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Mozart as a letter-writer: the dash as a stylistic feature and its affinity to musical phenomena

Mozart's letters – a copious corpus ranging from his age of 14 to the last months of his life, including hundreds of items – have always been the principal source of information about the events of his life and about his unique personality. We are lucky to possess this corpus almost in its entirety, thanks to the insight of Mozart's widow Constanze and her second husband Nissen, who rightly considered this treasure worth preserving, not less so than Mozart's musical manuscripts.[1] A few names have been deleted by Nissen in the letters of Mozart's last year, apparently in order to protect the reputation of some persons still alive at the time, but otherwise most letters have survived uncensored, including stark obscenities and harsh criticism.

This corpus is rare, if not unique for its period, the second half of the 18th century, as these letters are strictly private, and were never intended for publication. Mozart's father Leopold may have planned such a publication at some early stage, and his own letters to his landlord Hagenauer from the Mozarts' voyage around Europe in the mid 1760s may have been part of such a project.[2] But Wolfgang himself certainly did not consciously participate in these plans, and his letters may be considered spontaneous utterances, intended for the eyes of the receiver only. In this his letters differ widely from those of his literary contemporaries, such as Goethe or Lessing, whose letters, though being addressed to particular

1 See Mozart. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen, Wilhelm A. Bauer and Otto Erich Deutsch (eds.), vol. VII, Introduction by Joseph Heinz Eibl, p. IX.

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persons, were mostly written in the perspective of their eventual circulation among a wider public. Such letters were of course carefully preserved, while private correspondences, like Mozart's, mostly got lost. Moreover, Mozart seems to have been an avid letter-writer, differing in this from his contemporary composers, like Gluck an Haydn, and later Beethoven, who left us a relatively meager correspondence.

Some periods of Mozart's life are covered in his letters in great detail, almost on a daily basis, and this holds true especially for his voyage to Mannheim and Paris from 1777 to 1779. In hundreds of pages Mozart describes to his father, who remained behind in Salzburg, his daily routine, his meetings, meals and conversations, not omitting his impressions of musical events and criticizing some compositions he came across. Another period with a fine coverage is Mozart's sojourn in Munich to assist the rehearsals of his *Idomeneo* at the Court Theatre in the winter of 1780-81. This intensive wave of correspondence with Leopold continues, as Mozart leaves for Vienna and finally decides to stay there. The events of the crisis with Archbishop Colloredo, his liaison with Constanze Weber, leading to their marriage in 1782, the genesis of *Die Entführung* and Mozart's gradual admission into Viennese society are again related in great detail to his father. This intensive correspondence comes to a stop after the visit of the young couple in Salzburg in the fall of 1783. There are almost no letters of Mozart preserved from the years 1784-1786, the period of his most intensive musical production, seeing the creation of most of his piano concertos, the *Haydn-Quartets* and *The Marriage of Figaro*. Other, earlier periods which remain uncovered by letters are his prolonged stays in Salzburg, from 1773 to 1777 and 1779-80. From the last years we have a few letters to his friend Gottfried von Jacquin, the series of humiliating letters to his benefactor Michael Puchberg, and some dozens of rather short letters to Constanze, from his trips to Berlin in 1789 and to Frankfurt in 1790, and then from Vienna to Constanze's bathing resort, Baden.

Mozart's letters have of course been studied thoroughly by generations of researchers, first of all by Mozart's numerous biographers, who strove to verify the information contained in the letters by comparing it with other documents and sources. Then, these letters have been always the platform of a direct encounter with Mozart as a living person, writing almost as naturally as he was speaking. Then it was a precious source for Mozart's views and opinions, ranging from professional remarks about instruments, musicians and compositions, to impressions of people, places and fashions, to his rare utterances about politics and ideology.

There has been relatively little attention payed to Mozart's style of writing in his letters, to the letter as a literary document. A pioneering venture in this direction was Irma Hoesli's book *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Briefstil eines Musikgenies* published in 1948. Hoesli seems to have been a literary scholar, as her analyses of the letters reveal a remarkable insight into stylistic subtelties, such as Mozart's sophisticated play with the order of words, or his use of direct speech and other dramatic devices in his letters. The first half of her book deals exclusively with questions of style, under the headings: “play”, “drama” and “humoristic description”. More recent research, in most cases, mentions stylistic issues in the letters only sporadically.[3] Nevertheless, a more detailed appreciation of style in Mozart's letters is included in Ulrich Konrad's essay “Mozart, der Briefschreiber” which serves as an introduction to the appendix volume, added to the latest re-edition of the “Bauer-Deutsch” in 2005. In the chapter “Sprache” of this essay, Konrad discusses mixtures of languages or stylistic levels, nonsensical passages, absurd narrative, the use of codes and encryption, and he, too, mentions plays with the order of words, and direct speech.

