

CHAPTER ONE

THE FOUNDATIONS OF MOZART SCHOLARSHIP

Introduction

Academic disputes often reveal more about their participants than the specific matters under discussion. I begin this dissertation with the story of a dispute about the “foundations” of Mozart scholarship that arose in response to a position paper written in 1964 by a young Mozart scholar, Wolfgang Plath. At first glance this paper and the reactions it caused seem little more than footnotes to an intellectual history long forgotten. I will argue, however, that Plath’s paper remains of interest for three reasons. First, as a historical document in its own right: the program Plath proposed – despite its rejection by many of his influential interlocutors – went on to become something of a “master plan” for institutional Mozart research in the decades that followed. Second, Plath’s theses, particularly his views about the history of Mozart scholarship, reveal much about the state of methodological reflection in Mozart studies, and indeed in musicology as a whole, in the early 1960s, an era (in Germany and Austria at least) in which the power of the academic old guard – the “mandarins” of musicology – to dictate the paths of the discipline’s discourses had yet to be challenged. Plath’s polemic, I will maintain, was an unexpectedly profound challenge to the consensus of the these “mandarins.” Third, the context of the debate sparked by Plath’s theses and the context of debates that shook English-

speaking musicology – after about 1990 under the label of the “new musicology” – are eerily similar, yet feature some interesting role reversals. This chapter, then, is both a chronicle of past events and an archeology of a methodological present.

Wolfgang Plath’s Polemic

At a round-table discussion at the ninth congress of the International Musicological Society in Salzburg in 1964 the young German musicologist Wolfgang Plath, who had just assumed the direction of the *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe*, rose to defend two provocative theses about the state of Mozart scholarship he had circulated in advance. First, he had claimed, “Mozart research, because of its unclear sense of its own identity, has fallen into a crisis, whose proximate cause is neglect of fundamentals,” and second, “Basic research is the methodological and systematic study of sources. Only in this manner, at present, can progress in the treatment of fundamental problems of Mozart research be expected.”¹

¹ Wolfgang Plath, “Der gegenwärtige Stand der Mozart-Forschung (1964),” collected in *Mozart-Schriften: ausgewählte Aufsätze* ed. Marianne Danckwardt (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1991), 78. To aid the reader, references to the page numbers in the original text will be made only when these change. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Dietrich Berke’s “Mozart Forschung und Mozart Edition. Zur Erinnerung an Wolfgang Plath” in *Mozart-Jahrbuch* (2001), 1-12, appeared in mid-2004, after the research for this chapter was completed. Berke’s argument and mine run parallel to each other in many respects.

Plath begins his position paper by observing that Mozart studies are dominated by the interpretive methods known generally as *Geistesgeschichte* and associated with the thinking of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey; this orientation has lead Mozart scholars to concentrate on “understanding”² the composer and his works. For Plath successful interpretations depend on a secure factual foundation, and the notion that Mozart scholarship enjoyed this security was an illusion. The interpretation of the “spiritual and cultural phenomenon Mozart” ought to remain the “most important goal” of Mozart research, but is a “formal” goal that at most could be considered “abstract.”³ The way to reach this goal is through concrete research, and this research must orient itself towards the “actual demands of the material at hand.”

This is because concrete research should depend “in no way ... on the spiritual and cultural phenomenon Mozart,” but only on the “Mozart materials handed down by history.” Ideally, the “formal goal” of Mozart research might be interpretation and understanding, but the “object of study itself” demands that “the primary goal of Mozart scholarship should be the critical attention to and study of these materials.” Plath’s final point is

² The word Plath uses is *Verstehen*, which, as we will see, was critical to Dilthey’s conception of the “human sciences” (the *Geisteswissenschaften*) as sciences of *Verstehen*, as opposed to the natural sciences, the sciences of “explanation” (*Erklären*).

³ *Geist* is a difficult word to translate. Every reader of Hegel knows that “Spirit,” often chosen as a translation, is both inadequate and unsatisfying; in what follows here I will use both “Spirit,” as in “Mozart’s *Geist*” and “intellectual” as in *Geistesgeschichte*. Plath means to suggest here that Mozart is more than just the sum of the facts that can be collected about him. By using the word this way, it seems to me that Plath is trying to immunize himself at the very beginning of his polemic from the (for his audience very serious) charge of *Ungeistigkeit*. This move, as we shall see, did not succeed.

clear: “the positively secured facts, and nothing else, which are won from a process that develops continuously in its methods, are the foundations of research, upon which all other intellectual and scientific activities are to build.”

We will return later in this chapter to Plath’s important suggestion, reminiscent of the thinking of Karl Popper, that research is a process that “develops continuously in its methods.” Let us continue here with the solution he offers to the problem of Mozart’s research’s apparent insufficient concern with “positively secured fact.”

“Positively secured facts,” Plath suggests, are the materials upon which one might base acts of interpretation and understanding. Such acts are the final step in a process; they require the basis of factual evidence gathered in earlier steps. This final step is that which makes the “spiritual and cultural phenomenon Mozart available” not as the “sum of the facts, but as the integral meaning contained by the factual.” This shows, he claims, just how important “positivism” is to the human sciences. He defines positivism as the “turning towards the facts,” that is, the “differentiation between factually secured knowledge and hypothesis, mere supposition, or even uncontrollable fantasy.”

In the final analysis, he continues, “positivism is that which makes the human sciences scientific.” It is nothing more than the “rigorous application of the historical critical method.”⁴ This method is the “methodologically aware undertaking to win, in any way conceivable, as

⁴ I will explore the term “historical-critical method” and its relation to “positivism” in greater detail below.

much trustworthy information (facts) as possible from the materials being researched” but without stipulating that these facts “are the only possible final goals for research.”

This last qualifier is, I think, double-edged. On the one hand, it suggests that Plath, like his listeners, believed Mozart’s *Geist* to be more than just the sum of the facts one might use to describe it. On the other hand, it suggests, as he had just a few lines before, that the process of research is a continuing one without final goals, based on positive facts. Here Plath brings together two terms, “positivism” and the “human sciences,” that did not belong together, for his audience at least. This juxtaposition is an important part of what made his remarks controversial.

These “obvious and absolutely unoriginal reflections,” he goes on to argue (page 79), were in 1964 apropos, since Mozart scholarship seems to have thought, or at least acted, otherwise. And this is “astounding enough,” when one considers that both Otto Jahn and Ludwig von Köchel, “the two men to whom Mozart scholarship, in the final analysis, owes everything,” were “positivists” in the sense that Plath had just described “positivism.” How is it possible that Mozart scholarship could have lost its “inner orientation” and strayed so far from the work of Jahn’s and Köchel? His answer is drastic: “perhaps because it has never actually been near to them.”

He continues by describing how, in his view, the history of Mozart scholarship is a history of lost opportunity. Jahn and Köchel’s work, Plath claims, was “accepted with astonishment” by those interested in Mozart. But instead of seeing their accomplishments as a foundation upon which to

build, Mozartians simply assumed that the two fathers of Mozart scholarship had answered all of the important questions, especially those relating to material sources; indeed the “necessity” for further research along these lines was “neither acknowledged nor even imagined.”⁵ The “frighteningly” small amount of progress over the work of Jahn and Köchel demonstrated by the first Mozart complete works edition was a symptom of this failure of imagination.⁶ “Without having realized it,” Plath continues, “[Mozart scholarship lost] the potential leading role among the various specialties of the modern discipline of music history” to Bach scholarship, whose founders, the philologists Phillip Spitta and Wilhelm Rust, were Otto Jahn’s true “spiritual heirs.”

The vacuum left by lack of interest in what Plath calls the “learned-scientific” tendency in Mozart studies was filled by what Plath calls “the artistic” tendency, whose representatives approached the “object of research naively and without scruples as to method.” In their work “unfocussed and subjective” concepts like “artistic sensibility” and “musicality” took the place of “rational argumentation.” It is no wonder, he remarks, that those who did this kind of work on Mozart found the efforts their “learned-scientific” predecessors to be “repellently cold, inartistic, and unmusical.” The “learned-scientific” project (page 80) was continued only by Hermann Abert in the area of Mozart biography; in the

⁵ Neal Zaslaw reports in a personal communication (2004) that his teacher Paul Henry Lang at Columbia University believed similarly, in the early 1960s, that most Mozart questions had already been answered. See also Emanuele Senici’s review of Zaslaw’s *Mozart’s Symphonies* in *Il Saggiatore Musicale* 1/2 (1994), 408-414.

⁶ W.A. Mozart, *W.A. Mozart's Werke: Kritisch durchgesehene Gesamtausgabe* ed. Johannes Brahms et al. (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1878-1889).

rest of Mozart studies it remained “an isolated phenomenon” without “any influence worth mentioning.”

The situation was only made worse in the early twentieth century, he continues, when the epistemological strategies known collectively as *Geistesgeschichte* emerged as powerful influence in German intellectual life. Here, at least in theory, a chance was lost to re-unite the two competing models. Instead, Plath claims, exactly the opposite happened: the “artistic” tendency felt “confirmed in its uniqueness” due to the “many points of contact between” it and the theories of philosophers like Dilthey. The previous “antipathy to the positivism on the part of the artistic-research tendency” expanded to include the “odious charge of *Ungeistigkeit*.”

