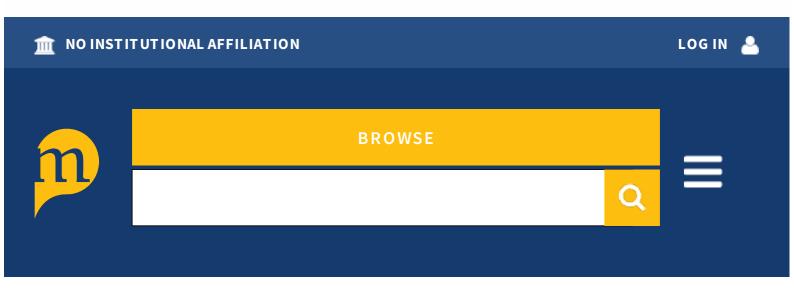
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Did Mozart have Tourette's syndrome?: some comments on Mozart's language.



# O Did Mozart Have Tourette's Syndrome?: Some Comments on Mozart's Language

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# In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

DID MOZART HAVE TOURETTE'S SYNDROME? SOME COMMENTS ON MOZART'S LANGUAGE K. ATERMAN\* The enemy of creativity « good taste.—Picasso. One of the striking features of the extensive literature on Mozart's life and work is the continuing debate on certain aspects of his personality, prompted by a perceived discrepancy between his sublime music and the "vulgarity" of his "uninhibited" language [1], which is marked by a "forthright, coarse exuberance" [2] that has caused some "understandable embarrassment" [3] to at least some readers. His language in letters to his cousin Maria Anna Thekla—the "infantile" [1], "notorious" [3], "inimitably bawdy and whimsical" [2] "Bäsle Briefe"—so offended the "refined" tastes of the rising Central-European middle class that these letters were either bowdlerized or simply not published.

This was, for example, the course taken in 1828 by G.N. Nissen, one of Mozart's early biographers, who was
aware that the attitude toward language and its "indecencies" was changing and decided not to include the
Bäsle letters in his Biographie W.A. Mozarts because of Mozart's "too childish and coarse jokes" [4].
Indeed, these letters did not appear in extenso until 1938—and in an English translation at that, [see 5,
Simpkin cites 1985 ed.] for the German version still had not been published in 1947 [3]. In due course,
however, Mozart's characteristic style in these letters—and in his life—came to be examined and
reexamined from sociological, psychological, and merely conjectural points of view. The result, as Simkin
[6] has recently maintained, is that "the surprising scatology found in Mozart's letters has not yet been
satisfactorily explained." Yet, the key to understanding Mozart's occasionally "eccentric" [7] style and
lanThe author acknowledges with pleasure the great interest and encouragement of Leroy P. Heffernan,
M.D., and the expert assistance of Mrs. M. Larlham. The paper is written for Myre Sim, a friend of many years.
AU translations from German by K. Aterman.»Address: 5737 Southwood Drive, Halifax, N. S., Canada B3H 1E6.©
1994 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. 003 1-5982/94/3702-0852W 1.00 Perspectives in
Biology and Medicine, 37, 2   Winter 1994 247 guage can, according to Simkin [6], be found in "Mozart's
plausible affliction with Tourette's syndrome." This assertion is certain to refuel the controversy about
Mozart's "peculiarities." Neumayr [7], for instance, in his study of Mozart's illnesses and death, had already
in 1987 dismissed as "absurd" the suggestion that Mozart suffered from Tourette's syndrome. Sacks [8],
well-known for his studies of the subject, also has questioned this diagnosis. Moreover, Simkin himself
recently has been quoted as saying in a telephone interview that "no one can prove [if] he [Mozart] did or
did not have this disorder [Tourette's syndrome], manic depression, hyperactivity, or was just juve nile"
[Matinée: The Daily News (Halifax, N.S.), Saturday, Dec. 19, 1992]. In view of these uncertainties, it may be
appropriate to draw attention to some factors that may help us see the question of Mozart's eccentricities
in sharper perspective. A discussion of this question in a some what different context has been presented
on an earlier occasion [9]. In their systematic review, Singer and Walkup [10] define Tourette's syndrome,
first described in 1825, as "a spectrum of familial involuntary motor and/or vocal tics and comorbid
neuropsychiatrie problems." This seemingly straightforward definition is complicated however, by the fact
that, as Sacks [8] has pointed out, there are "different forms of the syndrome," with the "stere otypic form"
representing one end of the spectrum and the "phantas magoric form" the other. Sacks describes the
phantas magoric form as being: especially remarkable for its mimicry, antics, playfulness, extravagance,
impudence, audacity, inventions, dramatisations, unexpected and sometimes surreal associations,
intense and uninhibited affects, speed, "go," vivid imagery and memory, hunger for stimuli and incontinent
reactivity, and constant reaching into inner and outer worlds to Tourettise The difficulty is that this
impressive and eloquent catalog of largely admirable qualities has wide applicability, leading us to ask
whether eccentrics and provocative and creative artists are "Tourettising"? This is where part of our
dilemma lies, for Sacks's description of

# DID MOZART HAVE TOURETTE'S SYNDROME? SOME COMMENTS ON MOZART'S LANGUAGE

K. ATTEMAN\*

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