Let me place here a preliminary remark, having some implications on the main issue of this paper,

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relating to a general quality of Mozart's letter writing, which has been respectfully silenced, or at least cautiously skirted, by many previous commentators. Mozart does not write like a scholar, moreover, his letter-writing clearly reveals his deficient education. Mozart, like most musicians at his time, enjoyed no thorough schooling, father Leopold himself being an untypical exception. Leopold was his only teacher on all subjects, and, apparently feeling the urgency of furthering the child's acquaintance with music, gave prominence to his musical education at the expense of all the rest. Thus Mozart's knowledge in general matters, such as history, literature, the arts, matters of state and politics, is for the most part limited to his immediate needs as a composer. Looking for an appropriate libretto, he would read hundreds of them to find the right one.[4] Otherwise, it is my impression that reading was not an essential part of his daily routine, at least not in his early years. His writing style in the letters reflects the language spoken in his surroundings, much more than any written texts. This is witnessed by his inconsequent and often faulty spelling, words and proper names as well, by his very free use of syntax, and his casual mixture of dialect and “high” German. Mozart obviously had an outstanding talent for languages, as is shown by his quick mastery of Italian and French at an early age, and later even some English. Astoundingly, the French and Italian passages in his letters are more correctly written than his German. Apparently, Mozart got some systematic training in these foreign languages, while his German was taken for granted. Even thus, extensive reading usually has a normalizing influence on a person's writing. So we may assume that if Mozart had read even just all the books contained in his own library at his death, his style of writing would have evolved more closely in line with the literary norms of his times.[5] Let us remember that at the period of Mozart's youth, German literary classicism was at its

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5 Martin Staehelin und Ulrich Konrad (ed.), Allzeit ein Buch: Die Bibliothek Wolfgang Amadeus Mozarts, Katalog der Ausstellung, Wolfenbüttel 1991.

acme, represented (among others) by Lessing, Klopstock, Wieland,[6] Herder and the early Goethe. German spelling, in literary publications at least, was already normalized more or less as it is today, and the style of these authors still serves as a model. Nothing in Mozart's correspondence indicates that this literature was familiar to him.

There is, though, a noticeable change in his style of writing in the last years of his life, from 1787 onward, after the long pause in his letter writing in the three preceding years. These later letters show a more “civilized” German, more in accordance with the rules of grammar and orthography. To me, there seems to be an easy explanation for this change. It is during these years of “silence” in his correspondence, that he had joined the fraternity of the Freemasons, which seems to have changed considerably his social intercourse. The members of the mason lodges were the intellectual elite of Vienna at the time, and certainly conversed in a different and more elevated style than Mozart's former cycle of friends. They may have inspired him to some reading too, though we have no direct testimony confirming this. Nonetheless, even his intimate letters to his wife from those last years are more correctly written than his earlier letters to his father or his sister. Of course, we have to keep in mind that correctness and normalized writing is not an ideal in itself. Mozart's relative freedom from coercive rules in his prose makes also for creative, inventive and inspired writing. The very stylistic specialties and novelties which have been pointed out by the above-cited scholars, may not have been possible if Mozart had enjoyed a thorough, classical education, as did some of his literary contemporaries.

One of these specialties is Mozart's punctuation in his letters, and more particularly, his use of dashes, as replacement, or addition, to other punctuation marks. The all-pervasive presence of these dashes is a

6 27.12.1777

familiar feature of Mozart's letters, from his maturity onward, to any reader of the original text in the Bauer-Deutsch edition. It may be unknown to those who read Mozart's letters in its only complete English translation to this date – the authoritative compilation by Emily Anderson. Let us quote her comment on the dashes from the introduction to *The Letters of Mozart and his Family*: “Very often whole letters are a series of sentences strung together by dashes. As a slavish adherence in this respect to the originals would have produced pages wearisome to the eye of the reader, the letters have been punctuated more normally and the dashes retained only when the sense demands it.” Thus the English version, purged of Mozart's dashes, presents to the eye a perfectly normal prose text, where full stops and commas are inserted willfully instead of the dashes, according to Anderson's understanding of the text. It is my claim, that these dashes are not just "wearisome to the eye", but an essential feature of Mozart's prose writing, lending it its very special flavour, and conferring to the sentences thus divided a different sense. In the following I shall trace the history of Mozart's use of dashes in his letters, try to unravel the special meaning implied by the use of this punctuation mark, and comment on its possible relation to Mozart's writing of music.

Dashes are of course a perfectly common punctuation mark, quite common in Mozart's time, as it is today. Their main purpose is to isolate the phrase contained between two dashes from the rest of the sentence, as a kind of insertion or comment, an unessential element, in a way that the sentence could make sense without it as well. This function of the dash is well expressed in its German name "Gedankenstrich", a trait of thought. Actually it represents an incidental thought intruding into the main discourse. It will be easy to show that, from an early stage, Mozart used these marks not only in this restricted sense, but in a very personal way. Let us look at the following passage from one of his earlier

letters to his sister, from December 1774:[7]

> Meine Liebste Schwester,
>
> ich bitte dich vergesse nicht vor deiner abreise dein vesprechen zu halten, dass ist den bewusten besuch abzustatten – – – – dan ich habe meine ursachen. Ich bitte dich, dort meine Empfehlung auszurichten – – aber auf das nachdrücklichste – – – und zärtlichste – – – und – – oh – ich darf mich ja nicht so bekümmern, ich kenne ja meine schwester, die zärtlichkeit ist ihr ja eigen; ich weiss gewis dass sie ihr mögliches thun wird, um mir ein vergnügen zu erweisen, und aus interesse – – – ein wenig boshaft – – – wir wollen uns in München darüber zanken, lebe wohl.