Nevertheless, Plath continues, leading Mozart scholars remained “mild and moderate” in their criticisms of the two figures “revered as founding fathers of scholarly-scientific Mozart research,” without noticing that the scholarship of the former had long since ceased to follow the example of the latter. Alfred Einstein’s remarks on Jahn and Köchel in his introduction to the third edition of the Köchel catalogue “demonstrated how secure *geisteswissenschaftliche Mozartforschung* thought its position to be.” Both were, in Einstein’s words, “too much scholars and too little musicians.” For Plath this is dangerous arrogance; first, there is no such thing as a “musical” method of historical research, so accusing a historian of being “unmusical” is a meaningless charge, and second, because the methods of the human sciences, should they claim to be scientific, demand that all historical arguments be made on the basis of historical sources. The

evaluation of these sources is the work of the philologist, “who must also be a positivist, if he is to produce useful results.”

Plath then explains what the neglect of positivism had done, in his opinion, to Mozart studies (page 80). “The ... blind prejudice against positivism” had had severe consequences: the discourse of the field had become “muddled, because the process of paying careful attention to the difference between secure knowledge and contingent hypothesis had become less and less important.” In its present state, Mozart studies had begun to see that it had “no secure foundations, and that any sense of security was an illusion.”

Then he states his second thesis: “Basic research is the methodological and systematic study of sources. Only in this manner, at present, can progress in the treatment of fundamental problems of Mozart research be expected” (page 81). This basic research will have two components. The first is what he calls *extensive Quellenforschung*, that is the reclamation of lost source materials and the accumulation of hitherto unknown sources. Here, he claims, “the difficulties will be mostly those of organization.” The second is *intensive Quellenforschung*, that is the “organization, evaluation, and classification” of all Mozart sources (not just the newly discovered ones), in order to “analyze the complete spectrum of the concrete information” these sources contain. Here the main difficulty is that “adequate methods have yet to be developed and tested.”

In the balance of his paper (pages 81-85), Plath proposes an impressively prescient program for Mozart studies, both biographical and works-based: almost all of the projects he outlined – studies of sketches,

copyists, paper, handwriting, first editions and other philological issues – have now, 40 years on, been attempted, with important results.⁷ Indeed, it seems almost as if Plath’s essay, which is little known beyond insider-circles in German *Mozartforschung*, has been used as some kind of master plan by many of those involved in institutionalized Mozart research over the last four decades. However it came about, the realization of Plath’s program is evidence of the victory of his paradigm. Indeed, Mozart studies now enjoy a philological basis that is the envy of the discipline.⁸ Just as Plath predicted, the projects he called for have become the basis upon which important Mozart projects of our time, including the *NMA* and the *New Köchel*, have been built.⁹

I have summarized Plath’s polemic – which is at times densely written to the point of being obscure – in such detail because I believe it to

⁷ Plath himself worked on handwriting, see various essays in his *Mozart-Schriften*. Alan Tyson studied Mozart’s paper types, cf. *Mozart: Studies of the Autograph Scores* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). Ulrich Konrad wrote a wide-ranging study of Mozart’s sketches and fragments, see *Mozarts Schaffensweise: Studien zu den Werkautographen, Skizzen und Entwürfen* (=Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, philologisch-historische Klasse, Dritte Folge, Nr. 201) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992). Cliff Eisen studied the Mozarts’ copyists in Salzburg, see “Mozart’s Salzburg Copyists: Aspects of Attribution, Chronology, Text, Style and Performance Practice” in *Mozart Studies* ed. Cliff Eisen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 253-308. Eisen also contributed additions to the documentary record of Mozart’s life and works: see his *New Mozart Documents: A Supplement to O.E. Deutsch’s Documentary Biography* (London: Macmillan Press, 1991). Dexter Edge has contributed a comprehensive study of Mozart’s Viennese copyists: *Mozart’s Viennese Copyists* (PhD Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2000).

⁸ Cf. Christoph Wolff’s review of Alan Tyson’s *Mozart: Studies of the Autograph Scores* in *Mozart-Jahrbuch* 1989-1990, 263-64.

⁹ But not always: as Cliff Eisen has argued, the *NMA* has often relied (or been forced to rely) on the texts of the earlier complete edition. See Eisen, “Old and New Mozart Editions” in *Early Music* 19/4 (1991), 513-532.

be relevant today. His references to the divide between “interpretive” and “scientific” methods, between the “scholarly” and the “musical,” invoke more than just the legacy of Wilhelm Dilthey. The distinctions between “lower” and “higher” criticism, “internal” and “external” evidence, to name just two of the pairs of terms often used in this context, have been fundamental ones in humanistic scholarship since at least the Renaissance. Most importantly, the suggestion that there is no such thing as an especially “musical” way to music history is a challenge to the way many – or most – music historians thought and think. My study will have much to do with this question and its possible answers.

In what follows I would like to treat Plath’s opposing terms not as binary oppositions, but rather as poles of a continuum between “positivist” and “idealist” ways of thinking about history. On the one side of this continuum we find the dream of an “objective” historiography, which claims to be built on unshakeable factual foundations, of telling the story of the past as it really happened, *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (a catch-phrase, often quoted and often misunderstood, coined by the conservative Prussian historian Leopold von Ranke, to which I will return). On the other side of spectrum we encounter a relativist view, where each and every historical event is unique, embedded in its own context, and the historian’s own standpoint is always also occasion for reflection. The tension between these two poles is a fundamental condition of Western thinking and writing about the past.

In this first chapter I will explore how Plath’s theses can be mapped on to this continuum. I will argue that Plath hoped to move the discipline

closer to the “objective” side of the spectrum, and that his audience, some of whom protested in no uncertain terms, considered themselves for a variety of reasons to be closer to the “idealist” pole.

I will also historicize Plath’s account of the history of Mozart scholarship. Here I will focus my attention mostly on Otto Jahn. While Köchel, a lawyer, court functionary, and mineral collector, was an outsider in nineteenth-century German academia, Jahn’s positions as professor in Greifswald, Leipzig, and Bonn made him a direct participant in debates about the proper methods of the historical sciences. His manifest contributions to Mozart biography often direct musicologists’ attention away from his groundbreaking accomplishments as a philologist and cultural historian. The enormous breadth of his scholarship exemplifies the ideals of nineteenth century *Altertumswissenschaft* (and thereby the two *Leitwissenschaften*, the “leading disciplines,” philology and history) in a way that Köchel’s contributions, as significant as they are, do not. Indeed, Jahn – one of the most influential members of the German professoriate of his day (he was for a short time also Friedrich Nietzsche’s teacher) – had as much as anyone to do with the emergence of academic discourses, and the methodological disputes they engender, that still remain with us. That they are still with us is why they are the subjects of this chapter.

I will begin by sketching an intellectual context for Jahn’s work, which I will call “historicism,” and then tracing how succeeding generations of Mozart scholars, up to the generation that made up the bulk of Plath’s audience in Salzburg in 1964, positioned their own work in terms of the debates about the writing of history that continued all around them.

As I do this I hope to shed some light on a matter central to Plath's claims, his opposition between *Geistesgeschichte* and positivism.

In the final analysis, I will argue, Plath was not really campaigning for a return to previous methods at all, despite his invocation of the two fathers of Mozart studies. Instead, his call for a more exclusive focus on the rigorous collection and examination of sources had more to do with the experiences he gained as a young editor for the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* and with that project's specific approach to writing history, which was partially spelled out around the same time by the American Bach scholar Arthur Mendel.¹⁰ Plath's call for positivism, although clothed in the rhetoric of "return" to the supposed practices of Jahn and Köchel, was a call for departure from the way Mozart scholars, by and large, had conducted their research for more than a century.¹¹ As we shall see, Plath's audience, mostly prominent members of the German-speaking professoriate, were outraged at his suggestion that their methods were unsuited to fostering progress in Mozart studies. If we consider this audience to be a kind of musicological *ancien régime*, then Plath's program was a revolutionary

¹⁰ Plath himself began his career among the group of scholars around the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe*, the results of whose "positivistic" program shook Bach research in the 1950s. See Plath's PhD dissertation, *Klavierbüchlein für Wilhelm Friedemann Bach* (University of Tübingen, 1958) and the volume he edited for the *NBA*, the *Klavierbüchlein für Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (Neue Bach-Ausgabe V/5)* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1962). On the influence of the *NBA* on postwar American musicology see Joseph Kerman "Musicology and Positivism: The Postwar Years" in *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 31-59, especially 50-55, and Richard Taruskin *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), especially the section "In the Aftermath of the Great Trauma," 37-47.

¹¹ Indeed, Plath admitted as much when he pointed out that Mozart Scholarship, always "artistic" in orientation, was never really near the methods of Köchel and Jahn.

one. It was, one might even argue, a program of liberation. At the end of this chapter, I will explore how, in my view, this “progressive” quality provides an interesting context for the state of music historiography today, after the “new musicology.”

