:

But what is this?—Is it possible? What vision meets my ears, what sound bombards my eyes? [What do my ears see, what do my eyes hear?] A letter from—I am almost rubbing my eyes sore—why, it is—The devil take me † God protect us [God be with us] † It actually is from you—indeed! If winter were not upon us, I would smash the stove in good earnest. But as I frequently use it now and intend to use it more often in the future, you will allow me to express my surprise in a somewhat more moderate fashion and merely tell you in a few words that I am extraordinarily pleased to have news from you and your most precious family. (911–12)

Obviously Mozart takes much delight in this passage despite his strenuous and frustrating work schedule. But these sentences also show Mozart's almost schizophrenic way of life. He jumps from one extreme to the other, from anger to joy, from seriousness to cheerfulness, and, of course, also from the curse "The devil take me" to the divine incantation "God be with us." And there is also the conscious exchange of the verbs of the well-known formula "What do my eyes see, what do my ears hear." In an essay about "Mozart's Language," Renate Bebermeyer has made the following convincing observation regarding such stylistic and semantic contrasts: "Mozart's letters portray unartificial straightforwardness, they are not indebted to poetic letter formats, and they do not want to be sensitive and intellectual treatises for posterity. The reader is confronted not with artistic aphorisms but with the written form of oral speech, and he has the immediate feeling of listening to a loose and relaxed dialogue" (1991:130). These are indeed not stylistically and intellectually crafted letters such as those by Goethe or Thomas Mann, for example, who intended their epistles to be part of their literary *œuvre*. Instead, Mozart's epistolary style is written orality, and it is his spontaneous use of language, including rich proverbial speech, that gives his lively and telling letters their linguistic and emotional authenticity.

Animal Phrases as Social Commentary

This authentic use of folk speech can also be seen in Mozart's frequent employment of proverbial expressions, whose animal metaphors are placed in direct relationship with his social environment. The repeated use of the expression "to be an (a stupid) ass" is related to Mozart's predilection towards curses. He cites it ironically or sarcastically whenever he is bothered by acquaintances or patrons. An early example can be found in his sister's diary. She had noted: "On the

29th [of May 1775] a concert took place in the hall of the city hall, where a female singer and a violinist could be heard.” Her brother Wolfgang simply and to the point added the precise statement: “terrible ass!” (Bauer and Deutsch 1962–75, I:526).³ But Mozart is also quite willing to refer to himself with this popular phrase: “As for your reproach about the little singer in Munich, I must confess that I was an ass to tell you such a palpable lie. Why, she does not yet know what *singing* means” (485). Another time he states self-critically, “See what an ass I am!” (539), but the following examples show how this proverbial phrase serves him very well in making a satirical point: “Menzel is, and always will be an ass” (880) and “why, he is a full-blown ass” (967). Especially illuminating is the following passage from a letter to his father on 12 June 1778 from Paris: “I too am quite pleased with it [a new symphony]. But I cannot say whether it will be popular—and, to tell the truth, I care very little, for who will not like it? [. . .] I still hope, however, that even asses will find something in it to admire” (552–53). Mozart also includes this phraseologism in his undated comedy *Die Liebes-Probe* (The Love-Test), where a certain Leander cites it to deal in a rather colloquial fashion with his servant Wurstl: “You are after all with your entire zeal and speed the biggest ass that I have seen in my life” (Bauer and Deutsch 1962–75, IV:170). These must have been Mozart’s thoughts when he had to deal with contemporaries who simply were no match for his genius.

Other proverbial animal metaphors show how Mozart employs drastic folk speech in order to give his letters the necessary expressiveness. Quite often he intends to shock with such coarse statements, but Mozart might also have wanted to use the colloquial idiom to show himself as a “normal” speaker of the language. As an extraordinarily gifted artist he might at times have longed for the joys of normality. Irma Voser-Hoesli speaks in this regard of Mozart’s “propensity towards the concrete” and his “inclination to sensual tangibility” (1948:65–66). This linguistic realism can be seen very clearly in the following citations (some of the proverbial flavor is lost to a degree in translation): “A grotesco was there who jumps well, but cannot write as I do, I mean, as sows piddle [piss]” (110); “Little Wolfgang has no time to write, for he has nothing to do. He is walking up and down the room like a dog with fleas” (243); “Now, I have a piece of news for you [. . .], namely, that that godless arch-rascal Voltaire has pegged out like a dog, like a beast! That is his reward!” (558); and

"During the night instead of slumbering softly and sweetly—I slept like a dormouse and snored like a bear [. . .]" (824).

One senses in these lines how Mozart is being carried away by language just as he is in his musical compositions. One association follows another, where his obvious "linguistic games [in the form] of wordplays and word innovations" follow "structural principles of music" (Reiffenstein 1993:373).⁴ This can be seen especially well in a postscript to Heinrich W. von Hefner, which Mozart added to a letter of 15 September 1773 written by his father to young Mozart's mother. Here Mozart not only plays with the word "enemy-spider" of the proverbial expression "to be the enemy-spider of someone," but at the end he also adds yet another metaphorical animal proverb:

I hope that we shall still find you in Salzburg, my friendly slug.
 I hope that you are well and not an enemy spider,
 for if so I'll be an enemy fly
 or even a friendly bug.
 [. . .]
 And then you won't see me again nor I you; yet
 when horses are hungry, some oats they get.
 Farewell, my lad, I'm ever to infinity
 or else I'll go mad. from now to all eternity. (245)

One last animal proverb might be mentioned here which the just-fourteen-year-old Wolfgang employed in a short postscript to his father's letter of 10 February 1770 to his wife. In print this paragraph is a mere five lines long, and one is inclined simply to ignore it. And yet, with it the young Mozart might well have given us an incredibly valuable elucidation of his character:

Talk of the devil [sow] and he [it] will appear. Thanks and praise be to God, I am quite well and can scarcely await the hour when I shall receive an answer from you. I kiss Mamma's hand and to my sister I send a pockmark of a kiss and I remain the same old . . . old what? . . . the same old buffoon,
 Wolfgang in Germany, Amadeo in Italy, De Mozartini. (113)

Right at the beginning, and with noteworthy self-irony, Mozart varies the proverb "Talk of the wolf and it will appear" and thus refers to himself more or less as a "lucky pig," because according to the incantation "Praise and thanks be to God" he is healthy and in good spirits. And then he calls himself a buffoon, a role which he quite consciously

played throughout his life. This role playing, which is based on an old folk tradition that is particularly prevalent in Viennese buffoon plays, illustrates “the delight in fecal matters on an infantile basis” (Rommel 1952:302). That is, Mozart has integrated the buffoon-like fecal humor into his letters quite intentionally, since he knew that he could communicate effectively using such vocabulary and phrases with other family members who were used to this type of humorous folk speech. Therefore, the scatological language in Mozart’s letters must not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of their author’s sick perversion, as will be explained in more detail in the discussion of his letters to his cousin.

Somatic Expressions as Emotional Indicators

It must be remembered that the weebegone Mozart also knew moments of utter happiness and joy, as he informs his father on 26 September 1777 with a fitting somatic phrase: “I am always in my very best spirits, for my heart has been as light as a feather ever since I got away from all that humbug; and, what is more, I have become fatter” (277). The heart as the place of emotions appears repeatedly in the letters, as for example: “I have now written all that is weighing on my heart” (463) and “I set off at half past eight in the morning, but Madame Cannabich did not get up—she simply would not and could not say good-bye. I too did not wish to distress her [to make her heart heavy], so I left the house without seeing her” (641). But Mozart’s use of the proverbial expression “not to have the heart to do something” is especially touching in a letter to his father from Paris dated 9 July 1778, in which he had to announce the death of his mother,

I hope that you are now prepared to hear with fortitude one of the saddest and most painful stories; [. . .]. On the 3rd, at twenty-one minutes past ten at night my mother fell asleep peacefully in the Lord; [. . .] as I judged from my own grief and sorrow what yours would be, I could not indeed bring myself [did not have the heart] suddenly to shock you with this dreadful news! (561)

A small poem, which Mozart later wrote as an adult man on 4 June 1787 after the death of his pet starling bird, fits quite well to this letter. Every lover of animals will be able to empathize with the fitting phrase of “a bleeding heart” that Mozart uses to express his painful loss:

A little fool lies here
 Whom I held dear—
 A starling in the prime
 Of his brief time,
 Whose doom it was to drain
 Death's bitter pain.
 Thinking of this, my heart
 Is riven apart [bleeds].
 Oh reader! Shed a tear,
 You also, here.
 He was not naughty, quite,
 But gay and bright,
 And under all his brag
 A foolish wag.
 This no one can gainsay
 And I will lay
 That he is now on high,
 And from the sky,
 Praises me without pay
 In his friendly way.
 Yet unaware that death
 Has choked his breath,
 And thoughtless of the one
 Whose rime is thus well done.