7 In the following all original citations from Mozart's letters are taken from the Bauer-Deutsch edition. They are followed by English translations, which are taken word by word from Emily Anderson. Nevertheless, I took the liberty to restore Mozart's original punctuation, including the dashes.

> My dearest Sister,
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> I beg you not to forget to keep your promise before you leave, I mean, to pay the call we both know of – – – – for I have my reasons. I beg you to convey my greetings there – – but in the most definite way – – – in the most tender fashion – – – and – – oh – I need not be so anxious, for of course I know my sister and how extremely tender she is; I am quite certain that she will do her utmost to do me a kindness, and for her own advantage too – – – but that is rather nasty – – – but we shall quarrel about this in Munich, farewell.[8]

Here Mozart uses not just one, but several, up to four dashes at a time. Here the dashes are expressive of Mozart's playfully hiding part of his thoughts, as he is sending his sister on a romantic errand. The words contained between the dashes are mostly not complete phrases, sometimes only a single word, or even just an exclamation ("oh"), the dashes representing the acted-out hesitation in uttering his demand. This is the first appearance of this device in Mozart's correspondence, and it shows how he makes use of a conventional punctuation mark for expressive, even dramatic purposes, which are perfectly alien to its common usage.

From then on (Mozart was almost 19 at the time), dashes in uncommon contexts and uses appear sporadically, and then more and more frequently, especially in Mozart's letters to his father during his prolonged trip to Mannheim and Paris, from September 1777 to January 1779. A breakthrough in Mozart's use of dashes may be observed in the series of letters to his cousin Maria Anna Thekla, dating from this same trip, the famous Bäsle-letters. These letters, which signal a radical departure from all rules of decency and common logic, are the most natural platform for an emancipation of the rules of punctuation as well. Indeed, the first of Mozart's letters which has come down to us being all through

8 I use here, and in the following, Emily Anderson's translation, but I restored Mozart's punctuation, including the dashes.

punctuated by dashes, is his letter to Maria Anna Thekla from the 5th of November 1777. From this rather long opus, rich in facetious lingual inventions, nonsensical compilations and containing not a few obscenities, let us cite just a short passage, with special attention to its conspicuous use of dashes:

> 1: es wird ein brief, oder es werden briefe an mich in ihre hände kommen, wo ich sie bitte daß – – was? – – ja, kein fuchs ist kein haaß, ja das – – Nun, wo bin ich geblieben? – – ja, recht, beim kommen; – – ja, ja, sie werden kommen – – ja, wer? – wer wird kommen – – ja, itzt fällts mir ein. briefe, briefe werden kommen – – aber was für briefe? Je nu, briefe an mich halt, die bitte ich mir gewis zu schicken;
>
> No. 1: A letter, or letters, to me will reach you, which I must ask you to – – to what? — Why, a fox is no hare, well – – Now, where was I? – – Yes, of course, at reach; – – yes, they will reach you – – well, what will? – – Why, now I remember, letters, why letters will reach you – – but what sort of letters? Why, of course, letters addressed to me, which I must ask you to forward without fail.

Here the dashes obviously mimic in a parodist exaggeration the hesitations, truncated utterances, stuttering – of somebody totally lacking in concentration, suffering from an almost amnesiac disability to remember a sentence pronounced just a moment ago. So again the dash is used for dramatic purposes, representing the pauses in actual speech, their doubling hinting at the duration of such pauses. What we have here is not writing as a process of organised thought in coherent sequences, but what I'd call a visual recording of live speaking.

This letter remains yet an isolated event, and Mozart's letters to his father from Mannheim, and then

from Paris, in the Winter and Spring of 1778, though interspersed with dashes, are otherwise more or less normally punctuated. The turning point is the letter to Leopold from June 12th 1778, written in Paris, the first letter to his father being all through rife with dashes. Actually, this is a postscript to his mother's letter, which happens to be her last one, written three weeks before her death. Mozart, in his postscript, does not mention his mother at all: he gives a detailed critical description of the professional abilities of the tenor singer Raaff, whom he met in Paris at the time, and who was later to be the first Idomeneo; he then talks about his meals with count Sickingen and about his new Paris Symphony. But from the foregoing letter by his mother we know that she was already quite ill at this moment. We may imagine that this was a cause of worry and agitation for Mozart, and this may be an explanation for the asthmatic quality these frequent dashes confer to the letter. In fact, I counted 50 dashes in the 77 lines this letter occupies in the Bauer-Deutsch edition.

From then on, for the remaining 13 years of his life, this omnipresence of dashes remains a permanent feature of his letters, of nearly all of them, to the very last ones. Dashes become the most frequently used punctuation mark in Mozart's letters, often used in replacement of full stops, commas, or colons, and sometimes in addition to those more traditional marks. To my knowledge, this phenomenon is unique to Mozart's letter-writing. Dashes have been used by other writers of course, and by some even abundantly, but never with such frequency and universality.