Otto Jahn: The Founder

Otto Jahn, whose four-volume Mozart biography, based in part on extensive work with Mozart’s compositional materials, was the first to attempt a rigorous survey of the composer’s life and works, enjoys little popularity among today’s Mozart scholars.¹² Jahn’s problems began in the early twentieth century, as the methods and conclusions of his study came

¹² Otto Jahn, *Mozart* (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1856-1859). The following discussion is indebted to the recent literature on Jahn, especially Gerrit Walther, “Mozart und Methode. Otto Jahn’s Beitrag zur Begründung der modernen Musikgeschichtsschreibung” in *Musikwissenschaft – eine verspätete Disziplin?* ed. Anselm Gerhard (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2000), 31-54, and the essays in *Otto Jahn: ein Geisteswissenschaftler zwischen Klassizismus und Historismus* ed. William M. Calder III, Hubert Cancik, and Bernhard Kytzler (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag, 1991) (this collection will be hereafter referred to as *Otto Jahn*). Michael Stramm’s dissertation *Otto Jahn’s Musikästhetik und Musikkritik* (Essen: Verlag die blaue Eule, 1998) offers many useful biographical details but steers clear of wider judgments about Jahn’s *Mozart-Bild*. Dieter Demuth devotes considerable attention to Jahn in his *Das idealistische Mozart-Bild 1785-1860* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1997), but mainly from a philosophical perspective. The only treatment in English is A. Hyatt-King’s “Jahn and the Future of Mozart Biography” in his collection *Mozart in Retrospect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 66-77. For the sake of simplicity I will steer clear of a discussion of the methods of musical biography *per se*; for an interesting recent treatment see Yolanta T. Pekacz, “Memory, History, and Meaning: Musical Biography and its Discontents,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 23 (2004), 39-80.

under increasing scrutiny. By the early 1920s the break was an open one: Hermann Abert, who revised the biography for a new edition in 1922, declared then with some pathos that “the house Jahn had built had collapsed” and that it “was time to build a new one.”¹³ As we have seen, the charge Abert and others, including Alfred Einstein, leveled was that Jahn was “too unmusical” to appreciate Mozart’s genius and that he was too much a prisoner of his own personal prejudices. The latter were particularly his opposition to the music and aesthetics of the New German School and his alleged need to compensate for his own personal suffering – he bore a series of hardships, including the insanity of his wife, political misfortune, an illegitimate child, academic squabbling and finally debilitating illness – by idealizing the subject of his study.¹⁴ These views of Jahn’s work continue to be repeated without much reflection in the secondary literature.¹⁵

Jahn began his academic career as a scholar of classical antiquity, yet *Altertumswissenschaft* did not end for him with the collection and ordering

¹³ Hermann Abert “Über Stand und Aufgabe der heutigen Mozart-Forschung” in *Mozart-Jahrbuch* 1 (1923), 16.

¹⁴ On Jahn’s musical aesthetics see Andreas Eichhorn, “Otto Jahn, dem das Beethoven’sche Lied an die Freude nicht heiter genug erschien: zu Otto Jahn’s musikästhetischen Denken” in *Otto Jahn*, 151-68. Cf. Gernot Gruber, “Otto Jahns Bedeutung für die Mozartforschung” in *Ibid.*, 144-50.

¹⁵ See Abert’s introduction to his revision of Jahn’s biography, *W.A Mozart: Neubearbeitete und erweiterte Ausgabe von Otto Jahn’s Mozart, erster Teil* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel 1923), iii-xxv; Alfred Einstein’s “Hermann Aberts Mozart” in *Mozart-Jahrbuch* 1 (1923), 158-62; Einstein’s introduction to the third edition of the Köchel catalogue: *Chronologisch-thematisches Verzeichnis sämtlicher Tonwerke Wolfgang Amadé Mozarts 6. Auflage bearbeitet von Franz Giegling, Alexander Weinmann und Gerd Sievers* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1964), XXV-LII; and the relevant passages in Gernot Gruber’s *Mozart and Posterity* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994).

of sources, as his later critics were to claim. For Jahn the study of history and the sources from which it is written was always a two-dimensional process; the wide expanses of the factual one dimension, the depth provided by interpretation the other. The philosopher of history Hayden White has described this realization, influential among historical theorists of Jahn's generation, as "an awareness of the gap between historical events and the language used to represent them."¹⁶ This is a rather up-to-date sounding position, which grants the language we use to tell the stories of history an important place in our consideration of how these stories are told. In short, Jahn wanted to explain the works of the ancients, but at the same time he sought to learn their language in order that they might explain themselves.

The methods Jahn used in non-Mozartian investigations can illustrate this approach. After being dismissed from his chair in Leipzig for political reasons in the aftermath of the 1848 revolution (he was a committed liberal democrat), Jahn kept himself busy – and afloat financially – with "occasional" projects. One of these was his Mozart biography, another a detailed catalogue of ancient Greek vases in the collection of the King of Bavaria. He published excerpts from this catalogue as articles; let us examine a portion of one of these.¹⁷

¹⁶ Hayden White, introduction to Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* trans. Todd Samuel Presner and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), xii. See my comments on Leopold von Ranke, below.

¹⁷ Otto Jahn, "Über Darstellungen Griechischer Dichter auf Vasenbildern" in *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften Dritter Band* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1861), 699-760, here 736-44. On the continuing importance of Jahn's vase descriptions see Jan Bažant, "Otto Jahn's 'Griechische Kunstgeschichte' Today" in *Otto Jahn*, 14-16.

The vase in question is pictured in figure 1.1. Jahn begins with vivid description of the figures on it: he uses words like “mit grosser Lebhaftigkeit” [“with great liveliness’] and “eine gewisse ernste Tüchtigkeit” [“a certain earnest virtuousness”]. He continues in this vein of detailed, by no means dry and certainly not “scientific” description. Jahn’s description aims to capture a sense of the vase both as a specific work of art and a relic of a wider cultural context. Such an approach is a mix between the “critical-historical” and the contextual. The aulos-player, for example, elicits a footnote directing the reader to a long series of other such figures on vases and the literature on them. He then proceeds with his main project, the depiction of poets on vases. Kydias, for instance, may be the poet Kydias of Hermione referred to by Plato, Aristophanes and later Plutarch. “May have been,” for Jahn qualifies this reference with critical reflection on the dangers of associating names on vases with specific historical personages, warning against the temptation of taking this vase for a portrait of the actual poet Kydias in the absence of further evidence. Jahn then elaborates his critical description with an appraisal of the vase’s meaning. The vase represents the ideal, he writes, of a scene taken from “daily life,” the “enthusiasm of drunken revelers after a light-hearted celebration.”



Figure 1.1:

Vase with Aulos-Player

From Otto Jahn, “Über Darstellungen Griechischer Dichter auf Vasenbildern”

Jahn continues:

Such representations appear with extreme frequency, and, if one can follow the small details of behavior and clothing along with the development of artistic style, one can use such vases to portray a small portion of Greek cultural history completely and effectively.¹⁸

This mixture of the specific and the general, of historical criticism and ideal conclusions is at the heart of Jahn's method.

The treatment of *Don Giovanni* in his biography demonstrates the same contextualist approach.¹⁹ It takes up 150 pages, combining the documentary and biographical (excerpts from Mozart's own *Verzeichniß* are supplied in footnotes as running commentary) with contexts (the operas of Mozart's contemporaries and a lengthy discussion of other settings of the drama), text-criticism (based on Jahn's examination of the autograph), history of the opera's reception, discussion of issues of performance practice, and a review of da Ponte's libretto. There are also lengthy passages of description of both plot and music that in our terms could only be described as criticism and analysis. It is, in short, a multivalent treatment that combines social and cultural history, criticism, analysis, performance practice and hermeneutics in one place. Jahn's Mozart shines in the midst of it all, a unique figure, shaped by the contingencies of his time and defined by the immanent "facts" of the historical record, who nonetheless embodies transcendent ideals.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 737-38.

¹⁹ Jahn, *Mozart*, IV 296-449.

At the conclusion of his section on *Don Giovanni*, Jahn writes:

Through [the] innovative totality of [its] realism, *Don Giovanni* distinguishes itself clearly from *Figaro*, without being any less of an ideal work. This is because every single motive, taken from real life and portraying this life with surprising power, is made to serve the artistic idea of the whole; only thus is the work so effective. Those who contemplate with their full attention the statues of the Parthenon or Raphael's figures and compare them with living nature realize more and more how the great masters of sculpture follow nature in every respect...²⁰

The Mozart Jahn reveals through the historical record, then, embodies an ideal, the same one embodied by the ancient Greeks or by Raphael.