(Bauer and Deutsch 1962–75, IV:49–50; Marshall 1991:143–44)

Is this really nothing but an occasional poem, or is Mozart speaking here, albeit indirectly, about his own fate in life? After all, with his thirty-one years he too is “in the prime,” though his musical and much-praised services remain “without pay.” Impoverished, “his breath is choked.” In German the poem states that “he bleeds to death,” and, like his bird, he enjoys playing the buffoon or clown in addition to playing his music. Ten years earlier Mozart had expressed his fooleries more coarsely with scatological vocabulary in a letter to his father on 25 October 1777: “Well, addio. I again kiss Papa’s hands and embrace my sister and send greetings to all my good friends; and now off to the closet [little shit house] run I, where perchance shit some muck shall I, and ever the same fool am I” (342). It is always astonishing to discover these extreme vacillations in the psychological state and linguistic style of Mozart.

Emotional matters are also at the heart of the somatic phrases incorporated in other letters (again it is difficult to render them

into English and maintain the proverbial flavor): “I told him [Raaff] my whole story about Mannheim and how I had been led by the nose, adding every time that perhaps I might still get an appointment there” (571); “Forgive me for not writing much this time, but I am up to the eyes in work” (701); “Well, I must close, for I must now write at break-neck speed. Everything has been composed, but not yet written down” (702); and “On the whole, Karl [Mozart’s son] is no worse; but at the same time he is not one whit [not by a hair] better than he was. He still has his old bad manners” (971). But without blinking an eye, Mozart is quite capable of moving from somatic expressions that refer to the neck, eyes, hair, and nose to phrases that include lower parts of the human anatomy, namely the behind. He uses the folk expression “to kick someone on (in) the behind” in a letter of 13 June 1781 to his father, intensifying his colloquial venting by citing the “behind” version of the phrase first and then adding the coarser variant “to kick someone in the arse” for good measure:

Instead of taking my petition or procuring me an audience [with the archbishop], [. . .] Count Arco hurls me out of the room and gives me a kick on my behind. That means in our language that Salzburg is no longer the place for me, except to give me a favourable opportunity of returning the Count’s kick [in the arse], even if it should have to be in the public street. (743)

But that is not all. Three days later, on 16 June 1781, Mozart writes to his father: “That arrogant jackass [Count Arco] will certainly get a very palpable reply from me, even if he has to wait twenty years for it. For to see him and return his kick [in his arse] will be one and the same thing, unless I am so unlucky as to meet him first in some sacred place” (746). And finally, on 20 June, Mozart pens the following tirade in which several proverbial expressions underscore his emotional arguments:

It is the heart that ennobles man; and though I am no count, yet I have probably more honour in me than many a count. Whether a man be count or valet, the moment he insults me, he is a scoundrel. I intend at first to tell him [Count Arco] quite reasonably how badly and clumsily he has played his part. But in conclusion I shall feel bound to assure him in writing that he may confidently expect from me a kick on his behind [in his arse] and a few boxes on the ear in addition. For, when I am insulted, I must have my revenge. (747)

The somatic proverb “It is the heart that ennobles man” expresses Mozart’s noble disposition, but in his frustration, he has no other recourse but to vent his feelings against the count with the phrases “to be a scoundrel” (the German “Hundsfoß” [slang for female genitals] is quite vulgar) and “to kick someone in the arse.”

Humorous Use of Anal Folk Speech

In these outbursts of anger Mozart employs the folk expressions about “arse” as serious verbal aggression. But as always with Mozart, there is another, much more humorous use of such anal folk speech. In one of his early letters to his sister Maria Anna, dated 17 February 1770, we find the playful statement: “Here I am, now you have me. Dear little Marianne, with all my arse I rejoice that you had such a frightfully good time” (115). But then, ten years later, the presumably much more mature brother writes the following nonsensical lines into his sister’s diary, alluding to the two phrases “to be an ass” and “to lick someone in the arse”:

the 19th [August 1780] about shitting, my humble self, an ass, a break, again an ass, and finally a nose, in the church, staying at home due to the whistle in the arse, whistle not a bad tune for me in my arse. In the afternoon Katherine stopped by, and also Mr. Fox-tail, whom I afterwards licked in the arse; O delicious arse! [. . .]

the 20th at 10 o’clock at mass. the [. . .] ass whom I groped completely, and the ass licked me, has given as an ass his very best. (Bauer and Deutsch 1962–75, III:7–8)

In a similar fashion Mozart describes the Countess Baumgarten on 13 November 1780: “It is she who has a fox’s tail sticking out of her arse and, oh vanity, an odd-looking watch-chain hanging under her ear and a fine ring” (662). And about the same time, on 7 September 1780, Wolfgang writes the following traditional folk verse into his sister’s diary:

Hussa, copper-smith, come,
be a man, catch if you can,
be a man, catch if you can
lick my arse, copper-smith.

(Bauer and Deutsch 1962–75, III:10)⁵

Mozart’s preoccupation with the proverbial phrase “to lick someone’s

arse” was so indulgent that he wrote the following postscript on the envelope of a letter to his father on 4 November 1777, outlining in grotesque and crude detail his wishes for the decoration of wooden targets for the game of darts:

As for the targets, if it is not too late, this is what I would like. A short man with fair hair, shown bending over and displaying his bare arse. From his mouth come the words: “Good appetite for the meal!” The other man to be shown booted and spurred with a red cloak and a fine fashionable wig. He must be of medium height and in such a position that he licks the other man’s arse. From his mouth come the words: “Oh, there’s nothing to beat it.” So, please. If not this time, another time. (357–58)

Doubtlessly this statement is meant in a humorous vein, but it is nevertheless a clear indicator of Mozart’s rather active scatological mind-set.

Obviously the question of the possible origin of such outbursts of fecal and anal language is justified. Norbert Elias has characterized the problem with a few key concepts in his significant study, *Mozart: Zur Soziologie eines Genies* (1991): “Mozart’s fecal humor. Problem: What is characteristic of this humor for the social canon, what is specifically and individually Mozart? The civilizational [socializing] difficulty of humor needs to be considered as an individual flight of ideas, constant linkage of fecal and oral phantasies. Compulsion that is nevertheless under control” (1991:180). It is important to keep in mind that Mozart’s scatological humor for the most part is based on the “colloquial use of coarse words and phrases in common currency at his time” (Eibl and Senn 1978:105). It is a popular “linguistic custom” (106) that relies upon humor rather than a psychologically rooted anal fixation or perversion. Commenting especially on the numerous references to “arse” and its related phrases, Irma Voser-Hoesli made the following observation in a chapter on “Humorous Aspects” in Mozart’s letters: “Mozart boldly goes beyond the [Rococo] convention and gives basic human instincts their due by accepting them with a natural delight in the ridiculous” (1948:46). When looking at the many anal and scatological passages in the letters, if one does not consider Mozart’s sense of humor and the socio- and psycholinguistic norms of language at his time, then one is ignoring and misunderstanding Mozart’s conscious and deliberate role as a buffoon.

