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A reference to Mozart in Kotzebue’s *Menschenhaß und Reue* (1789)

Dexter Edge

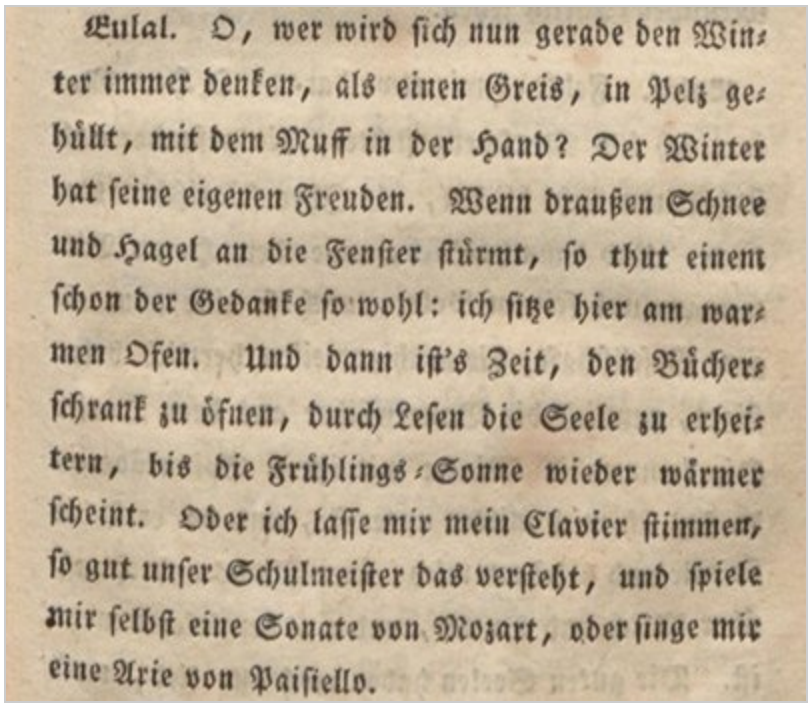
Menschenhaß und Reue. Schauspiele in fünf Aufzügen von August von Kotzebue. Berlin, 1790. bey Christian Friedrich Himburg.

[Act 2, scene ii]

[45]

Eulal. O, wer wird sich nun gerade den Win=
ter immer denken, als einen Greis, in Pelz ge=
hüllt, mit dem Muff in der Hand? Der Winter
hat seine eigenen Freuden. Wenn draußen Schnee
und Hagel an die Fenster stürmt, so thut einem
schon der Gedanke so wohl: ich sitze hier am war=
men Ofen. Und dann ist’s Zeit, den Bücher=
schrank zu öfnen, durch Lesen die Seele zu erhei=
tern, bis die Frühlings=Sonne wieder wärmer
scheint. Oder ich lasse mir mein Clavier stimmen,
so gut unser Schulmeister das versteht, und spiele
mir selbst eine Sonate von Mozart, oder singe mir
eine Arie von Paisiello.

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Eulal. O, wer wird ſich nun gerade den Winter immer denken, als einen Greis, in Pelz gehüllt, mit dem Muff in der Hand? Der Winter hat ſeine eigenen Freuden. Wenn draußen Schnee und Hagel an die Fenſter ſtürmt, ſo thut einem ſchon der Gedanke ſo wohl: ich ſitze hier am warmen Ofen. Und dann iſt's Zeit, den Bücherſchrank zu öfnen, durch Leſen die Seele zu erheitern, bis die Frühlings-Sonne wieder wärmer ſcheint. Oder ich laſſe mir mein Clavier ſtimmen, ſo gut unſer Schulmeiſter das verſteht, und ſpiele mir ſelbſt eine Sonate von Mozart, oder ſinge mir eine Arie von Paiſiello.