Later commentators (not only Wolfgang Plath) have been prone to portray Jahn as a collector of positive facts, a worker in the proverbial “watch factory” of historical scholarship, shy about interpretation.²¹ A similarly negative connotation of the word “philology” only serves to underscore this view of him.²² It would be difficult, however, to maintain Plath's assertion that Jahn's methods were a model of positivism, the extension of purely scientific methods to the study of human cultural artifacts. For positivism is the surely the wrong word to use: a description more in tune with the traditions in which Jahn was grounded would be “the critical-historical method.” Jahn was too committed to the search for the transcendental spirit, the *Geist*, of the ancients – and of Mozart – to have been satisfied with empirical observation alone. Here the critical-historical

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 450.

²¹ See Jan Bažant, “Otto Jahn's ‘Griechische Kunstgeschichte’ Today” in *Otto Jahn*, 15.

²² See chapter two, “Textual Criticism and Performance Studies,” below.

method – and this should be no surprise, considering the context in which Jahn lived and worked – goes hand-in-hand with the search for history’s Hegelian “absolute subject” in the constellation of scholarly practices known loosely as “historicism.”

Historicism

Historicism is notoriously difficult to define; it is used in many contexts to mean several different things.²³ Let me begin by stipulating that historicism has four main elements, all of which draw on German

²³ For an excellent introduction in English to the problems surrounding the word “historicism” see Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1983). For a comprehensive treatment in German see Reinhart Koselleck, “Geschichte” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland Bd. IV*, eds. Otto Brunner Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Kotta, 1972), 678-717. An informative recent essay is Gunnar Hindrichs, “Das Problem des Historismus,” *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 129/2 (2002), 283-305. See also Friedrich Jaeger and Jörn Rüsen, *Geschichte des Historismus: Eine Einführung* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1992). The influence of historicism on German musicology is examined in the essays in Anselm Gerhard ed., *Musikwissenschaft – eine verpätete Diziplin?* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2000). For an explanation of the differences between the historicism I discuss here and the “New Historicism” of current literary studies see Don E. Wayne, “New Historicism” in the *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism* ed. Martin Coyle, Peter Garside, Malcolm Kelsall and John Peck (London, Routledge: 1991) 791-808, esp. 794. I will discuss historicism here in a broader sense than is often used for the term in musicology; for an overview of “compositional historicism” see James Garratt, *Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination: Interpreting Historicism in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). An older but still useful collection devoted to this subject is Walter Wiora, ed., *Die Ausbreitung des Historismus in der Music* (Regensburg: Bosse-Verlag, 1969).

reactions to Enlightenment philosophy and historiography and reflect a practice that took shape in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

First, for the historicist there is no such thing as purely empirical history, where “events” are observed by the historian as historical “Dinge an sich” and recorded in a value-free chronicle. This quality emerged most identifiably from Kant’s critique of empirical reason.

Second, the historicist believes in the individuality of the past, that is he or she rejects thinking in normative terms about it. This has its roots, among other places, in eighteenth-century European society’s realization that the rest of the world, which had become better known through exploration and colonization, was filled with fundamentally different cultures, each with its own history. Johann Gottfried Herder’s ideas about the uniqueness of individual peoples, languages, and societies, both past and present, were of particular influence on these emerging theories of historicism.²⁴

A third element is the critical skepticism of all that is handed down from history, in other words the “critical-historical method.” This component is shaped by both the prestige of philological techniques, which dates back to the Renaissance, and, more directly, by the emergence of a sources-based method of writing history (particularly cultural history) in late-eighteenth century Germany, which sought to provide the German

²⁴ A relevant text of Herder’s on the philosophy of history is his “Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit. Beitrag zu vielen Beiträgen des Jahrhunderts” in *Johann Gottfried Herder Werke IV*, (Frankfurt: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1994), 9-108. The classic study of the emergence of “historicism” is Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1965), on Herder especially 355-444.

nation with its own canon of historical monuments. The “critical-historical method” is the aspect of historicism that is closest to the empiricist pole of the spectrum of historical methods.

A fourth facet is the “interpretation of the world as history.” All the works of humanity, be they nation-states, vases, or operas, are best understood historically: all cultural creations are part of a stream of history that flows from the past through the present to the future. This is a legacy of Hegel’s philosophy, which gave the unfolding of history the role of expressing the ideas that emerged from the dialectic of mind and *Geist*, thus (somehow) overcoming Kant’s divide between subjects and objects. When we speak of *historicizing* something, we are referring to a part of this practice. All of these elements worked together, in varying proportions, to define the *practice* (I’ll use this word again) of historicism, which dominated German historiography from the 1820s until after the Second World War.²⁵

The Prussian historian Leopold von Ranke is often remembered as a leading exponent of the historical school, and for his famous dictum that historians should “bloß sagen, wie es eigentlich gewesen” [“just say how it really was”]. This phrase is often understood to mean that the historian should concentrate only on the empirical: indeed, Ranke’s work is often held up as a kind of paradigm of positivism. What Ranke meant, however, is something more complicated.²⁶ To begin with, English-speaking readers

²⁵ See *Ibid.*, 1-28 and Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1983), 498.

²⁶ For a collection of Ranke’s texts in English and an illuminating introduction to them see Leopold von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History* ed. and trans. Georg G.

often misunderstand the word *eigentlich*, which had another meaning in addition to “actually” in the nineteenth century. *Eigentlich* can also mean “in a specific character”; one might just as well translate Ranke’s motto as “just say what it was that was special and characteristic [or perhaps essential] about the past.” Historical events, Ranke believed, should be understood in their own contexts and released from a grand panorama of universal history. Every historical age, he claimed, should be able to claim “immediacy to God.” By removing himself from the process, the historian could hope to arrive at a “truer” history, where history’s objects are described in their own terms.²⁷

To understand Ranke and the critical methods he espoused as positivist is to remove him from his own context, and to concentrate on only one of the many constitutive aspects of historicism.²⁸ For Ranke, and for any historicist in the same tradition, there is always something transcendental at stake in the writing of history: history’s guiding “ideas.” For Ranke these were, perhaps, the ideals of the German nation as embodied by the Prussian state. For Jahn the idea was Mozart’s genius as both classical ideal and unreachable paragon of Apollonian beauty.²⁹

Iggers and Konrad von Moltke (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973). For more on Ranke’s dictum, which he borrowed from Thucydides, see Konrad Repgen “Über Ranke’s Diktum von 1824: ‘Bloss sagen, wie es eigentlich gewesen,’” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 102 (1982), 439-449.

²⁷ Iggers and von Moltke, ix-x.

²⁸ Even so careful a thinker as Leo Treitler has made this mistake, by his own admission. See his “History, Criticism and Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony” in *Music and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 37.

²⁹ This Hegelian element – despite Ranke’s documented distaste for Hegel himself – is common to any number of other historical techniques closer to the idealist pole I have been describing, from Marxism to today’s New Historicism. “The most

Historicism presumes a constant tug-of-war between transcendent ideals and critical examination of the historical record. Jahn's friend Johann Gustav Droysen, an influential historian of the post-Ranke generation, set out to reflect upon this conundrum in his influential book *Historik*.³⁰ Droysen's past is also of the present: for the past to become real it must be reinterpreted again and again. For him, echoing Ranke, there is one "historische Frage" ["historical question"]: "Ist das nun wirklich so gewesen, wie ich es gelernt und mir gedacht habe?" ["Was it really so, as I have learned and imagined it?"].³¹ This question, and the specific manner in which it is asked, determines the quality of a historian's work. Reflection on the complicated "flux" of history and the constant recombination of history's "facts" in ever-changing constellations serves to help the historian discern the ideals, and indeed the progress of these ideals, "behind" history, towards their Hegelian self-revelation.³²

unacknowledged common epistemological ground [of historicism and Marxism] is the assumption that history can be presented as the acts of individual subjects who are related to and dominated by an absolute subject. This assumption allows the historian to reconstruct past events as *meaningful* since they come together in a unified narrative called *history*." Cf. Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "The New Historicism and Its Agenda" in *New German Critique* 55 (1992), 90.

³⁰ Johann Gustav Droysen, *Historik: Vorlesungen über Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der Geschichte* ed. Rudolf Hübner (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1967).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³² See Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 104-115. Droysen influenced twentieth century music historiography through Carl Dahlhaus: see James Hepokoski, "The Dahlhaus Project and Its Extra-Musicological Sources" in *Nineteenth-Century Music* XIV/3 (Spring 1991), 233. For a sampling of Dahlhaus' approach to Droysen see his *Foundations of Music History* trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 34-43.

Droysen uses an image of width and breadth that his friend Jahn would have found appealing:

Many become weary of these efforts, and lose themselves in on secondary paths, following the broad instead of the deep, satisfied with learned collecting or the pleasures of the erudite wandering of the amateur. It is a matter of character to steer a straight course around these obstacles, and to arrive at one's goal.³³

These questions are made more difficult by the challenge of history's variety. Droysen illustrates this problem with a metaphor from art history:

The hundreds of paintings in a museum – each has its own unique mode of existence, each offers the friend of art, the aesthete, the budding artist etc. another facet to observe. Art history puts them together in a relation that, taken by themselves, they do not have, for which they were not painted, a relation that results in an order, a continuity under the influence of which the painters of these pictures stood without having been aware of it. Only this order allows us to distinguish in time between among the confusions of the various eras and nations, the choices of object, the manners of composition and even the techniques of drawing.³⁴

³³ “...viele ermatten sich in diesen Mühen, verlieren sich in Nebenwege, gehen immer mehr in die Breite statt in die Tiefe, begnügen sich mit gelehrten Materioponie oder den dilettantischen Vergnügungen des gelehrten Müßigangs. Es ist eine Sache des Charakters, trotz alledem festen Kurs zu steuern und zum Ziele zu gelangen.” Droysen, *Historik*, 34.