Mozart's hilarious postscript to a letter of 14 November 1777 by his mother to her husband shows explicitly how normal and accepted such "dirty (filthy) talk" or "coprolaliac phantasies" (Elias 1991:135), i.e., scatological language, were in his social environment:

I, Johannes Chrysostomus Amadeus Wolfgangus Sigismundus Mozart, hereby plead guilty and confess that [. . .] I did frequently, without any difficulty, but quite easily, perpetrate—rhymes, the same being, moreover, sheer garbage, that is, on such subjects as muck, shitting and arse-licking—and that too in thoughts, words—but not in deeds. [. . .] I must admit that I thoroughly enjoyed it. I confess all these sins and transgressions of mine from the bottom of my heart and in the hope of having to confess them very often, I firmly resolve to go on with the sinful life which I have begun. Wherefore I beg for the holy dispensation, if it can be easily obtained; if not, it's all one to me, for the game will go on all the same. *Lusus enim suum habet ambitum.* (373)

This is undoubtedly meant as a humorous explanation of Mozart's "play" with such scatological vocabulary. The game is carried on for the sake of having verbal fun, as the Latin proverb "The game has its own bounds" expresses. There is no need for Mozart to make any excuses for this behavior, because the coprolalia, if not coprophilia, that seems excessive and ridiculous today was rather common in Mozart's milieu: "Undisguised allusions to anal functions of the human body were part and parcel of the normal joys of social intercourse among young and probably also among older people with whom Mozart associated" (Elias 1991:136).

In fact, Mozart's mother also delights in such anal vocabulary, as for example in her postscript to a letter of 26 September 1777 by Wolfgang to his father: "Addio, ben mio. Keep well, my love. Into your mouth your arse you'll shove. I wish you good-night, my dear, but first shit in your bed and make it burst. It is long after one o'clock already. Now you can go on rhyming yourself" (278). It is of interest to note here that the invitation to "go on rhyming" is an obvious reference to the fact that the mother is actually citing a traditional folk verse that continues with the lines "Shit into the bed until it overflows, / tomorrow is Elisabeth." Certainly Mozart remembered these verses ten years later when, on 2 September 1788, he notes in his "Register of all my Works" the canon "Bona nox bist a rechta ox" that cites them at the end:

Good night, good night,
 shit in your bed and make it burst,
 good night; sleep quite soundly
 and into your mouth shove your arse.

(Bauer and Deutsch 1962–75, VII:595; Eibl and Senn 1978:64–65)

Mozart actually knew the folk verse by at least the age of fourteen,⁶ for already on 7 July 1770 he sent part of it in Italian from Rome to his sister in a postscript to his father's letter: "*Addio statevi bene, e cacate nel letto che egli fà fracasso* [Addio. Keep well, and shit in your bed (and) make a mess of it]" (148). Certainly Mozart is preoccupied with such anal statements, but since he is in fact merely citing common patterns of folk speech, it is somewhat questionable to speak too quickly of "Mozart's scatological disorder [coprolalia]" (Simkin 1992:1563; Aterman 1993).

Above all, Mozart's anal language mirrors the Austro-German predilection for so-called anal or fecal humor, as Alan Dundes (1984) has convincingly shown by way of numerous oral and written references over a period of several centuries. It should not be surprising that in addition to obscene words, popular expressions also play a significant role in this verbal communication, even though scatological proverb lore has often been suppressed in collections by prudish collectors and publishers (Englisch 1928:129–37). In a letter of 13 September 1768 by father Leopold Mozart to Lorenz Hagenauer we find one of these common phrases, but for once the scatological verb was not spelled out completely: "*It was a year ago the day before yesterday, September 11th, that we left Salzburg.* Could I ever have dreamt then that I should stay a year in Vienna? But who can oppose Fate! I am so annoyed that I could foam at the mouth [actually: that I could sh . . . oranges]. The only good thing to be said is that we all, thank God, are well. But I only wish that I could let you know the happy day of our departure!" (91). About two years later, when father Mozart writes to his wife on 3 November 1770, he has absolutely no inhibitions in completing the fecal verb: "I cannot think of anything to write to you about, except that, thank God, we are well and wish that New Year's Day or at least Christmas were here already. For until then there will always be something to do or to think about, perhaps some small worry to make one foam at the mouth [actually: to make one shit oranges] and have an unpleasant time. But patience!" (168). It should

be noted that Leopold Mozart uses the incantation “Praise and thanks be to God,” albeit in its truncated form “thank God,” in both of these emotional epistles. The phrase “thank God” forms quite a contrast to the proverbial expression “to shit oranges,” but such stylistic oppositions are typical occurrences throughout the correspondence of the Mozart family.

Without doubt the proverbial phrase “to lick someone in the (someone’s) arse” is of particular importance in Mozart’s letters. Even though Johann Wolfgang von Goethe rendered the phrase acceptable among the German-educated population by citing it as “He can lick me in my arse” in the third act of his play *Götz von Berlichingen* (1771),⁷ it had belonged “at least two generations earlier to the comical scenes of popular Viennese folk theatre as part of everyday language” (Rommel 1952:301). Mozart, of course, knew the expression from oral tradition, and he integrated it again and again in his correspondence and in several canons without ever having to fear that his society and especially his family members would accuse him of being a perverse anal fanatic. His infamous canons about this proverbial theme in particular are nothing more than harmless social games put to music. Mozart has described for us in a letter of 17 October 1777 from Augsburg to his father how he came spontaneously to his first “Lick me in the arse” text at a small gathering that included his mother and cousin:

A certain Father Emilian, a conceited ass and a sorry wit of his profession, was very sweet on my little cousin and wanted to jest with her, but she made fun of him—finally when he was a bit tipsy, which soon happened, he began to talk about music and sang a canon, saying: “In my life I have never heard anything more beautiful.” I said: “I am sorry that I cannot join in, but nature has not bestowed on me the gift of intoning.” “That does not matter,” he said. He began. I took the third voice, but I invented quite a different text, i.e., “Pater Emilian, oh, you idiot, you, lick my arse. I beg you.” All this, *sotto voce*, to my cousin. Then we laughed for another half-hour. (329–30)

Obviously Mozart never forgot this humorous incident, and that resulted in the curious fact that between 1782 and 1788 Mozart “cites this ‘winged word’ for the entertainment of singers and listeners in several canons [see KV 231 (382c), KV 233 (382d), and KV 559, 560b],⁸ whose texts he formulated himself. In these canon-texts the phrase

has no derogatory meaning but expresses rather a friendly, naively humorous ‘request,’ as it is still in use in Bavarian speech. [. . .] To interpret the request ‘Lick my arse’ that is usually directed towards men as anal eroticism is utter nonsense” (Eibl and Senn 1978:59–60). It is instead nothing more than playing with colloquial folk speech, through which Mozart does demonstrate his at times infantile sense of humor. But certainly this canon-text (KV 231 [382c]) was merely a humorous reaction to his problematic existence, perhaps a form of liberation into folk tradition:

Lick my arse, hurry, hurry!
Lick my arse, hurry! Lick me, lick me, lick me, lick me, lick me.
Lick me, lick me, lick – hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry!
Hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry!
Lick my arse, hurry, hurry, hurry.
Hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry!
Lick my arse, hurry, hurry! Lick my arse me.
Lick my arse, hurry.
Lick me.

(Marshall 1991:146–47; Ochs 1991).

Can or must one really interpret this text psychologically, only because a genius like Mozart happens to have written and composed it? Just because this canon does not fit the idealized view that people like to create for extraordinary types like Mozart, one must not suppress such work, nor must it be interpreted as being ridiculously infantile or anal-erotic. It is a play with folk tradition, something trite but joyous and certainly entertainingly funny, created by a great artist whose life was anything but laughable. No doubt the following question raised by Renate Bebermeyer gets at the crux of the matter: “Today everyone is granted an individual language competency—why then should we take it amiss that Mozart spoke [and wrote] by at times humorously and blithely calling things by their names” (1991:134).