Commentary

Although he is hardly more than a footnote in literary history today, August von Kotzebue (1761–1819) was one of the most popular and most often performed German playwrights of the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth. He was also one of the most prolific, writing around 220 plays, as well as books of history, autobiographical works, journal articles, and pamphlets. Among music historians, Kotzebue is remembered mainly as the author of dramatic texts set to music by a variety of composers, and for his connection to Beethoven. In 1811 Kotzebue was commissioned to write a prologue, drama, and epilogue for the dedication of a new theater in Pest (Hungary); Beethoven composed an overture and incidental music for the prologue, *König Stephan, Ungarns erster Wohltäter* (op. 117), and similarly for the epilogue, *Die Ruinen von Athen* (op. 113). Kotzebue so impressed Beethoven that the composer asked him to write a libretto for an opera on a historical subject (Forbes 1967, 524); but Kotzebue declined. The young Franz Schubert set two librettos by Kotzebue: *Der Spiegelritter* (D. 11, incomplete) and *Des Teufels Lustschloß* (D. 84, two versions); other Viennese composers who set works by Kotzebue included Conradin Kreutzer, Joseph Weigl, Ignaz Ritter von Seyfried, Adalbert Gyrowetz, Paul Wranitzky, and Franz Xaver Süßmayr (Schröter 2011, 44). Albert Lortzing based the libretto for his 1842 opera *Der Wildschütz* on Kotzebue's comedy *Der Rehbock*.



Kotzebue was born in Weimar on 3 May 1761, the son of an official in the court of Duchess Anna Amalia (see Schröter 2011); Kotzebue's uncle was Johann Karl August Musäus (1735–1787), whose *Moralische Kinderklapper für Kinder und Nichtkinder*, published posthumously in 1788, also contains a reference to Mozart. In his youth, Kotzebue came into regular contact with leading German writers of the time, including Goethe, who was a friend of the family. Kotzebue studied law at Jena and Duisberg, but his heart lay in the theater. From the fall of 1781, he was in St. Petersburg as secretary to Friedrich Wilhelm von Bauer (1731–1783), who the following year became director of the German theater in St. Petersburg, which Kotzebue took a hand in running. After von Bauer's death in 1783, Catherine II appointed Kotzebue to a judicial post in Reval (today Talinn) in what was then the Russian province of Estonia. In 1785 he was appointed "Präsident des Gouvernements-Magistrat" of Estonia and was ennobled, also marrying that year. In 1788 he founded an amateur theater in Reval which gave the premieres of several of his plays. After the extraordinary success of *Menschenhaß und Reue* in 1789, Kotzebue devoted himself increasingly to writing. Following the death of his first wife in 1790, he spent time in Paris and Mainz, but ultimately returned to settle on an estate near Reval. Kotzebue retired from his governmental position in 1795; in 1798 he was briefly chief dramatist to the court theater in Vienna. His life in the first years of the nineteenth century continued to be peripatetic and eventful, including even a brief period of exile in Siberia, an episode that became fodder for his autobiographical work *Das merkwürdigste Jahr meines Lebens* (The Strangest Year of My Life). Kotzebue's continuing contact with Russia led some in Germany to suspect him of being a spy, and he came to be hated by liberals and German nationalists because of his outspoken anti-democratic sentiments (see Schröter 2011, 101ff). Kotzebue was stabbed to death in his home in Mannheim on 23 Mar 1819 by a radical student, Carl Ludwig Sand, who was later executed for the crime.



Kotzebue's second son, Otto von Kotzebue (1787–1846) became a renowned explorer; the Alaskan town of Kotzebue is named after him.

Kotzebue wrote his sentimental drama *Menschenhaß und Reue* (Misanthropy and Remorse) in 1788 while living in Reval. The play was first performed there on 23 Nov 1788 by his amateur theater. Realizing that he had a potential hit on his hands, Kotzebue quickly sent the play to Johann Jakob Engel in Berlin, where it had its premiere in the Nationaltheater on 3 Jun 1789. It was a career-making success for the young playwright, who had just turned 28. (Mozart was in Berlin in May 1789, but left the city just a few days before the play's premiere.) The play was soon taken up by theaters throughout German-speaking Europe, with productions in Hamburg, Mannheim, Hannover, Leipzig, Breslau, Frankfurt am Main, Vienna, and Weimar, all before the end of 1789, and in Munich just after the New Year (Schröter 2011, 29). *Menschenhaß und Reue* was first performed in Vienna in the Burgtheater on 14 Nov 1789, where it was the theatrical hit of the season; its fifth performance on 30 Nov 1789 had the highest box-office receipts, 667 gulden 52 kreuzer, of any play or opera performed in the Burgtheater that season (1789–90) or the following one (Edge 1996, 80–81 and 108–110). It was performed 25 times in Vienna between its premiere and 6 Dec 1791, the day after Mozart's death, so Mozart might easily have seen it and would surely have been aware of its success. Kotzebue continued to be performed frequently in Vienna; 105 of his plays had been performed there by 1817 (Schröter 2011, 44).