³⁴ “Die Hunderte von Bildern einer Pinakothek, – sie haben jedes für sich ihr Sein, bieten jedes für sich dem Kunstfreund, dem Ästheten, dem lernenden Künstler usw. andere und andere Seiten der Betrachtung. Die Kunstgeschichte stellt sie in einem Zusammenhang, den sie an sich nicht haben, für den sie nicht gemalt sind und aus dem sich doch eine Reihenfolge, eine Kontinuität ergibt, unter deren Einfluß die Maler dieser Bilder standen, ohne daß sie sich dessen Bewußt waren, und die in der Wahl der

A mass of detail, a “buntes Vielerlei” that only time can help to sort out, is received by a mass of interpreters, each with their own perspective. History assembles the details into narrative, but a narrative of which history’s actors were unaware.

In 1845, early in his career, Jahn wrote the following about the study of historical works of art:

My goal is, more than anything, always to consider and observe the work of art as a work of art, and through careful and complete as possible comparisons of monuments, to penetrate and understand the special language that works of art speak. Knowledge of this language is as important and irreplaceable a necessity to the student of art as knowledge of language is to the student of the written word.³⁵

What Jahn imagines here is the union of philology, archaeology and history into a historical practice build around “understanding” the relics of the past. As I have already pointed out, Jahn wanted to explain the works of ancient Greek art, but at the same time he sought to learn their language in order that they might explain themselves. At issue is not just recovery of ancient

Gegenstände, in der Art der Komposition, selbst in dem Techniken der Zeichnung und Farbe dies bunte Vielerlei unter verschiedene Zeiten und Länder uns erst zeitlich scheiden läßt.” *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁵ “Ich meine hauptsächlich das Bestreben, stets das Kunstwerk als solches aufzufassen und zu betrachten, und durch sorgsame und möglichst umfassende Vergleichung der Monumente Einsicht und Verständnis der eigentümlichen Sprache zu gewinnen, welche die Kunstwerke reden. Kenntnis dieser monumentalen Sprache ist dem Kunsterklärer so sehr ernstes und unerlässliches Erfordernis, wie dem Erklärer von Schriftwerken die Kunde der Sprache.” Otto Jahn *Archäologische Aufsätze* 1845, VI quoted by Jan Bāzant, “Otto Jahn’s ‘Griechische Kunstgeschichte’ Today in *Otto Jahn*, 26.

texts or artifacts; instead in Jahn's work the relation of those who produced and received them is a central concern. As the archeologist Jan Bažant has written,

Jahn stressed that a detail or series of details has in itself no scientific value. He once said that it was wrong to conceive classical archeology as a kind of watch factory, for in any historical branch it is impossible to divide the work between those who make the component parts and those who assemble them...he was no longer satisfied with historical research that aimed at a critical evaluation of sources and the assemblage of their "facts" into the mosaic presented as "history."³⁶

Jahn's work is based on critical examination of the sources and built on the foundations of the "historical-critical method." But behind Jahn's construction of Mozart's life, of a piece with the methods he uses to tell the story of that life, is an idealized Mozart. Those who have criticized Jahn's *Mozartbild* are correct to identify this quality. They are incorrect, though, to ascribe the transcendental qualities of Jahn's *Mozart* only to Jahn's personal weaknesses or his loyalty to specific composers. What is left for Jahn in the shards of a Greek vase is the *Geist* of classical Greece; in the score of Don Giovanni it is the transcendental ideal of Mozart's "classical" portrayal of "nature" in music. Yet both remnants are contingent on their time and place; the individual source and the all-encompassing ideals they represent exist together in a state of never-ending flux. To put it another way: for positivists, of whom I will speak in more detail later, there is nothing left after the subtraction of causation. For Jahn there certainly is

³⁶ Bažant, 15.

something left in the artifacts of human practice: the ideals of human creativity.

Plath's decision to invoke Jahn's name in his battle to bring a kind of empiricism for its own sake (that Jahn would have seen as a profound threat to the historical enterprise) to Mozart scholarship was bound to evoke mistrust in his audience. The tradition of which Jahn, Droysen, and this audience were a part demanded the study of cultural objects, of the historical artifacts of humanity, be guided by its own methods. The scholar who, a generation after Jahn and Droysen, attempted to codify these methods was Wilhelm Dilthey; he called them collectively *Geistesgeschichte*. We will recall that Plath suggested that Dilthey's methods were no longer appropriate for the study of Mozart.

Geistesgeschichte

For Dilthey the *Geisteswissenschaften* (the "human sciences") were what the *Naturwissenschaften* (the "natural sciences") were not. The former are practices of *erleben* and *verstehen* (experience and understanding): they concern themselves with the "insides" of experience.³⁷ The latter are sciences of description: they concern themselves with the "outsides" of experience. There is, for instance, a distinction between

³⁷ For a comprehensive introduction in English to Dilthey's thought see H.P. Rickman, *Dilthey Today: A Critical Reappraisal of the Contemporary Relevance of his Work* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

“history” and “natural history” in Dilthey’s conception. Each requires its own methods. The young Dilthey began to formulate his program for the human sciences in the 1860s as a reaction to what he and others saw as the growing influence of the natural sciences on all intellectual endeavors; like Droysen’s, his theories are in part a response to the utilitarian and empiricist intellectual climate of this era. Industrialization and the rapid growth in influence of the natural sciences in Germany in the 1860s gave such thinking much weight in Dilthey’s youth. Traditional idealism was forced to deal with it, to assimilate it. This assimilation became Dilthey’s project. As he put it:

The fundamental idea of my philosophy is that no one, so far, has based his philosophizing on the un-mutilated whole of experience, and so, on the whole fullness of reality. Speculation is certainly abstract...but empiricism is no less so. It bases itself on mutilated experience, distorted from the outset by an atomistic theoretical view of mental life...[N]o complete human being can be confined within this experience.³⁸

Empiricism employed alone is an inappropriate method for the subjects of the human sciences. I will turn presently to “positivism” in more detail; let me for the moment assert that positivism sees no need at all for such a split. Yet Dilthey attempted to assimilate positivism: in a way his philosophy is idealistic with an anti-metaphysical twist. From idealism comes the notion

³⁸ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Weltanschauungslehre. Abhandlungen zur Philosophie der Philosophie (=Gesammelte Werke vol. VIII)* (Leipzig: Taubner, 1932), 175; translated in Rickman, 133.

of objective ideals, to which he adds a pre-subjective force called “life.”³⁹ From empiricism he took the notion that specific historical situations can be described in *all* of their detail, that historical change can be stopped, as it were, and a kind of snapshot can be made of it. As one influential philosopher of history has put it, “through the medium of understanding every situation can be assimilated, also the...‘otherness’ of history, which can be assimilated and translated through self-recognition.”⁴⁰ History is like a mirror: we look into it and see more than just documents and sources. What we see is life itself, its complete “gestalt.”⁴¹

The paradigm of *Geistesgeschichte* found an echo in German-speaking Mozart scholarship of the early 1920s. In the introduction to his revision of Jahn’s biography Hermann Abert wrote:

Today we have escaped from the spirit of Romanticism; we have crossed over from idealistic, constructive thinking to empirical and realistic thinking and therefore have become much stricter in our critique and use of source material. We are not satisfied with a selection; we strive for totality. We have another attitude to the artistic personality *per se*. Here we strive via empiricism towards spiritual content [*Vergeistigung*], we approach problems psychologically and seek to solve them by the most exact attention possible to the very most personal, to the details of style.⁴²

³⁹ For a further explication of the term “life” in Dilthey’s writings see Jacob Owensby, *Dilthey and the Narrative of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 21-50.

⁴⁰ Reinhart Koselleck, “Standortbildung und Zeitlichkeit. Ein Beitrag zur historiographischen Erschließung der geschichtlichen Welt” collected in *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 177.

⁴¹ Later theories of culture and anthropology are similar. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

⁴² Abert, *Mozart*, vi.