Scatological Humor in the “Bäsele” Letters

Of course, scholars have also interpreted quite a bit of psychological “nonsense” into the (in)famous letters to his cousin in which anal and scatological matters do celebrate incredible orgies. Nine letters

written by the over-twenty-year-old Mozart to his cousin Anna Maria Thekla Mozart (1758–1841), daughter of Leopold Mozart's brother, have been preserved from the years 1777–81, alas without any knowledge of the whereabouts of Anna Maria's (the Bäsle; i.e., little cousin) letters to her cousin Wolfgang (see Meier-Gesees 1962; Hildesheimer 1982:105–23; Solomon 1995:161–72; Gutman 1999:375–81). Perhaps her letters would indicate more clearly whether there was an early love relationship between the two of them. However, this was also the period when Mozart fell in love with the singer Aloysia Weber, the sister of his later wife, Konstanze Weber. All of this leads Robert L. Marshall to the following interpretation of the letters: "Perhaps there is a link between the infantile outbursts of crude language in the Bäsle letters and Mozart's infatuation with Aloysia Weber. The letters may have constituted an important outlet for pent-up sexual tensions that must have been almost unbearable for Wolfgang at this time; that is, scatology may have functioned as a substitute—a rather bizarre form of 'sublimation'—for the erotic impulses directed toward Aloysia" (1991:144). More believable is Arnold Kühn's earlier understanding of the situation: "Mozart relates to her [the Bäsle] as a kind of playful companion that perhaps was connected with a bit of infatuated flirtation. [. . .] Mozart must have had the picture of his light-hearted cousin in mind when he wrote these humorous letters, and this must have encouraged him to compose such foolish jests in his epistolary prose" (1962:111). As one reads and interprets these Bäsle-letters, one must not forget that Mozart was "a bipartite being," i.e., "that a sincere seriousness and a joyful if not buffoonish nature are united in a marvelous way in his being" (Kühn 114–15).

The anal and nonsensical humor of these truly unique letters, in which wordplay, comedy, wit, and self-irony are all united, can in fact be found in Mozart's entire correspondence. For this reason one should not overemphasize the possibility of Mozart's erotic experiences with his cousin. After all, Mozart wrote these "incredible" verses to his mother on 31 January 1778, during the same period that he composed most of the Bäsle-letters. Obviously his mother did not take offense at this "poetic" *tour de force* based on plenty of scatological humor:

Oh, mother mine!
 Butter is fine.
 Praise and thanks be to Him [God],

We're alive and full of vim.
Through the world we dash,
Though we're rather short of cash.
But we don't find this provoking
And none of us are choking.
Besides, to people I'm tied
Who carry their muck inside
And let it out, if they are able,
Both before and after table.
At night of farts there is no lack,
Which are let off, forsooth, with a powerful crack.
The king of farts came yesterday
Whose farts smelt sweeter than the may [honey].
His voice, however, was no treat
And he himself was in a heat.
Well, now we've been over a week away
And we've been shitting [muck] every day.
[. . .]
We have summa summarum eight eyes together,
Not counting those [the one] on which we sit.
But now I really must rest a bit
From rhyming. Yet this I must add,
That on Monday I'll have the honour, egad,
To embrace you and kiss your hands so fair.
But first in my pants I'll shit, I swear. (456–57)

* * *

Madame Mutter!
Ich esse gerne Butter.
Wir sind Gottlob und Dank
Gesund und gar nicht krank.
Wir fahren durch die Welt,
Haben aber nit viel Geld;
Doch wir sind aufgeräumt
Und keins von uns verschleimt.
Ich bin bei Leuten auch
die tragen den Dreck im Bauch,
doch lassen sie ihn auch hinaus
So wohl vor, als nach dem Schmaus.
Gefurzt wird allzeit auf die Nacht
Und immer so, daß es brav kracht.
Doch gestern war der Fürze König,
deßen Fürze riechen wie Hönig,
Nicht gar zu wohl in der Stimme,

Er war auch selbstn voller Grimme.
 Wir sind ietzt über 8 Tage weck
 Und haben schon geschossen vielen Dreck.
 [. . .]
 Wir haben summa summarum 8 Augen
 Ohne dem wo wir drauf sitzen.
 Nun will ich mich nit mehr erhitzen
 Mit meiner Poesie; nur will ich Ihnen sagen
 Daß ich Montag die Ehre hab, ohne viel zu fragen,
 Sie zu embrassiren und dero Händ zu küssen,
 Doch werd' ich schon vorhero haben in die Hosen geschossen.
 (Bauer and Deutsch 1962–75, II:245–47)

This is Mozart the buffoon *par excellence*, who clearly has his fun with this scatological “poetry.” But the poem once again shows that this type of scatological humor was common enough at the time that even the mother of this famous son could be amused by such verses.

In an enlightening chapter on “Scatology and the ‘Bäse’ Letters,” David Schroeder has pointed out that such anal statements “should not be taken as documents of a ‘life’.” These are epistolary objects, emerging from well-known patterns of written and verbal practice in the eighteenth century, a practice of opposition and defiance, not an indulgence in infantilism but a transgression into regions of unacceptability” (1999:133). That is admittedly one side of the coin, but such scatology is not as unacceptable at the time as Schroeder would want his readers to believe. Schroeder also overemphasizes the sociopsychological meaning of the Bäse-letters at the expense of their humorous tendency, i.e., Mozart’s intentional play with what is for the most part preformulated folk speech.

The first Bäse-letter (31 October 1777) as well as the ninth and last letter to his cousin (on 23 October 1781) are of little interest from a proverbial point of view. The final letter is characterized by a prosaic informational style and is void of any wordplay (see pp. 774–75). The short first letter is comprised of only one paragraph, but Mozart does conclude it by making use of a proverbial expression. There is no scatological humor as yet:

How very odd! I am to write something sensible and not one sensible idea occurs to me. [. . .] Well, I have too little space left to jot down any more sensible remarks. Besides, too much sense gives one a headache. In any case my letter is full of sensible and learned stuff, as you must

acknowledge if you have read it; and if you have not yet read it, please do so quickly, for you will draw a great deal of profit from it and some lines in it will make you shed bitter tears. (351)

These comments comprise half of the entire letter. But one senses the start of Mozart's play with language in the Bäsle-letters, especially when with much irony Wolfgang points out to his cousin that his letters will not contain many "sensible remarks." There will also be no need, proverbially speaking, "to shed bitter tears," since this epistolary exchange between the two cousins will be based on humorous wordplay.

In contrast, the second letter to the cousin, dated 5 November 1777, is a masterpiece of Mozart's nonsensical humor based on paremiological language. This can be seen already in the introductory paragraph, where Mozart's musical appreciation of language results in repetitive echo sounds of individual words. Once again he also employs his frequent proverbial *leitmotif* of "Praise and thanks be to God":

I have received reprieved your dear letter, telling selling me that my uncle carbuncle, my aunt can't and you too are very well hell. Thank God [Praise and thanks be to God], we too are in excellent health wealth. Today the letter setter from my Papa Ha! Ha! dropped safely into my claws paws. I hope that you too have got shot the note dote which I wrote to you from Mannheim. If so, so much the better, better the much so. Now for some sense. (358)

In the following paragraph Mozart leads this playful game with language *ad absurdum*, including variations, questions and answers, etc. Clearly he is having a great time with these linguistic but also musical wordplays. The expected scatological humor also appears, of course, and finally this torrent of words ends with one of Mozart's favorite proverbs that refers rather directly to his financial worries. In his role as the fool Mozart always connects joviality with sincerity:

You write further, you pour out, disclose, divulge, notify, declare, signify, inform, acquaint me with the fact, make it clear, request, demand, desire, wish, would like, order me to send lend you my portrait. Eh bien, I shall certainly despatch scratch it to you. Oui, par ma foi.⁹ I shit on your nose and it will run down your chin. A propos. Have you got that Spuni Cuni [meaning unknown] business? Do tell me! Do you still love me? I am sure you do! If so, so much the better, better the much so!

Well, so it is in this world, I'm told. One has the purse and another has the gold [money]. Whom do you hold with? Surely with me—I am certain you do. But now things are more difficult. (358)

But then Mozart increases his scatological humor in a boundless fashion by telling a “personal narrative” connected to the proverbial expression “to let one off” (to fart):

Now I must tell you of a sad thing which has happened just this very moment. As I was doing my best to write this letter, I heard something on the street. I stopped writing—I got up—went to the window . . . and . . . the sound ceased. I sat down again, started off again to write—but I had hardly written ten words when again I heard something. I got up again—As I did, I again heard a sound, this time quite faint—but I seemed to smell something slightly burnt—and wherever I went, it smelt. When I looked out of the window, the smell disappeared. When I looked back into the room, I again noticed it. In the end Mamma said to me: “I bet you have let off one.” “I don't think so, Mamma,” I replied. “Well, I am certain that you have,” she insisted. Well, I thought “Let's see,” put my finger to my arse and then to my nose and—*Ecce, provatum est*. Mamma was right after all. Well, farewell. I kiss you 1000 times and remain, as always, your little old piggy wiggy [sow-tail].