We may ask form where this habit of Mozart originated, how the idea occurred to him, who was his model? The answer is surprising – and obvious at the same time: it is again father Leopold, who certainly was also the first inspiration to Mozart's musical compositions. Leopold's letters apparently suggested to Wolfgang the frequent and unconventional usage of dashes in writing. These appear quite often in Leopold's letters to his son sojourning in Mannheim, letters criticizing in harsh terms Mozart's

alleged idleness, irresponsibility, spending, and social intercourse. Their appearance normally signals Leopold's anger and helplessness at his son's behaviour:

– ja, du hattest nicht zeit, daran zu denken. Wo wollt ihr nun weiter hingehen? – – Nach Paris? – was wollt ihr für einen Weg nehmen? – wollt ihr nach Paris ohne einige Empfehlungsschreiben zu haben? – – was für einen Weg wollt ihr nehmen um etwas unterweegs verdienen zu können? – – ohne dieses vorauszusetzen, wisst ihr wohl wie viel Geld zu dieser erstaunlichen Reise nötig sein würde? – – und wenn ihr dann da seyd, an wenn wollt ihr euch wenden? – muß nicht geld genug schon im Sack seyn, um leben zu können, bis man die nötigen bekanntschaften gemacht hat, um etwas verdienen zu können? – – (20th of November 1777).

– Well, probably you had no time to think of this. Where are you going to now? – – To Paris? – What route will you take? – Are you making for Paris without any introductions? – – What route will you choose so as to be able to make some money on the way? – – You must make some, for you doubtless appreciate what a sum will be necessary for this terrific journey? – – And when you reach Paris, to whom will you apply? – Surely you must have enough money in your pocket to enable you to live until you have made the necessary acquaintances who will help you to earn something? – –

Here dashes are used for emphasis, and they most certainly represent pauses in speech, which would allow the foregoing sentence to sink in, before the sermon is continued.

It is interesting to observe, how these dashes appear quite frequently in the correspondence of the Mozarts, father and son, at this time, and it is not always clear who was imitating whom in this

practice. Of course, in Leopold's letters this remains an isolated phenomenon, and when he was not exceptionally upset, he would not use it. It never became with Leopold a universal feature of his writing, as with his son, and in his late letters to Nannerl in the years 1784-1787 it tends to become rarer.

Let us have a look at another passage from a letter Wolfgang wrote to Leopold, dated December 15th 1781, when dashes have already become a permanent feature of Mozart's letter writing. This is the letter where Wolfgang reveals to his father for the first time his urgent need to get married, and, following right after, the choice he had made of his future wife:

> Nun aber wer ist der Gegenstand meiner Liebe? – erschröcken sie auch da nicht, ich bitte sie; – doch nicht eine Weberische? – Ja eine Weberische – aber nicht Josepha – nicht Sophie – sondern Constanza; die Mittelste. – Ich habe in keiner famille solche ungleichheit der gemüther angetroffen wie in dieser. – die Älteste ist eine faule, grobe, falsche Personn, die es dick hinter den ohren hat. – die Langin ist eine falsche, schlechtdenkende Personn, und eine Coquette. – die Jüngste – ist noch zu Jung um etwas seyn zu können. – ist nichts als ein gutes aber zu leichtsinniges geschöpf! Gott möge sie vor verführung bewahren. – die Mittelste aber, nemlich meine gute, liebe konstanze ist – die Marterin darunter, und eben deswegen vieleicht die gutherzigste, geschickteste und mit einem worte die beste darunter. – die nimmt sich um alles im hause an – und kann doch nichts recht thun.

> But who is the object of my love? – Do not be horrified again, I entreat you; – surely not one of the Webers? – Yes, one of the Webers– but not Josepha – nor Sophie – but Constanze; the middle one. – In no other family have I ever come across such differences of character. – The eldest is a lazy, gross, perfidious woman, and as cunning as a fox. – Mme. Lange is a false, malicious person and a coquette. – The youngest – is still too young to be anything in particular. – she is just a good-natured, but feather-headed creature! May God protect her from seduction. – But the middle one, my good, dear Constanze is – the martyr of the family, and, probably for that very reason, is the kindest-hearted, the cleverest and, in short, the best of them all. – She makes herself responsible for the whole household – and yet in their opinion she does nothing right.

In the beginning of this passage Mozart uses the dashes to stage an imaginary interrogatory on his father's part to sort out who finally is his son's chosen bride. Here the dashes represent the transition from one role to the next in direct speech: “– doch nicht eine Weberische? [Leopold] – Ja eine Weberische [Wolfgang]”. Then the dashes are used to create tension, when he names the sisters one by one, with a dash after each, to arrive at last at Constanze's name. Then again, the dashes separate the short descriptions he gives of each of the sisters. Let us look at this sentence: “ – die Jüngste – ist noch zu Jung um etwas seyn zu können. – ist nichts als ein gutes aber zu leichtsinniges geschöpf! Gott möge sie vor verführung bewahren. – “. The words “die Jüngste” are separated by dashes from what precedes and the continuation: this is a pause for reflection, as if Mozart were innerly deliberating: “what shall I say about her?”. Then, having found something to say, it turns out to be rather insignificant (“she is too young to be anything at all”); a new idea presents itself to his mind (“she is good but flippant”) and he links it to the preceding, again by a dash. So the dashes for Mozart are multifunctional: sometimes they separate and sometimes they connect, and at times they do both at the

same time.