This is a very interesting passage. In it Abert seems to be arguing for the kind of dialectical switching back and forth between the two poles of the continuum of historical methods I described earlier in this chapter. Immediately, we notice the Diltheyian attempt to assimilate empirical research while at the same time retaining the metaphysical goal of *Vergeistigung*. (Note as well the nod to psychology, whose empirical basis was a subject of great controversy at the time.) A subtle shift is that Abert's focus shifts from sources and their contexts to the less concrete but ultimately grander register of style. In Abert's day style history, in Mozart scholarship and in musicology as a whole, moved to the top of the discipline's priorities.⁴³

Behind Abert's implied methodological criticism of Jahn lies, I believe, a difference of opinion about who Mozart *was*: Jahn's Apollonian ideal, or the more "demonic" gestalt so influential to Abert's generation.⁴⁴ One root of this disagreement was the growing influence of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

⁴³ Style history came to Mozart studies through the work of T. de Wyzewa and G. de Saint-Foix, whose multi-volume *W.-A. Mozart: sa vie musicale et son oeuvre* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et cie, 1912-1936) attempted to sort Mozart's works according to stylistic principles. Guido Adler brought style history to musicology at large. See his *Methode der Musikgeschichte* (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1919). On Adler's historiographical context see Barbara Boisits, "Historismus und Musikwissenschaft um 1900: Guido Adler's Begründung der Musikwissenschaft im Zeichen des Historismus" in *Frauen in der Musikwissenschaft*, ed. Markus Grassl (Vienna: Universität für Musik und Darstellende Kunst, 1998), 11-29.

⁴⁴ Cf. Alfred Heuß, "Das dämonische Element in Mozarts Werken" in *Zeitschrift der internationalen musikwissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft* 7/5 (1906), 175-86.

Nietzsche contra Jahn

Nietzsche stands well outside of the mainstream of the historical tradition I have been describing. Indeed, in much of his philosophical universe, the “historical” man is exactly the man who must be transcended to make way for the *Übermensch*. Yet Dilthey, who lived into the twentieth century, considered himself a member of a group of thinkers including Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Wagner, Ruskin, Tolstoy and Maeterlink, and this despite his opposition to their “subjective” approach.⁴⁵ Whereas Nietzsche was often deeply skeptical of claims of objective knowledge, Dilthey argued that his “philosophy of life” was the place where human knowledge – in the form of historical consciousness based on understanding – and objective certainty could meet and be reconciled. They shared, nonetheless, a rejection of the kind of empiricism later proclaimed by Plath. And as we have seen, they shared this suspicion of empiricism with the “historical school” as well.

There is another reason, however, to bring Nietzsche into the telling of this story: that is his direct connection to Otto Jahn. In his first important book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche launched a bitter attack on his former university teacher. His attack was personal and brutal. Speaking of the critics of the new, Dionysian German music, he wrote:

One has only to take a close look at these suitors of music as they are in the flesh, tirelessly crying out ‘Beauty! Beauty!’, to

⁴⁵ See Dilthey *Werke* VIII, 199-205 and Rickman, 132-135.

judge if they distinguish themselves as the spoilt favorite children of nature, formed in the womb of the beautiful, or if they are not rather in pursuit of a deceitful disguise for their own lack of refinement, an aesthetic pretext for their own sobriety and poverty of feeling: here I am thinking for example of Otto Jahn. But the liar and hypocrite should beware of German music: for, in the middle of all our culture, it is precisely music which is the sole unadulterated, pure, and purifying fire-spirit...[E]verything which we now call culture, education, civilization will at some stage have to appear before the infallible judge, Dionysus.⁴⁶

This assault is probably of as little importance to Nietzsche studies as it is to Mozart studies. It does, however, illustrate another aspect of Jahn's bad reputation: his alleged pedantry, that is, his historicist attachment to the aesthetic models of the past and his rejection of the "purifying fire-spirit" of Wagner's music dramas.

Yet Jahn and Nietzsche are not polar opposites, indeed, they are rather closer together on my continuum than they might seem at first; this is one of the reasons, perhaps, for Nietzsche's vehement tone. (Another, which I am playing down here, is Jahn's public criticism of Nietzsche's then-idol, Richard Wagner.⁴⁷) Nietzsche's philology takes Jahn's as its point of departure – which makes sense, as Nietzsche was for a short time Jahn's student – and stretches it to the breaking point, to the point where

⁴⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* translated by Douglas Smith, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 106-107.

⁴⁷ For the background of Nietzsche's attack on the recently deceased Jahn, particularly Jahn's criticism of Wagner and his personal and professional connections to Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms, see Barbara von Rebniz, "Otto Jahn bei Friedrich Nietzsche: der 'Grenzbotenheld' als Wagner-Kritiker" in *Otto Jahn*, 204-33.

history, the preoccupation with the relics of the past, gives way to something quite different.

One of Nietzsche's first major works after the *Birth of Tragedy* was his *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*. It is a settling of accounts with the entire "historical school," or as Nietzsche calls it, "the historical sickness." Here he does conclude that the practice of history has its uses, but, paradoxically, "only as an art form that can allow us to forget," and put our attention where it belongs, on "life." (This is, of course, also an important term for Dilthey). History is fiction because all human knowing is contingent on the knower's perspective.⁴⁸ Of course, for Jahn, there *is* a truth to be found somewhere in the archive, waiting to be faithfully transcribed; but Jahn's own skepticism, reflected by his abiding concern for the contexts of historical documents, makes the road to that truth a long one. For Nietzsche, not only is the road a long one – it leads nowhere. But for all of his ranting about the "torture-system of historical thinking" and the "terrible Dionysian judge" waiting for thinkers like his teacher, Nietzsche, in an important way, is in the same boat as his teacher: for both, history is what you make of it.

It would be an exaggeration to claim that Plath's audience in 1964 were so negative in their reactions to his theses only because of their distrust of a figure criticized with such vehemence by Nietzsche, in other words that their suspicion of overly "factual" historical research was informed mainly by allegiance to his thinking. I doubt that many in the

⁴⁸ Cf. Alan Munslow, "Nietzsche" in *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies* (London: Routledge, 2000), 174-178.

audience would have even recalled the passage from the *Birth of Tragedy*. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to underestimate Nietzsche's influence on the intellectual world of the Weimar Republic, particularly in conservative academia, the world of Plath's interlocutors (I will return presently to this point). Leading scholars like Abert and Einstein, as we have seen, were particularly unsparing in their criticism of Jahn, claiming more than once that Jahn was "too much scholar and not enough musician." Behind this accusation hovers Nietzsche's terrible Dionysian judge – an irresistible authority figure, it seems, to German intellectuals of the World War I generation.

A certain kind of *Bildung*, the establishment of a consensus about art, politics and society, in other words the encouragement of a feeling among individual human subjects for the absolute Subject, was a central focus of Jahn's varied academic career. And this kind of *Bildung* is Nietzsche's public enemy number one, the project of those who need an "excuse for their own sobriety and poverty of feeling." Consider this passage from the *Uses and Disadvantages of History*:

Knowledge, acquired out of proportion, without hunger, indeed without needing it at all, functions no longer as something that can change the world, finding its way to the outside, and remains hidden in a certain kind of chaotic inner world, which every modern person, with a certain perverse pride, calls their own unique *Innerlichkeit*. One says that one has content and that only form is missing; but, for all that lives, this is an inappropriate opposition. Our modern *Bildung* lacks all life for just this reason, because it cannot be imagined without this opposition, that is: it is not *Bildung* at all, but only a kind of knowing about *Bildung*, it remains just a thought of *Bildung*

and a feeling of *Bildung*, it does not become a kind of *Bildung* upon which that one acts.⁴⁹

This is the kind of *Bildung* that does not *act* and *live* as Wagner's music does. Indeed, it may well be that Nietzsche's critique of Jahn's "phony" *Bildung* is the root of the often repeated charge that his writings on Mozart were "unmusical." So it is indeed an irony that a Nietzschean perspective should have leaked into a Mozart discourse conducted among German Mozart scholars whose *Bildung* – exactly in the sense so bitterly criticized by Nietzsche – can only be described as exquisite. It is yet more of an irony that they seem not to have noticed.

Positivism

Now, arriving at positivism, the opposite pole to the idealistic strategies of historicism and *Geistesgeschichte*, we are nearing our goal of understanding "how it really was" that day in Salzburg. It is another difficult term. Originally coined by the French philosopher August Comte, positivism, broadly defined, assumes that the world around us can be described through empirical observation, and that the sum-total of these observations can be described as "reality," unmediated by the perspectives of those doing the observing. Comte believed that all of human history

⁴⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben" in *Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe III/1*, eds. Giorgio Colli, and Mazzino Montanari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), 239-330, here 268-269.

could be divided into three stages: the “religious,” the “metaphysical,” and the “positive.” In the latter “one confines explanation to the verifiable and measurable correlations between phenomena.” The comprehension of history’s laws ushers in the last stage, and consequently history’s end. For the positivist things are as they are observed to be: the assumption that they are not is metaphysics and belongs in the realm of the purely verbal. Further, and this is of great importance, for positivists there is no difference between observing human beings (and their cultural production) and observing natural phenomena.⁵⁰ It would be simpler for us if positivism were only a label for Compté’s theories. Unfortunately, the word has a tendency to reappear in many guises, for example as a negative label in today’s metamusicological discourse, as we shall see in a moment.