Wolfgang Amadé Rosy Posy (359–60)

When Mozart refers to himself as a “Sauschwanz” (sow-tail) at the end of this letter, he indicates quite directly that he is aware of his epistolary “Sauereien” (piggish, filthy, dirty talk).

The same musical and fecal language game continues in the third Bäsle-letter, dated 13 November 1777. Let us cite merely the first paragraph, where Mozart shows himself as an impressive virtuoso in the grotesque amassment of popular curses. At the end he adds the two proverbial phrases “to keep one's word” and “the sooner, the better” for a bit more colloquial language:

Bless my soul, a thousand curses, Croatians, damnations, devils, witches, sorcerers, hell's battalions to all eternity, by all the elements, air, water, earth and fire, Europe, Asia, Africa and America, Jesuits, Augustinians, Benedictines, Capuchins, Minorites, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carthusians and Brothers of the Holy Cross, Canons regular and irregular, all slackers, knaves, cowards, sluggards and toadies higgledy-piggledy, asses, buffaloes, oxen, fools, nit-wits and dunces! What sort of behaviour is that, my dears—four smart soldiers and three bandoliers? . . . Such a parcel to get, but no portrait as yet! I was all eagerness—in fact, I was

quite sure—for you yourself had written the other day that I was to have it soon, very, very soon. Perhaps you doubt that I shall keep my word? Surely you do not doubt me? Well, anyhow, I implore you to send me yours—the sooner, the better. (372)

In this cannonade of curses Mozart is literally being carried away, and Arnold Kühn was correct when he described this baroque montage with the musical and linguistic phrase of a “drum roll accompanied by a flood of curses” (1962:126). And yet all of this is probably much ado about nothing, because Mozart once again is having fun playing with words and hopes that his cousin will receive his *tour de force* favorably. That is clearly also the case for the following scatological lines: “Forgive me my wretched writing, but the pen is already worn to a shred, and I’ve been shitting, so ’tis said, nigh twenty-two years through the same old hole, which is not yet frayed one whit, though I’ve used it daily to shit, and each time the muck with my teeth I’ve bit” (372).

In the fourth letter, dated 3 December 1777, Mozart reveals himself as a master of proverbial language. At the beginning he cites two “heart”-expressions, and he repeats the proverb about the purse and money. The phrases “to lick someone in the (someone’s) arse” and “to shit into one’s pants” appear as well, along with the proverbs “Who-soever believes it, is blessed” and “What’s too much, is too much.” The humorous twists of the two proverbs “What one promises one must keep” and “One must always be a man of one’s word” are added for good measure.¹⁰ Sentence after sentence Mozart plays the buffoon, creating a humorous confusion based on traditional and innovatively varied folk speech patterns:

Before I write to you, I must go to the closet [little shit-house]. Well, that’s over. Ah! At last I feel lighter [around my heart], a weight [stone] is off my heart; and now I can guzzle again. Oh, oh, when you’ve emptied yourself, life is far more worth living. [. . .] Yes, yes, my dearest Miss Cousin, thus has it been since days of old, Tom [One] has the purse and Dick [another] has the gold [money];¹¹ and what do you hold it with? with your hand, don’t you? Huzza, copper-smith, come, be a man, catch if you can, lick my arse, copper-smith. Yes, and true it is that whosoever believes it, is happy [blessed] and whosoever does not, will go to Heaven, but straight, and not in the way I am writing. [. . .] My decision is taken; when it’s necessary, I go somewhere; but it all depends on circumstances. If I have diarrhoea, I run: and if I can’t con-

tain myself any longer, I shit into my trousers. [. . .] You say: “I could tell you a great deal more, but too much is more than enough [too much]”. In *one* letter it is too much, I admit, but one can write a great deal by installments. [. . .] What one has once performed [kept], one must promise, one must always be a word of one’s man. Well, let’s be serious. (403–04)

The letter from which this very much shortened paragraph is taken fills one and a half printed pages, in which Mozart pours forth a torrent of words, a flow of proverbial language, and plenty of scatological allusions. All in all the fecal and nonsensical humor of this letter is once again “a sign of Mozart’s much-praised enjoyment of playing with language in a creative fashion and proof of the fact that his letters to his cousin must be evaluated as epistles of pure entertainment” (Kühn 1962:141).

The first and last paragraphs of the fifth Bäsle-letter (28 February 1778) contain further proverbial materials. When Mozart states at the beginning that “Thinking and shitting are two different things,” he might well be citing a folk proverb that has hitherto not been registered in proverb collections. But he might also simply be playing with the proverb “Thinking and knowing are two different things,” transposing this piece of wisdom, somewhat expectedly by now, into the world of scatology. His predilection to fecal humor knows no bounds:

Perhaps you think or even are convinced that I am dead? That I have pegged out? Or hopped a twig? Not at all. Don’t believe it, I implore you. For believing [thinking] and shitting are two very different things! [. . .] I shan’t apologize for my long silence, for you would never believe me. Yet what is true is true. I have had so many things to do that I had time indeed to think of my little cousin, but not to write, you see. (499–500)

Of course, at the end of this paragraph, Mozart quickly adds the proverbial tautology “What is true is true” as an effective justification couched in the wisdom of folk speech.

At the end of the letter Mozart even coins the word “schistori” (shistory) by perverting the proverbial expression “To believe the whole story” through the combination of the words “shit” and “history.” Mozart then adds the unchanged proverb “Whoever begins must also end,” in order to bring the letter to a close. But a little more anal stuff is included as well by integrating the old proverbial *leitmotif* of “lick my arse”:

I have told you all I know; and it is much better to stop than to make up the rest. If I did so, you would not believe any of the story [shistory; or: you would not believe any of this shit]; but as it is, you will surely believe—not even half of it. Well, I must close, though it makes me morose. Whoever begins must cease [end], or else he gives people no peace. My greetings to every single friend, and whoever doesn't believe me, may lick me world without end, from now to all eternity, until I cease to be a nonentity. He can go on licking [my arse (implied)] for ever, in truth, why, even I am alarmed, forsooth, for I fear that my muck will soon dry up and that he won't have enough if he wants to sup. Adieu, little cousin. I am, I was, I should be, I have been, I had been, I should have been, oh that I were, oh that I might, would to God I were, I shall be, if I should be, oh that I should be, I shall have been, oh that I had been, would to God that I had been, what?—a duffer. (501)

A “duffer” is an old fool of sorts, and by signing his letter with this ironically intended word, Mozart is again saying that all of his word-plays, as well as the grammatical-musical improvisations around the verb “to be,” are nothing more than humorous clowneries. One doesn't sense any erotic attachment to the cousin in this letter. Rather, Mozart appears as a brotherly buddy perhaps, knowing darn well that his Bäsle will understand his jokes in their intended humor.

Mozart wrote his sixth Bäsle-letter, that of 23 December 1778, shortly after the rejection that his amorous advances had received from Aloysia Weber. Clearly the disappointed lover was in need of encouragement and friendship, and so he made the quick decision to invite his cousin to visit him in Munich. Despite his disappointments with Aloysia, he finds the old humorous tone in this letter, making use of such proverbial phrases as “not to be a rabbit” (not to be afraid), “to play a big role (part),” “to do something to the smallest hair” (to the smallest detail), and, of course, “lick my arse.” The proverb “Whoever doubts it is a whore” is added to strengthen the truth of his arguments, but the scatological humor is present as well:

Dearest coz, don't be a fuz [rabbit]. I would gladly have gone to Augsburg, I assure you, but the Imperial Abbot wouldn't let me go and I can't blame him, you know, for that would be contrary to God's and Nature's law and whoever doubts this is a wh-e. Well, that's how things are at the moment. [. . .] So if it really gives you pleasure to see me, come to Munich, that fine town. Make a point of being there before the New Year, mind, and I shall take a good look at you in front and behind; I shall take you round the town and, if necessary, wash you down [give

you an enema]. [. . .] Perhaps you will have a great part to play, so come for a bit or else I'll shit. If you do, this high and mighty person will think you very kind, will give you a smack behind [on the arse], will kiss your hands, my dear, shoot off a gun in the rear, embrace you warmly, mind, and wash your front and your behind [give you an enema front and behind], pay you all his debts to the uttermost groat [to the smallest hair], and shoot off one [a fart] with a rousing note, perhaps even let something drop.