We have to keep in mind that Mozart did not abandon other punctuation marks, when he started using dashes almost indiscriminately. He continues using full stops, commas, semicolons and colons. Sometimes dashes are added to these, sometimes not, and at times the dashes stand alone. There seems to be no method in the use of these signs or their combinations. As we could see in the foregoing example, a dash is sometimes added after a full stop, when an afterthought caused Mozart to add a phrase to what seemed already a closed issue. Thus the dash, in a way, annuls the closing effect of the full stop.

Having traced the history of the appearance of dashes in Mozart's correspondence, from sporadical eruptions to an overwhelming presence, it is our task now to try and define, from a more general point of view, what purpose this very special means of punctuation served, what it meant to Mozart, and why he used it to such an extent.

We fixed the moment from which dashes became a permanent feature of Mozart's letter writing – the illness and death of his mother in Paris in the Summer of 1778. This is not only a heavy crisis. It is the moment marking Mozart's first independence, his actual liberation from parental tutelage. Mozart found himself alone in a foreign city: his mother was dead, and relations with his father were deteriorating rapidly. His father showed no tolerance for his proceedings, neither as regards his career, nor his choice of friends, or a mate. Wolfgang found himself more and more inclined to disobey his father and make his own choices. Outwardly, there came a regression from this state of mind. A few months later, at his father's insistence, Mozart reluctantly returns to Salzburg, and serves there for another two years; his full emancipation occurs only in the Spring of 1781, when he quits the service

of Archbishop Colloredo and decides to stay in Vienna. Yet, his inner determination to walk his own path seems to originate in this Summer of 1778.

In my view, the rules of syntax and punctuation were perceived by Mozart similarly, as a kind of parental fetters, which had to be shaken off. A full stop marks a neat separation between two ideas, and, in a way, breaks off the continuity of discourse. Commas, semicolons and colons create hierarchical relations between phrases and words, establishing a clear system of significance. Written Language thus becomes a representation of a well-ordered society, nicely divided according to rank and social standing.

The dash, as Mozart uses it, blurs all these distinctions. It creates a separation, which is needed to make the text intelligible, but fixes no hierarchy. Continuity is preserved in spite of separation. In Mozart's letters from Summer 1778 onward, there is often a flow of fragmentary utterances, separated by dashes, none of them a fully shaped idea, but in their combination presenting a clear train of thought. As I stated earlier, this way of writing seems to be a visual representation of Mozart's actual way of speaking. It preserves the flavour of live speech. Dashes designate pauses in speech, breathing-pauses, having no definite grammatical significance. Thus Mozart revolts discretely against the established rules of grammar, and creates a kind of personal syntax, which is of course readily understandable to any reader, and has consequently escaped the attention of most commentators.

This may be another manifestation of a hidden aspect of Mozart's personality: the rebel, the idealist, the social reformer. The absence of clear political utterances on Mozart's part has been regretted by many.[9] The expressions of revolt against authority in his letters aim mainly at his personal oppressors, be it

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his father, French nobility or the Archbishop of Salzburg. But nowhere is there a direct expression of opposition to the social order as such, in general terms. Yet Mozart is also the composer of the *Marriage of Figaro* and the *Magic Flute*, with their encryptedly subversive librettos, and a faithful member of the Freemasons, who most certainly were the political avant-garde of the epoch. Furthermore he acted out his rebellion as he abandoned his stable appointment in Salzburg for a perilous existence as a free-lance musician in Vienna. Thus his – probably unconscious – creation of a premature "stream of consciousness" writing by means of the extensive use of dashes, may be another way of exteriorizing his oppositional drives.

Father Leopold, at this stage, when Mozart found himself alone in Paris, became the ultimate representative of the burdensome social order. It was he who exhorts not only filial obedience, but also adjustment to common taste in his compositions, and, even worse, servile acceptance of humiliation by superiors. The emancipation from parental guardianship merges with antagonism to the established order. Thus the upheaval of grammatical rules may stand for an act of dissent in the face of either, or of both at the same time. As mentioned earlier, it is certainly not incidental, that the first letter with dashes all through was addressed to his cousin, the Bäsle, with whom all rules of convention and social manners were revoked at a stroke.

Of course I do not mean to say that this was a conscious process. Mozart probably had no clear idea what the rules of grammar and punctuation were in the first place. Thus he could not consciously transgress them. Yet he certainly had a notion of how an orderly prose text looked like, and apparently felt a need to make it differently, to activate his creativity in this domain too. His original way of applying dashes to texts is, then, to be perceived as a spontaneous act of liberation, independence and emancipation from convention, more than as a revolt or provocation.

This all-pervasive and unconventional use of dashes may be related to two other characteristics of Mozart the letter-writer, mentioned earlier in this paper: firstly, his colloquial rather than literary writing, manifesting itself by disregard of elementary rules of orthography and grammar, such as not writing nouns and proper names with capitals, faulty or inconsequent spelling, incorrect use of cases. Mozart's idiosyncratic use of dashes may be considered another such phenomenon, representing his all-over ignorance or neglect of the strict codes of German writing. Yet as we have seen, the general style of his prose evolved in the sense of more conformity with common usage, especially in his later years, while the dashes, on the contrary, appeared rather late and remained a constant feature of his writing until the very end.