Let us recall Plath’s argument. “Basic matters of evidence,” he claimed, “that is, positively secured facts and nothing else, provide the foundations of research upon which all scholarly activity is based.” Only after this material has been ordered and interpreted should the final step of understanding be attempted, only then will Mozart’s *Geist* be “available to the scholar who wishes to understand” and even then only as the “integral meaning of the factual.” If this is the purpose of the human sciences, he continued, then it is clear that positivism has an important role to play, “as the turning towards the facts, that is the process of distinguishing between

⁵⁰ See the articles “Compte, Isidore Auguste Marie François Xavier” and “positivism” in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 145 and 705-06. In the nineteenth century Compté’s theories had little echo in Germany, but a considerable one in England, particularly on John Stuart Mill. For a good general definition of positivism see Leszek Kolakowski, *Die Philosophie des Positivismus* trans. Peter Lachmann (Munich, Piper, 1971), 9-19.

secure factual knowledge and hypothesis, mere suspicion or even uncontrolled fantasy.” In the end, he argued, positivism “is that which makes the human sciences scientific.”⁵¹

Plath uses the word “positivism” nine times in the four and a half pages he devotes to theories of history in his essay. He associates the word with what he calls the “gelehrt-wissenschaftliche Tendenz” in Mozart studies, what I have been calling the historical-critical method, a tendency that was represented most by Otto Jahn and Ludwig von Köchel, and had lost the battle with the “künstlerische” techniques of Dilthey and his followers. His advice for his colleagues was concentration on the “scientific” end of the methodological spectrum; to underscore this point he returns often to words like “foundation,” “basis,” and “Wissenschaftlichkeit.”

The point of unfavorable comparison in Plath’s polemic is Bach studies. Plath’s had taken his doctorate in Tübingen, one of the centers of the “philological revolution” in Bach research in the 1950s (the other two were Göttingen and Princeton). The story is well-known: a team of younger scholars, prominent among them Alfred Dürr and Georg von Dadelsen, working mostly on source problems like paper types and scribal hands, had overturned the traditional chronology of Bach’s Leipzig church music.⁵² This chronology was thought to have been established conclusively by the Bach scholars of the late nineteenth century, by strict paragons of the historical-critical method like Philip Spitta and Wilhelm

⁵¹ Plath, 79.

⁵² See Arthur Mendel, “Recent Developments in Bach Chronology,” *The Musical Quarterly* 46 (1960), 283-300.

Rust, whom Plath labels as “Jahn’s methodological heirs.” The twentieth-century scholars had “falsified” the nineteenth-century scholars’ results.⁵³

This newer Bach research is mentioned nowhere in Plath’s remarks, however. Plath didn’t mention the latest developments in Bach research, but everyone present would have been well aware of them. His point was, I believe, that the revolution in Bach studies had only been possible because there was a corpus of philological research dating back to Spitta and Rust that researchers like Dürr and von Dadelsen had been able to *falsify*. In Mozart studies, and this is the heart of his argument, there was little or no previous research to falsify, because researchers since Jahn had turned their attention to “interpretation” and to *Geistesgeschichte* in the style of Dilthey. So, in Plath’s view, there was an urgent need for a massive expansion of “basic research.” Indeed, Plath and his colleague Wolfgang Rehm had circulated a three-page catalogue of “zu bearbeitende Themen aus der Mozart-Forschung” in 1963 among their colleagues in “In- und Ausland.”⁵⁴ This list of desiderata contains 26 points. 16 are concerned with sources or compositional process, five with cultural context (for instance number 17, “Mozart’s letters and documents as sources for music history”), three with style criticism, and two with performance practice. I would argue that one of the purposes of this document, and of Plath’s position paper and appearance at the congress, was to stimulate new

⁵³ I use the word “falsify” here in the sense of the theories of Karl Popper, who argued that “science” depends on statements being *disproved*. I will return to Popper presently.

⁵⁴ Wolfgang Plath and Wolfgang Rehm, “Zu bearbeitende Themen aus der Mozart-Forschung,” unpublished typescript, ca. 1963. Communicated privately by Wolfgang Rehm. The complete list appears in appendix one below, with Professor Rehm’s kind permission.

avenues of Mozart research concentrated on primary sources, so that the weakened foundations of Mozart scholarship might be repaired as quickly as possible, *through falsification of previous research*.

Now if of all of this “falsifying” of results is beginning to sound like another kind of positivism, that is the kind most often associated with the Austro-British philosopher Karl Popper, that is because, as I see it, there is a real connection between Plath’s theses and Popper’s theories. It was the Princeton professor Arthur Mendel who delivered the theoretical foundations for the new Bach philology, both in his Bach writings and in his well-known address (“Evidence and Explanation”) to the International Musicological Society’s New York congress in 1961.⁵⁵ Mendel in turn was influenced by his Princeton colleague Carl Gustav Hempel, a “neopositivist” philosopher of science whose main project was bringing scientific precision to disciplines like history. Hempel’s work has much in common with Karl Popper, whom Mendel also cited in his paper.

Two threads in Popper’s work are of interest here. First, the notion that there is such a thing at all as a “positive” fact, and second, that such facts can be intersubjectively validated by “falsifying” them.⁵⁶ Both of

⁵⁵ Arthur Mendel, “Evidence and Explanation,” in *Report of the Eighth Congress of the International Musicological Society New York, 1961* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1962), vol. 2, 2-18. For Mendel’s report on Bach research in the 1950s (including a passing mention of Wolfgang Plath), see his “Recent Developments in Bach Chronology.”

⁵⁶ There is some disagreement among historians about who was the first, Hempel or Popper, to propose such theories of evidence and explanation. For Hempel’s theories, see Carl G. Hempel, “The Function of General Laws in History” in his collected essays, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Science* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 231-44 (originally published in 1942). A discussion of Karl Popper’s approach to “covering law theories” can be found in his *The Open Society and its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), vol. II, 363-64.

these ideas are central to Plath's argument that there are "facts" to be sought in Mozart studies and that real progress can only be made through a *continuously developing* process of "factual" research.

It seems unlikely that Plath could have been unaware of this way of thinking about history.⁵⁷ In short, Plath's theses amount to a call for the importation of what one might call the Mendel-Hempel-Popper program, or perhaps the "Princeton program" of Bach research, into Mozart scholarship. Why didn't Plath cite either philosopher, or even Mendel? In order to understand that, perhaps, we have to understand to whom he was speaking.

The Mandarins Enraged

Thirty-five years ago, the American historian Fritz K. Ringer published a study of an influential group of intellectual opinion-makers: the German professoriate. Ringer described how, in the contexts of the German academic system, their numbers were kept small, but their influence on state and society was guaranteed by a complex web of interdependence that bound them to whatever political leadership was then

There Popper outlines his claim to having originally proposed this approach. For an explication and critique of Hempel's theories, see Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 203-15. On page 214 Danto refers to followers of Hempel among historians as an "avant-garde."

⁵⁷ Dietrich Berke makes a direct connection in his reminiscences of Plath. See Berke, "Mozart Forschung und Mozart Edition," 1 and *passim*.

in power.⁵⁸ Ringer called them the “German Mandarins,” a reflection of their own self-image as a kind of spiritual and intellectual aristocracy. Part of Ringer’s conception of *Mandarinentum* depends on the idea that in order to become a Mandarin, German academics had to subscribe to a canon of shared philosophical and methodological positions.

In the case of German musicology in the 1950s and early 1960s, these positions included the view that the study of musical sources was not and should not be an end in itself: music was, as Hans Engel put it in response to Plath, a phenomenon of *Gestalt* and *Geist* that could not be reduced to watermarks and handwriting.⁵⁹ The theoretical foundations for this consensus were provided by the historicist tradition and the concepts of *Geistesgeschichte*. Plath’s polemic could well have been interpreted by his audience as an attack on this agreement – and therefore an attack on their positions as officially sanctioned interpreters of Mozart. Positivism – at least the word spoken aloud – had *never* belonged to this canon of shared beliefs.⁶⁰ Plath’s use of the word, then, must have seemed like a conscious provocation to much of his audience.⁶¹ For the young discipline of musical

⁵⁸ Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community 1890-1933* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1969). Although Ringer’s study stops in 1933, I think it fair to extend many of his observations to the postwar period, as for instance Pamela Potter does in her study of German musicology before and after 1945; see Pamela Potter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 33.

⁵⁹ Hans Engel, “Probleme der Mozartforschung” in *Mozart-Jahrbuch* 1964, 43.

⁶⁰ Ringer’s survey of the history of the negative connotations of the word “positivism” among German academics is particularly convincing. See Ringer, 294-304.

⁶¹ “Should Plath not have been fully aware of the pejorative character that had grown around the concept of positivism? That is hard to imagine in a man of such universal

scholarship, the study of historical sources (in Plath's sense, "facts") was always only a prelude to *understanding* the music in them. For all of the success enjoyed by natural sciences in nineteenth-century Germany, in the human sciences Dilthey's methods of engagement, built on historicist foundations, remained preeminent. These methods were dogma for Plath's listeners.