Adieu, my angel, my sweetheart.

I am aching to see you. (643–44)

Perhaps there is a bit of an erotic if not sexual tone in this letter, but the scatological humor certainly pushes it aside. Without doubt Mozart is once again playing the phraseological buffoon, who writes his invitation with much irony and humor—and the Bäsle indeed traveled to Munich!

The seventh letter to the cousin, on 10 May 1779, has its share of scatological statements, but let it suffice to cite merely the paragraph in which Mozart quotes the “purse-money” proverb for the third time in these Bäsle-letters. After observing that “Whoever has neither (purse and money), has nothing,” Mozart extends the proverbial logic *ad absurdum*, as yet another example of his nonsensical humor:

Yes, my dear little cello, it's the way of the world, I'm told. Tom [One] has the purse and Dick [another] has the gold [money]; and whoever has neither, has nothing, and nothing is equal to very little, and little is not much; therefore nothing is still less than little, and little is still more than not much, and much is still more than little and—so it is, was and ever shall be. (652)

The word “Violoncellchen” (little cello) also appears at the very beginning of the letter: “Dearest, most beloved, most beautiful, most amiable, most charming little bass [cousin] or little cello, whom a worthless cousin has enraged [put into harness]!” (652). Does the word creation “Violoncellchen” really show only Mozart's musically inclined language use, or might he be alluding to an amorous adventure with his cousin, on whom he played like on a small cello and whom he, proverbially speaking, put into harness?¹² All the adjectives in the superlative would perhaps fit such an interpretation, especially if they were not meant ironically for once. But the statement that “a

worthless cousin” took advantage of the beautiful girl indicates that nothing can come of the affair, if in fact it took place at all.

Little wonder then that the eighth Bäsle-letter (24 April 1780) does not exhibit the playful and humorous tone any longer, especially since Mozart now has a relationship with his future wife, Konstanze Weber. This letter contains mere informational texts, and only these few lines are reminiscent of the effective proverbial language exhibited in the earlier correspondence to the cousin: “Joseph Hagenauer, in whose bow-window you and my sister and I drank chocolate, has died [. . .]. His brother Johannes [. . .] must now buckle to, a thing which he finds rather difficult to do [which leaves a bitter taste in his mouth]” (654–55). Those are mere memories, and it is clear that the friendly, humorous, and youthful relationship with the Bäsle has come to an end. Joviality has turned into seriousness, as evidenced in the ninth and final Bäsle-letter, dated 23 October 1781, through its dry and stilted language that is void of any proverbial language or scatological humor.

Proverbial Love Letters to His Wife, Konstanze

On the other hand, Mozart had now found his real love. This can be seen from a telling letter of 15 December 1781, informing his father that he intends to marry Konstanze Weber, whom he characterizes as follows: “She is not ugly, but at the same time far from beautiful. Her whole beauty consists in two little black eyes and a pretty figure. She has no wit, but she has enough common sense to enable her to fulfill her duties as a wife and mother. [. . .] Moreover, she understands housekeeping and has the kindest heart in the world. I love her and she loves me with all her heart. Tell me whether I could wish myself a better wife?” (784). By changing the adjective in the proverbial phrase of “to have a kind heart” to its superlative form, Mozart wants to convince his father of the definite goodness of his beloved. At the end of the letter he chooses yet another somatic phrase in order to explain to his father that he has completely revealed his feelings to him: “My dearest father, I have opened my heart to you and explained my remarks. [. . .] Please take pity on your son! I kiss your hands a thousand times and am ever your most obedient son W: A: Mozart” (784). One week later, on 22 December 1781, Mozart assures his father, once

again proverbially, that at the age of twenty-five he is indeed quite capable of making the right choice for a spouse: "From the description of her which I gave you, my girl will be a very suitable wife for me. For she is just as I have described her, not one whit [hair] better or worse" (787).

Yet some quibbles must have arisen between the two lovers during the next spring, as can be seen from a letter on 29 April 1782 by Mozart to Konstanze. Here he makes very effective use of the medieval German proverbial expression "*jdm. einen Korb geben*" (to give someone the basket, i.e., to turn down someone's amorous advances). The metaphor refers to the custom of hoisting a lover up to the top of a castle tower in a basket and then rejecting him half-way up by letting him sit there (see Röhrich 1991–92, II:872–75). The English translation of "To turn someone down" retains this ridiculing image only very slightly, unfortunately, but it is a better translation than "to throw someone over" in this case:

Dearest, most beloved friend!

Surely you will still allow me to address you by this name? Surely you do not hate me so much that I may be your friend no longer, and you—no longer mine? [. . .] Do think over what you said to me today. In spite of all my entreaties you have thrown me over [given me the basket, i.e., turned me down] three times and told me to my face that you intend to have nothing more to do with me. I am not so hot-tempered, so rash and so senseless as to accept my dismissal [basket]. I love you far too well to do so. I entreat you, therefore, to ponder and reflect upon the cause of all this unpleasantness. (802)

Where is the former fool and clown in this passage? Mozart even adds the somatic phrase "to tell something to someone's face" in order to show the directness of the rebuke by Konstanze. There is no humor to be found here, and there is also an absence of anal or fecal joking. The lighthearted teasing with the cousin of the Bäsle-letters has given way to a loving seriousness, if not despair, and the "basket" is not just a metaphor but a worrisome reality for Wolfgang.

Later, after the wedding on 4 August 1782, Mozart writes loving and tender letters to his wife, assuring her again and again of his faithful love. Repeatedly he employs the popular love-formulas "Love me as I love you" and "Think of me as I think of you" and their variants in his epistles.¹³ In the following short letter of 8 April 1789, he

writes from Budwitz to his wife, telling her how much he suffers under the constant separation from her and their son Karl. Fatalistically he adds the proverb “What can’t be cured must be endured” to underscore the irrevocability of this unfortunate state of affairs:

How are you? I wonder whether you think of me as often as I think of you? Every other moment I look at your portrait—and weep partly for joy, partly for sorrow. Look after your health which is so precious to me and fare well, my darling! Do not worry about me, for I am not suffering any discomforts or any annoyance on this journey—apart from your *absence*—which, as it can’t be helped [cured], can’t be remedied [must be endured]. I write this note with eyes full of tears. [. . .] Adieu. I kiss you millions of times most tenderly and am ever yours, true till death, stu–stu–Mozart. (919–20)

This is a sincere and sensitive letter to his beloved but distant wife. Of course, Mozart’s sense of humor is not completely missing in these letters to Konstanze, and where it does appear, it features his playful anal humor. In a letter of 19 May 1789 from Berlin, Mozart makes use of this anal humor in order to express his joyful anticipation of returning home: “Oh, how glad I shall be to be with you again, my darling! But the first thing I shall do is to take you by your front curls; for how on earth could you think, or even imagine, that I had forgotten you? How could I possibly do so? For even *supposing* such a thing, you will get on the very first night a thorough spanking on your dear little kissable arse, and this you may count upon” (927). This is to be understood as jovial love-talk just like the tender word games between two young lovers. Little wonder that Mozart in his letter of 30 September 1790 from Frankfurt am Main writes with proverbial naiveté: “I am as excited as a child at the thought of seeing you again” (943). And yet, Mozart can also be quite realistic, for next to his deep love for Konstanze there is always also the miserable financial situation of the entire Mozart family—no matter what heights Wolfgang’s fame is reaching. His letter of 8 October 1790, including the proverbial phrase “to be a penny-pincher,” speaks volumes in this regard: “True, I am famous, admired and popular here; on the other hand, the Frankfurt people are even more stingy [like penny-pinchers] than the Viennese” (945).