Another peculiarity observed by commentators is Mozart's tendency to play with words, changing their order, using them in unexpected senses or contexts, playing with their sound and inventing names and words. Dashes are certainly another such playful device: they serve for dramatic tension, humoristic effects and vivid representation. Yet, the other jesting means are used only sporadically, while the dashes are a constant mannerism of Mozart's mature writing.

Mozart's style of writing, as we have seen, is a spontaneous manifestation of his personality. Now, we may ask in consequence, how this style, and especially the use of dashes, relates to the doubtless principal manifestation of his personality: musical composition. Is there any discernible parallelism between the very peculiar prose of Mozart's letters and his musical idiom?

At a first glance, there seems to be the greatest divergence between the two: Mozart's musical style is a

model of orderliness and thoughtful organisation. All stylistic means – rhythm, harmony, texture, dynamics and orchestral colours – converge to bring about the most clear and precise expression of his musical thought. Phrases are neatly divided, and a distinct hierarchy is created between main and subsidiary ideas. Mozart's music, more so than any other music I can think of, is self-analytical: its structure emerges clearly by the very hearing of it, and it demands no intellectual effort to ravel it out. Mozart's musical writing is in this sense the quintessence of Classicism, differing substantially from Haydn's, whose formal complexities often present a challenge to listeners and analysers as well.

How far is all this from the casual, inaccurate, haphazard way of his epistolary utterances! Mozart seems really to have considered spoken, and even written language as an inferior means of expression, which deserves no special respect or consideration.[10] Music, at the same time, is treated with the utmost care and esteem, even when he is writing just a canon for domestic use or a dance for the next Redoutenball.

And yet, in one respect Mozart's letters and his music resemble each other: in their vividness, their plasticity and their immediate effect. Being absorbed for long periods in the listening to Mozart's works in all genres, and at the same time reading his letters, one feels that, in a way, it is the same voice speaking to us in both. What may be the origin of this impression?

It seems, as has been observed by other commentators,[11] that language for Mozart was not only, or at least not principally, an organised system of signs which serve for human communication, but a musical phenomenon, an assemblage of sounds, which are expressive directly, by their phonetic

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qualities. This makes words for Mozart a material for play of all sorts, changing their order, appending to them unexpected endings, and bringing them in unfamiliar contexts. But this sensitiveness to the audible effect of language make Mozart's letters sound in a special way, and this holds true especially for their rhythmic effect. Mozart's prose, though not metrically organised, has a strong rhythmic quality, which is a partial explanation for its lively character.

It his here where the dashes come in. I have shown that dashes in Mozart have no distinct grammatical function. They may replace almost any other mark of punctuation, or appear even in places where none is needed at all. They are indeed musical signs, indicating silence. They mean simply that the flow of speech must be interrupted at this point, for the most various purposes, as we have shown, be it emphasis, dramatic tension, a comical effect, hesitation, a suppressed thought, and so on. At some points they are doubled, or even tripled, to indicate that the silence must be longer. Thus a Mozart letter looks like a musical score, or a part for a single musician, interspersed with silences.

It was a delightful surprise for me when Manfred Hermann Schmid drew my attention to his discovery of one instance at least, where Mozart replaced a full stop by a sign resembling a dash in the text of a musical score.[12] This occcurs in Don Giovanni's aria “Fin ch'han dal vino”, at bars 93-97. In the libretto the word “menar” terminates the second strophe (which is presented here a second time) and is followed as usual by a full stop. In the autograph score Mozart underlines the musically unusual link he creates between this strophe and the next (strating with “Ah la mia lista”) by eliminating the full stop and replacing it with “a thick line”, actually a long dash. In Schmid's words: “Für die neue Syntax ist

12 Manfred Hermann Schmid, Worte im Zeichen von Musik, in: *Der Text im musikalischen Werk. Editionsprobleme aus musikwissenschaftlicher und literaturwissenschaftlicher Sicht*, Walther Dürr, Helga Lühning, Norbert Oellers, Hartmut Steinecke (eds.), Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie, Erich Schmidt Verlag, Berlin 1998, p. 17-21.