The unanimity of their responses at the meeting in Salzburg is a striking confirmation of Ringer's thesis.⁶² Regardless of affiliation or personal history, all of those who spoke out against Plath were driven to do so by their opposition to anything that smacked too much of positivism. Figures as diverse as Hans Engel, who had risen to some prominence in the musicological establishment of the Third Reich through his studies of music and "Volk,"⁶³ found themselves agreeing wholeheartedly with émigrés like the Marxists Georg Knepler and Harry Goldschmidt. Key tenets of the historical school – that writing history is always interpretation, and history always reveals absolute ideals – were under attack. Engel followed his *ad hoc* comments in Salzburg with a lengthy written rebuttal in the *Mozart-Jahrbuch* of the following year. His main argument: Mozart studies "is *Musikwissenschaft* and not *Notenwissenschaft*."⁶⁴

learning...No, Plath used the word clearly as a provocation, and provoke he did." Berke, "Mozart-Forschung und Mozart-Edition," 9.

⁶² For a transcription of the discussion see "Symposium: der gegenwärtige Stand der Mozartforschung" in Franz Giegeling ed. *Bericht über den neunten internationalen Kongress Salzburg 1964. Band II: Protokolle von den Symposia und Round-Tables* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1966), 88-97.

⁶³ For Engel's activities as a musicology professor in the Third Reich and after see Potter, "Most German of the Arts," 157, 160 and *passim*.

⁶⁴ Engel, "Probleme der Mozartforschung," 43.

Plath's most eminent critic, Friedrich Blume, waited several years to deliver a reply. In a keynote address given to the 1967 International Musicological Congress in Ljubljana, he continued in Engel's vein, attacking Plath's paper directly:

The over-breeding of specialization and neo-positivism open up threatening consequences for musicology: the isolation of researchers and disciplines from one another, the decline of international cooperation, and the increasing lack of understanding on the part of wide groups of the general public for musicological research...The hunger to understand music cannot be stilled with the recipes of secret alchemical kitchens...There are in fact studies that concern themselves exclusively with paper types, rasterology and the like, and if this continues, in the year 2000 music history won't be about composers and theorists, but about copyists, and not about masses and symphonies, but about watermarks and rasters.⁶⁵

The New Musicology

Blume's position resonates – surprisingly, perhaps – with Joseph Kerman's famous diagnosis of the state of the discipline in Great Britain and North America in the mid-1980s. For Kerman, as for Blume, musicology had fallen into the hands of an ideology called positivism (in both source-studies and analysis); one of Kerman's main claims was that

⁶⁵ Friedrich Blume, "Historische Musikforschung der Gegenwart" collected in *Syntagma Musicologicum II: Gesammelte Reden und Schriften 1962-1972* eds. A.A. Abert and M. Ruhnke (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1973), 40-41.

the tool to combat this ideology would be something he called “criticism.” Kerman’s book, *Contemplating Music*, garnered much publicity and generated its share of controversy.⁶⁶

Seen from a distance the controversy around Kerman and his followers seems eerily like the controversy around Plath’s theses about Mozart scholarship, only in reverse. Despite the many obvious differences between German and English-speaking musicology, it would be hard to press the young Wolfgang Plath, who figures in this story as something of an upstart, into the role of a reactionary. In his own context, his was clearly the reformist side of the debate. And even through the fog of positivism’s many connotations, the role-reversal we can make out here does have some interesting contours. On the one side, we see Plath speaking in sympathy with a dominating figure of a strictly empirical American musicology, and appearing to suggest application of the newest theories from Princeton. On the other, the imperious Mandarins of *Musikwissenschaft*, including some of dubious political pedigree, with whose arguments the claims of some “new musicologists” overlap. Throwing the anti-positivist Theodor W. Adorno into the mix, both a defender of old-fashioned *Geist* and a “Galionsfigur” to the “new musicology” only makes the panorama more complicated.⁶⁷ Indeed, such a

⁶⁶ Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985) (published in the UK as *Musicology*). For a recent overview of the “new musicology” see Alistair Williams, *Constructing Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), on Kerman, 2-7.

⁶⁷ For Adorno’s strong critique of positivism see his “Einleitung zum ‘Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie’” in *Gesammelte Schriften* 8, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), 280-353.

tableaux is exactly the kind of historiographical challenge in which Droysen would have delighted.

It would probably be a mistake to make too much of the similarities between Blume and Kerman.⁶⁸ Blume's old-school historicism and Kerman's New Critical agenda mix only to a certain degree. Yet on the continuum of historical methods they are closer together than one might at first suspect. More than anything else, perhaps, what North Americans and Britons owe to Kerman is the "reactionary" connotation of the word positivism. And thinking about Plath's use of the word positivism as a term of liberation helps us to sense something of the generation conflict (just four years before 1968) that hovers behind his theses.

The dispute over positivism in Mozart studies helps us as well to make sense of some of the finer points made by some of the "new musicology's" more astute observers. Perhaps Plath's biggest mistake was to suggest that "positivism" and "Geistesgeschichte" are opposites; Kerman, indeed, has been accused of a similar error. Leo Treitler, for example, took issue with Kerman's distinction between "positivism" and "criticism," building his argument to some degree on Droysen and Dilthey.⁶⁹ Yet from the other side of the new musicological debate Margaret Bent, more in sympathy with Karl Popper, has voiced a similar

⁶⁸ Tim Carter also sees similarities between *Geistesgeschichte* and the "new musicology." See "An American in...?" in *Music and Letters* 83/2 (2002), 274-78, here 276. Albrecht Riethmüller's suggests something similar when he compares the "new musicology's" Beethoven reception with the interpretations of Jacques Handschin. See Riethmüller, "Wunschbild: Beethoven als Chauvinist," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 58/2 (2001), 91-108, here 96.

⁶⁹ Leo Treitler, "The Power of Positivist Thinking (=Review of Kerman, *Contemplating Music*)," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 42/2 (1990), 375-402.

criticism of Kerman's "split."⁷⁰ Richard Taruskin's dialectical answer to the questions raised by the collision of positivism and interpretation is also telling. Taruskin knows that this opposition is misleading; that is how he is able to claim, on page 27 of his *Text and Act*, that when confronted the "moral confusion" of Leo Treitler's Dilthey-influenced approach, he'll "take bourgeois, democratic positivism any day," while asserting on page 42 that Mendel had launched a "what became a virtual era of documentary fetishism" that became a "reign of scientific intellectual terror."⁷¹

For better or worse Plath's program has become the foundation of a large part of Mozart studies. Of course, there has been much work done on the composer since 1964 that cannot be traced back to his program and that does not share Plath's suspicion of "interpretation." For as the "new musicology" has reminded us, we too should be suspicious of methods that claim too loudly to be "non-ideological," "scientific," or somehow "neutral."⁷² Indeed, in our supposedly postmodern condition it would be pointless to imagine that there is, or should be, such a thing as *one* "Mozart studies," or even a kind of "studies" devoted to a single canonic historical

⁷⁰ Margaret Bent, "Fact and Value in Contemporary Scholarship," *The Musical Times* 127 (1986), 85-89.

⁷¹ Taruskin, *Text and Act* 27 and 43. For more on this passage in Taruskin's book see the section on "Historical Performance and Textual Criticism" in chapter two, below. On positivism as the "new musicology's" "other" see Robert Fink, "Elvis is Everywhere: Musicology and Popular Music at the Twilight of the Canon," *American Music: A Quarterly Journal Devoted to all Aspects of American Music and Music in America* 16/2 (1998), 135-79.

⁷² Cf. for instance Rose Rosengard Subotnik, "On Grounding Chopin" in *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music*, (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 141-65 and, more recently, Nicholas Cook, "Analysing Performance and Performing Analysis" in *Rethinking Music*, eds. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 239-61.

figure. These problems of ideology, however, are ours to grapple with. If we are to do justice to Wolfgang Plath's historical context, we must recognize that he faced other problems, among them that there were in fact severe deficits in research on the physical materials of Mozart's compositional practice and the artifacts of the musical culture around him. Substantial parts of the canon of recent Mozart research – Tyson, Plath himself, Eisen, Konrad, Haberkamp, and Edge, just to name a few – seem to have emerged directly from, or at least in sympathy with, his analysis of the state of Mozart studies in the early 1960s. Clearly, we should be more than glad that this work has been done. Its results speak for themselves.

The Mandarins of Mozart scholarship carried out a debate almost forty years ago about the benefits and pitfalls of positivist historiography, and the parts of today's Mozart scholarship concerned with source studies owe much to Plath's apparent victory. As the *NMA* nears completion and another anniversary year looms, perhaps the time has come to continue the discussion where Plath and his opponents left it. Thinking about this discussion can help us to deconstruct – if not dispense with – the easy opposition between “source studies” and “interpretation,” “higher” and “lower” criticism, or even “positivism” and “Geistesgeschichte,” and find our way to a practice of Mozart scholarship that embraces the search for new and more precise interpretations of the stories implied by the rich – and ever-changing – constellation of materials Mozart and his world left behind.