But there is one letter, dated 6 June 1791, in which Mozart returns one more time to anal-erotic matters about half a year before

his untimely death. He is writing from Vienna to Konstanze in nearby Baden, where she is spending time at a spa. His attempt to revive the old language games is obvious, but the scatological vocabulary of the proverb “Whoever gorges a lot, must also shit a lot” is reduced to ellipses and then suppressed completely. It is not clear what Mozart had in mind with the “Plumpi-Strumpi,” but Alan Dundes most likely is correct when he associates “Plumpi” with such terms as “Plumpsklo” and “Plumpsdingsbums,” both referring to a primitive privy (1984:106). In comparison to the Bäsle-letters this revival of scatological humor lacks any vitality. However, the picturesque love-game of kisses floating about is rather charming:

I am delighted that you have a good appetite—but whoever gorges a lot, must also shit [sh . . .] a lot—no, walk a lot, I mean. But I should not like you to take *long walks* without me. I entreat you to follow my advice exactly, for it comes from my heart. Adieu—my love—my only one. Do catch them in the air—those 2999½ little kisses from me which are flying about, waiting for someone to snap them up. Listen, I want to whisper something in your ear—and you in mine—and now we open and close our mouths again—again and again—at last we say: “It is all about Plumpi-Strumpi – –.”¹⁴ [. . .] Adieu. A thousand tender kisses. Ever your Mozart. (952)

Barely a month later, on 5 July 1791, Mozart once again writes to his wife in Baden from Vienna, but this time it is a mere five prosaic lines in which the otherwise effectively employed proverbial phrase “lick my arse” comes across as rather bland: “Here are twenty-five gulden. Settle the account for your baths. When I come we shall pay for everything. Tell Süßmayer to send me Nos. 4 and 5 of my manuscript—and the other things I asked for and tell him he must lick my arse” (960). Given his constant money worries, it is surprising that Mozart did not once use the well-known proverb “Money rules the world” in his large correspondence!

Proverbial Phrases as Emotive Venting

Mozart had to endure plenty of vexation and frustration throughout his life despite his incredible artistic success. In order to vent his feelings, he often cites proverbial phrases whose metaphorical expressiveness helps to emotionalize his accounts. Thus a letter of 7 January 1770 to his sister begins with the expression “to be ticked

off” in order to express his anger about not having heard from her for such a long time. “I have an aching feeling [I am ticked off], because I have been waiting so long in vain for an answer. I have had good reason too, because I have not yet received your letter” (104). In a letter on 29 May 1778 to his sister and father, Mozart chooses the proverbial expression “to be neither fish nor fowl” to refer to his inner turmoil:

I am tolerably well, thank God [praise and thanks be to God], but I often wonder whether life is worth living [but I often don’t know what is fish and what is fowl]—I am neither hot nor cold—and don’t find much pleasure in anything. What, however, cheers me up most of all and keeps me in good spirits is the thought that you, dearest Papa, and my dear sister are well—that I am an honest German—and that, even if I may not always say what I like, I may at any rate think it. That, however, is all. (544)

The only thing missing seems to be the proverb “Thoughts are free!” That the young Wolfgang is not feeling especially well in Paris is indicated by the statement “I am tolerably well,” and not even the positive phrasal *leitmotif* “Praise and thanks be to God” can turn this ambivalent statement into a confident look into the future.

The various proverbial phrases quite often refer to the long and torturous trips Mozart had to endure in postal coaches across the bumpy roads of Europe. Quite telling is the following first paragraph of a letter on 8 November 1780, where the proverbial comparison “as hard as stone” is the perfect simile to describe the inconveniences of travel:

I assure you that none of us managed to sleep for a moment the whole night through. Why, that carriage jolted the very souls out of our bodies—and the seats were as hard as stone! After we left Wasserburg I really believed that I should never bring my behind to Munich intact. It became quite sore and no doubt was fiery red. For two whole stages I sat with my hands dug into the upholstery and my behind suspended in the air. (659)

Of course, Mozart has no choice but to use uncomfortable coaches, as can be gleamed from a rather drastic description in yet another letter to his father on 17 March 1781. The letter once again starts off with the proverbial formula “Praise and thanks be to God” and then speaks not of his sore behind but in a cruder fashion of the arse. The

proverbial comparison “as tired as a dog” adds yet another element of folk speech to this emotional statement:

Yesterday, the 16th, I arrived here, thank God [praise and thanks be to God], all by myself in a post chaise. [. . .] I travelled in the mail coach as far as Unterhaag—but by that time I was so sore in my behind [arse] and its surrounding parts that I could endure it no longer. [. . .] So I was obliged to proceed *by extra post*, reached St. Pölten on Thursday, the 15th, at seven o’clock in the evening, as tired as a dog, slept until two in the morning and then drove on straight to Vienna. (713)

Two more short references show how quickly and with what apparent ease Mozart uses the emotional metaphors of proverbial language in order to express his anxieties and concerns. “I am still seething with rage [full of gall]! And you, my dearest and most beloved father, are doubtless in the same condition. My patience has been so long tried that at last it has given out” (727); and “Now comes the rub [Now I sit like a rabbit in the pepper]!”¹⁵ The first act was finished more than three weeks ago, as was also one aria in Act II [. . .]. But I cannot compose any more, because the whole story is being altered—and, to tell the truth, at my own request” (770). These are excerpts from letters to his father, revealing quite clearly the problematic and rushed life that Mozart endured for a little more than thirty years.

In similar letters from the late 1780s to his friend Michael Puchberg in Vienna, Mozart repeatedly had to deal with his ever-present money worries. In a letter of 17 June 1788, he had to beg explicitly for financial support, and the proverbial phrase “to help someone onto field and plow” is a fitting metaphor to express to his friend that a cash advance would indeed enable him to earn his bread for wife and child: “If you have sufficient regard and friendship for me to assist me for a year with one or two thousand gulden, at a suitable rate of interest, you will help me enormously [onto field and plow]! You yourself will surely admit *the sense and truth* of my statement when I say that it is difficult, nay impossible, to live when one has to wait for various odd sums. If one has not at least *a minimum of capital* behind one, it is impossible to keep one’s affairs in order. *Nothing* can be done with nothing” (915). The proverb at the end of this text underscores one more time that indeed nothing can come from nothing. But how unnerving is this additional statement of 12 July 1789 to Puchberg, where Mozart couches his desperate plea for money into two somatic phrases that add to the emotional message: “Great God! [. . .] Only

the other day when I was with you I was longing to open my heart to you, but I had not the courage [heart] to do so. [. . .] Good God! I am coming to you not with thanks but with fresh entreaties! Instead of paying my debts I am asking for more money!" (929–30). In the undated poem "Der kunstreiche Hund" (The Ingenious Dog), Mozart included the line "The proverb says: Yes, slowly but surely one goes far" (Bauer and Deutsch 1962–75, IV:164), but this wisdom never proved true for Mozart's own financial situation, which did not improve no matter how feverishly he composed.

Mozart's Fate as Expressed in Proverbial Speech

Words in themselves mean nothing, as Mozart pointed out with the proverb "It is very easy to talk [Talk is cheap]" (291) on 2 October 1777 in one of his many letters to his father. Action is what is called for, and for Mozart deeds meant an incredible output of artistic creativity. He had learned his work ethic from his rigid father, as he admits in a touching proverbial observation in a letter on 7 March 1778 to his father: "You are indeed punctilious about everything. *Next to God comes Papa* was my motto or axiom as a child, and I still cling to it. Certainly you are right when you say that *Learning comes before doing*. Indeed you must not regret all the bother and trouble this has caused you" (506). Diligence is, of course, part of his work ethic, as Mozart notes to his father on 9 July 1778 with the cautionary proverb that "Idleness is the mother of all vices" (563).

Again and again there are also the everyday difficulties, as Mozart notes in a letter on 27 August 1778 to his father and sister: "Thank God [Praise and thanks be to God], I am quite well, and I trust that both of you are the same. You must have patience—everything goes very slowly. I must make friends—France is rather like Germany in feeding people with praises. Yet there is some hope that by means of your friends you can make your fortune" (607). Despite being fed with meaningless phrases, Mozart always maintains the hope that he will make his proverbial fortune. The expression "to make one's fortune" is repeated not quite three years later in yet another letter to his father dated 11 April 1781: "Oh, how I hope to hear by the next post whether I am to go on burying my youth and talents in Salzburg, or whether I may make my fortune as best I can, and not wait until it is too late. It is true that I cannot make it in a fortnight or three weeks

[in Vienna], any more so than in a thousand years in Salzburg" (724). But he is absolutely prepared to help his fortune along with such proverbs as "there's no rule without an exception" (444), "we must make a virtue of necessity" (708), "We shall just have to manage as best we can" (709), and "Misfortune brings wisdom" (721). From Vienna he writes with much confidence to his father on 22 December 1781: "My dearest, most beloved father, you will see that little by little circumstances will improve. Of what use is a great sensation—and rapid success [fortune]? It never lasts. *Chi va piano, va sano*. One must just cut one's coat according to one's cloth" (790).