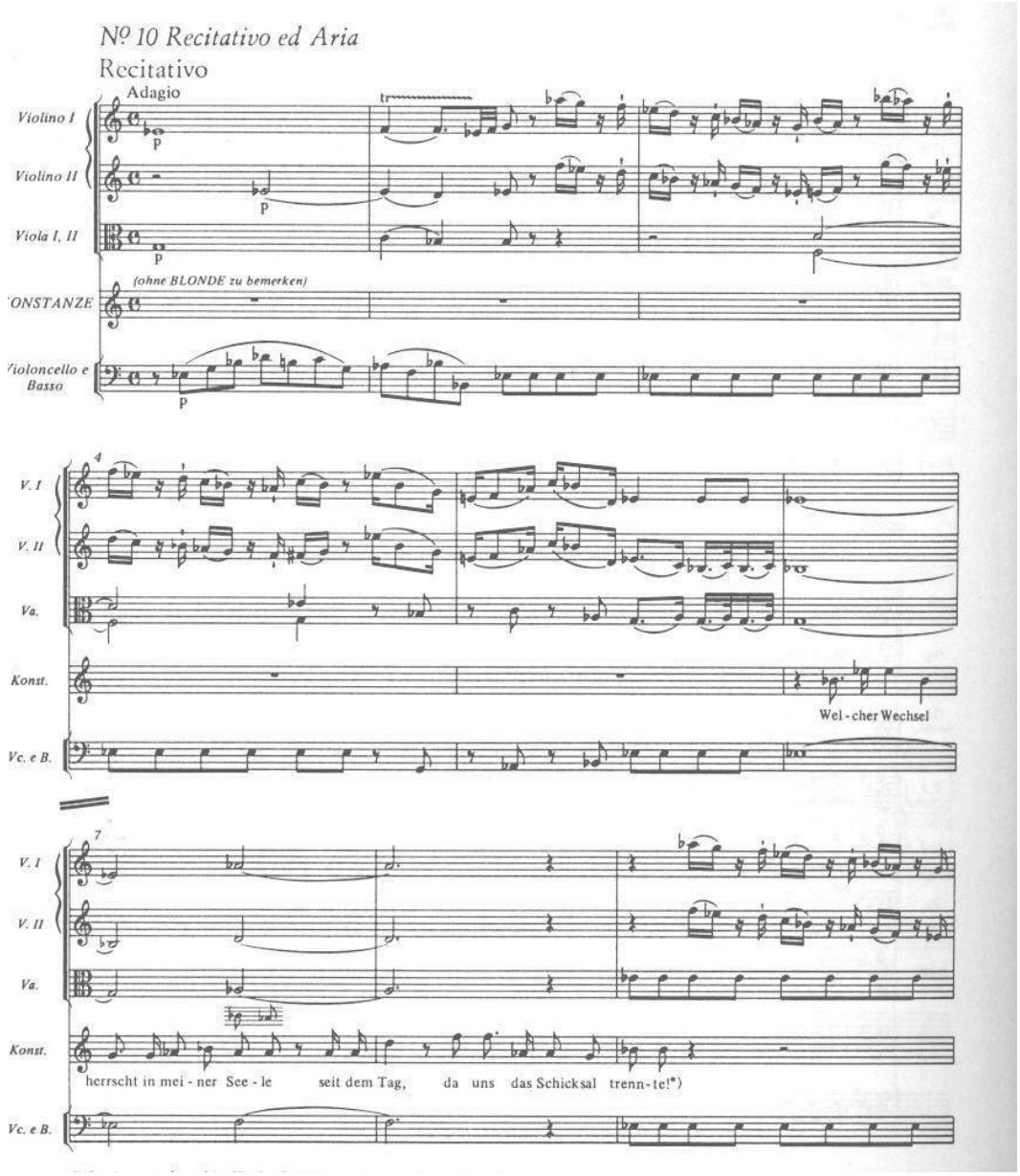
der Punkt als Schlusszeichen obsolet. Traditioneller und tausendfach respektierter Strophenschluss ist musikalisch aufgehoben. Hat das folgen für die Schreibweise des Textes? Mozarts “Interpunktion” für die exzeptionelle Stelle ist ebenfalls exzeptionell: Der sonst immer gesetzte Punkt unterbleibt. Stattdessen zieht Mozart eine lange und drastisch dicke Linie, als wollte er alten Schluss und neuen Anfang mit einem Seil zusammenhängen.” [In the new syntax the full stop as an ending mark is obsolete. The traditional and universally respected termination of the strophe is musically abolished. Are there consequences to this in the way the text is written? Mozart's “punctuation” for this exceptional place is exceptional in itself: The otherwise normal full stop is omitted. Instead Mozart draws a long and drastically thick line, as if he wanted to join the ending and the new start on a single rope.] Let me add that this happens in the most “rebellious” piece Mozart ever wrote, representing the operatic hero with whom Mozart probably most identified, in a moment of utter abandon.[13] This may serve as another indication to the revolutionary significance the extensive use dashes in Mozart's letters may have.

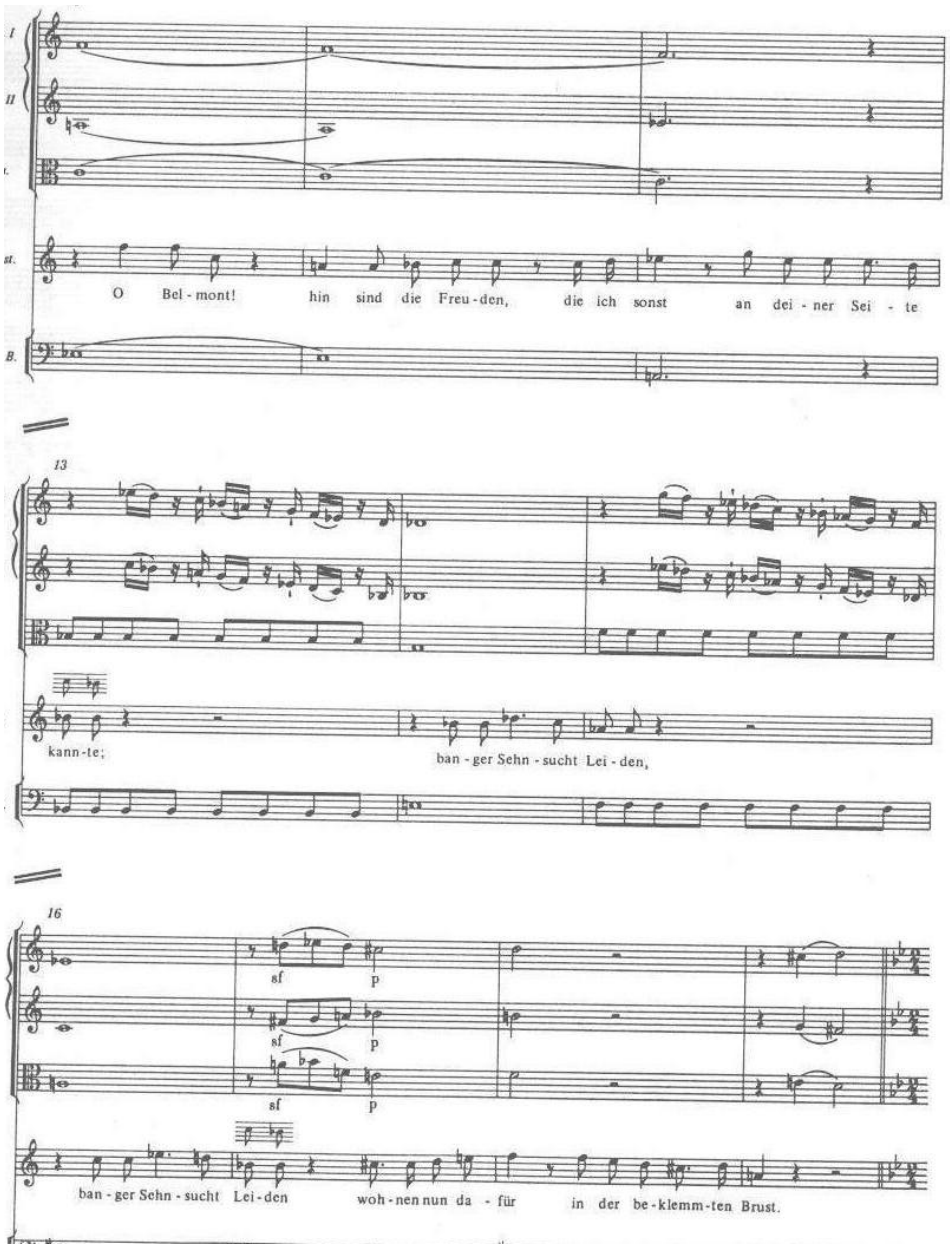
If we try to think of a musical genre, cultivated by Mozart, using silences in such an irregular way, what comes to mind is the recitative, and more particularly, the recitativo accompagnato. Mozart is the undisputed master of recitativo accompagnato, and his achievements in this domain, especially in his Italian operas, from *Lucio Silla* to *Così fan tutte* are extolled over and over by researchers. As we deal here with his German prose, the most appropriate comparison would be with a German accompagnato. As German recitatives are rare in Mozart, let me, as a conclusion, present here the only longer composed monologue in Mozart's mature operas, Konstanze's recitative “Welcher Wechsel herrscht in meiner Seele”, preceding the aria “Traurigkeit” from *Die Entführung*. I wrote out the text, replacing the silences by dashes, as Mozart would do if this were a letter.

13 See also: Benjamin Perl, Mozart in Turkey, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 12,3 (2001), p. 219-235.

> Welcher Wechsel herrscht in meiner Seele – seit dem Tag – da uns das Schicksal trennte! – O Belmont! – hin sind die Freuden, – die ich sonst – an deiner Seite kannte; – banger Sehnsucht Leiden, – banger Sehnsucht Leiden – wohnen nun dafür – in der beklemmten Brust. –
>
> Oh, what changes have been wrought in my heart – since that day – when fate parted us! – Oh Belmonte! – The joys have departed, – which I knew – when by your side; – the pains of anxious longing, – the pains of anxious longing – now inhabit my oppressed heart. –

Reading Mozart's letters, we may imagine them sung, as they may well be, and the orchestral interjections would then occur at the pauses indicated by the dashes.


Nº 10 Recitativo ed Aria
Recitativo
Adagio
Violino I
Violino II
Viola I, II
(ohne BLONDE zu bemerken)
ONSTANZE
Violoncello e Basso
V. I
V. II
Va.
Konst.
Wel - cher Wechsel
Vc. e B.
herrscht in mei - ner See - le seit dem Tag, da uns das Schicksal trenn - te!*)


O Bel - mont! hin sind die Freu - den, die ich sonst an dei - ner Sei - te
13
kann - te; ban - ger Sehn - sucht Lei - den,
16
sf p
sf p
sf p
ban - ger Sehn - sucht Lei - den woh - nen nun da - für in der be - klemm - ten Brust.