These few lines contain three proverbial references. There is first of all an allusion to the proverb that "Fortune is fickle." The Italian proverb meaning "He who goes slowly goes healthy [i.e., also has success]" expresses that it will take patience and work to find fortune or success in the musical world. And the proverbial expression "to cut one's coat according to one's cloth" is used as a metaphorical and traditional statement to explain to his father that he is willing to be quite realistic about his struggling existence as an artist. Clearly his artistic creativity is connected with many interruptions and difficulties. In two letters to his father, Mozart employs two related proverbs based on the verbs "to [can] be" and "to [can] do" in order to express his frustrations. On 14 February 1778 he writes with much insight from Mannheim:

It is not surprising that I have not been able to finish them [several pieces of music], for I never have a single quiet hour here. I can only compose at night, so that I can't get up early as well; besides, one is not always in the mood for working. I could, to be sure, scribble off things the whole day long, but a composition of this kind goes out into the world, and naturally I do not want to have cause to be ashamed of my name on the title-page. [. . .] Hence as a diversion I compose something else, such as duets for clavier and violin, or I work at my mass. [. . .] If only the Elector were here, I should very quickly finish the mass. But what can't be, can't be. (481–82)

His artistic work ethic does not permit Mozart simply to scribble something down on paper for the sake of getting a composition done. In his letter of 31 July 1782 from Vienna to his father, Mozart repeats these thoughts by starting them with a proverb of self-justification:

You see that my intentions are good—only what one cannot do one cannot! I am really unable to scribble off inferior stuff. So I cannot send

you the whole symphony until next post-day. I could have let you have the last movement, but I prefer to despatch it all together, for then it will cost only one postage. (811)

As can be seen, money always enters into the equation as well. But the same is true for God, into whose hands Mozart places his fate after all his labors and exertions. In an early letter to his father, dated 26 November 1777, Mozart at first cites the fatalistic proverb “What will be (happen), we know not,” but he immediately contradicts it with the wisdom of “What God wills, will be (happen),” thus entrusting his life into God’s designs: “Now do let me drop all that, how it is and how it will be. What is the use of needless speculation? What will happen we know not—and yet we do know! It is God’s will” (391). Barely two weeks later, on 6 December 1777, Mozart repeats these confident thoughts in typical proverbial fashion: “However, come what may, it can never be bad, if it is in accordance with God’s will; and that it may be so is my daily prayer” (408). And on 3 July 1778, when he informs his father and sister from Paris that his mother is gravely ill (she dies on that very day), he once again speaks of God’s proverbial and omnipotent will:

For a long time now I have been hovering day and night between hope and fear—but I have resigned myself wholly to the will of God—and trust that you and my dear sister will do the same. How else can we manage to be calm or, I should say, calmer, for we cannot be perfectly calm! Come what may, I am resigned—for I know that God, Who orders all things for our good, however strange they may seem to us, wills it thus. (557)

The proverb “God turns (orders) all things to the best” strengthens his statement that he has rendered himself completely into the hands and will of God. And after the beloved mother has died, her son writes humbly and hopefully to his father on 18 July 1778 that the proverbial table must now turn to a better side with the help of God. He hopes “to make his fortune” (408) now by leaving Paris and returning home:

I trust that all will turn out well, so that I may soon have the joy of embracing my dear father and my dear sister. Oh, how happily and contentedly we shall all live together! With all my strength I pray to God to grant me this favour! Sometime, please God, things must take a different turn [the table must turn]. Meanwhile [. . .] I intend, in God’s

name, to persevere in my life *here*, which is totally opposed to my genius, inclinations, knowledge and sympathies. [. . .] God grant only that I may not impair my talents by staying here; but I hope that it won't last long enough for that. God grant it! (572–73)

With the popular formula “God grant it,” Mozart again places his fate into God's hands and accepts the difficult and extraordinary life as an artist that God has imposed on him. In this excerpt from a letter written to his father on 4 April 1787, Mozart once more reflects on his problematic life and his own mortality in an unnerving and yet uplifting way:

I have now made a habit of being prepared in all affairs of life for the worst. 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 of learning that death is the *key* which unlocks the door to our true happiness. I never lie down at night without reflecting that—young as I am—I may not live to see another day. Yet no one of all my acquaintances could say that in company I am morose or disgruntled. For this blessing I daily thank my Creator and wish with all my heart that each one of my fellow-creatures could enjoy it. (907)

Once again Mozart cites a somatic phrase at the end of this touching paragraph. Proverbially expressed, he wishes “with all his heart” that every fellow-creature may find happiness in life. Some of this happiness reveals itself to us today through his lasting language of music which, like proverbs and proverbial expressions, belongs to the common good of all people. Just as the folk speech in Mozart's letters presents us a key to a better understanding of his life and work, so his music becomes a key for finding true human happiness or bliss.

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Notes

1. All quotations from the letters are cited from *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, where they have been chronologically arranged, translated and edited with an introduction, notes and indexes by Emily Anderson. The numbers in parentheses refer to the pages of this edition. While Emily Anderson has done a superb translation of these letters, including their frequent use of colloquial and proverbial language, she has at times failed to render elements of folk speech into equivalent

English phrases. Where this is the case, I have provided my own translation in square brackets within the translations of Emily Anderson.

2. Translations of German secondary sources are my own.

3. Diary entries are not part of the letters translated by Emily Anderson. These references can be found in Bauer and Deutsch (1962–75). Translations from this German edition of the letters and other writings are my own.

4. Irma Voser-Hoesli writes of Mozart as a “musical player” with language (1948:19).

5. I am following the translation that Emily Anderson has provided of Mozart’s letter of 3 December 1777 to his cousin (403), where a close variant of the folk verse is cited.

6. Wolfgang had in fact cited the verse already at least ten years earlier in the second letter of 5 November 1777 to his cousin Maria Anna Thekla (Bäsele): “Well, I wish you good night, but first shit into your bed and make it burst. Sleep soundly, my love, into your mouth your arse you’ll shove. Now I’m off to fool about and then I’ll sleep a bit, no doubt” (358).

7. See Zintl (1980); and for modern references, see Mieder (1997:16–19).

8. KV refers to *Köchelverzeichnis*, the index of Mozart’s compositions prepared by Ludwig Ritter von Köchel.

9. For Mozart’s delight in foreign languages and macaronic prose, see Marshall (1991:139–41).

10. These two twisted proverbs are also mentioned by Kühn (1962:142–43). For two collections of such anti-proverbs, see Mieder (1998b and 1999).

11. It is not clear why this time the translator Emily Anderson is adding the names Tom and Dick to her English rendition of this proverb. She might have thought that such typical names add a bit more folk speech character to the proverb translation than the impersonal words “one” and “another.” She clearly favored this version, since she repeats the names in the third occurrence of the proverb in Mozart’s letter of 10 May 1779.

12. For a fascinating study along these lines, see Arora (1993).

13. For some additional references, see “and love me, as I do you” (575), “and love me as much as I do you [as I love you]” (926), “love me as I do you” (955), “and love me as much as I love and shall ever love you” (955), and “Love me for ever as I do [love] you and be always my Stanzi Marini, as I shall always be your Stu! Knaller Praller Schnip–Schnap–Schnur Schnepeperl–Snai!” (963). Of course, there were also problems in this marriage, as Mozart indirectly suggests by means of a proverb in a short poem of 18 August 1784 to his newly-wed sister: “Yet no state is an unmixed joy [But every thing has two sides] / And Marriage has its own alloy, / Lest us its bliss perchance should cloy” (882).

14. For a discussion of such “private” language between two people, see Oring (1984).

15. Mozart is alluding to the German proverbial expression “*da liegt der Hase im Pfeffer*” (there the rabbit lies in the pepper; i.e., there’s the rub) with the meaning of “that’s where the problem (difficulty) lies.” The word “pepper” refers to a broth or sauce in which rabbit meat would be prepared with pepper being added as a spice; see Röhrich (1991–92, II:667–68).

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