The plot of *Menschenhaß und Reue* can be quickly summarized (see de.wikipedia.org; see also Stock 1971, 113–14, and Anderson 2008, 1–2). The central female character Eulalia marries the Baron Meinau at the age of fifteen. After only two years of marriage, she is seduced by one of her husband's friends while the Baron is away; overcome with shame, she flees from the Baron's

household, leaving behind her two young children. Meinau, in reaction, withdraws into misanthropy, retiring in anonymity to a small cottage with just a single trusted servant; although shunning society, he comes to be known locally for his good works. Throughout the play he is identified as "a stranger" (ein Unbekannter), because initially none of the people who come into contact with him are aware of his identity. Eulalia attempts to atone for her adultery by living in anonymous solitude under the assumed name of "Madame Müller" with General Count von Wintersee and his wife at their country estate. By "Kotzebuan chance" (Mandel 1990, 5), the Count's estate and Meinau's cottage are actually quite near to one another, but neither Eulalia nor Meinau are aware of this at the opening of the play. The action in the play takes place three years after Eulalia's adultery, and the audience learns this backstory only as the play progresses.

The Count's brother-in-law, Major von der Horst has fallen in love at first sight with "Madame Müller," and asks the Countess to convey a marriage proposal to her. In the course of the Countess's conversation with Eulalia, the latter reveals that she is the missing Baroness von Meinau. As it happens, the Major is an old friend of the Baron, whom he recognizes in "the stranger"; when the Major learns Eulalia's identity, he arranges a meeting between the couple. When Meinau and Eulalia meet, Eulalia faints and Meinau flees. The Count and the Major bring the couple together again to attempt a reconciliation. Meinau is inclined to forgive Eulalia, but hesitates, fearing the judgment of society. Eulalia and Meinau ultimately decide to remain separated, hoping to meet again in a better world after death. Eulalia prepares to depart forever, but asks to see her children one last time; neither Eulalia nor Meinau are aware that the children have already been fetched, and have been hidden behind them in the dark, the boy behind Eulalia and the girl behind Meinau. As the couple say their final farewells, the children cry out to their parents, the family embraces, Meinau says "I forgive you" (Ich verzeihe dir!), and the curtain falls. This scene is depicted on the title page of the edition cited here. (For an English translation of this final passage, see Mandel 1990, 5–6.)



The speech in which Eulalia mentions Mozart comes from the second scene of Act 2, the first meeting of Eulalia and the Major. The Major is immediately attracted by Eulalia's beauty and fascinated by her evident cultivation. He asks her how she avoids loneliness in the isolation of the Count's country estate. She responds that her days are full and pass rapidly in the enjoyment of nature. That is fine for summer, he says, but what of the winter? She responds with the speech transcribed here: in winter, she sits by a warm stove lost in her own thoughts, then takes a book out of the cabinet to lift her spirits. "Or," she continues, "I have my keyboard tuned, as well as the schoolmaster knows how, and I play for myself a sonata by Mozart or sing myself an aria by Paisiello."

Menschenhaß und Reue was tremendously popular with audiences, but was thought immoral by many critics, who found it shocking that Eulalia should have escaped harsher consequences for her adultery. Some prominent writers scorned the play as second rate. Schiller, for example, included a caustic epigram on *Menschenhaß und Reue* among his "Xenien," a collection of such epigrams written by Schiller and Goethe that appeared in Schiller's *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1797*. Schiller wittily wrote:

> "Menschenhaß? Nein davon verspürt' ich beim heutigen Stücke
> Keine Regung, jedoch Reue, die habe ich gefühlt."
> [*Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1797*, 266 (image 159); see also Stock 1971, 60–61]

> "Misanthropy? No, I felt not a trace of that in today's play,
> But remorse, *that* I felt."

In 1791, Friedrich Wilhelm Ziegler, a longtime member of the court theater in Vienna, published a critique of *Menschenhaß und Reue* in the form of play using the same characters, *Eulalia Meinau, oder die Folgen der Wiedervereinigung*, to which Kotzebue—never one to retreat from public jousting with his literary rivals—responded with yet another sequel, *Die edle Lüge*. In 1790 in Vienna, Johann Friedrich Schink published a critique of Kotzebue's play, *Rezension des Kozebueschen Schauspieles: Menschenhaß und Reue*. (On the early reception of *Menschenhaß und Reue* in intellectual circles, see Stock 1971, esp. chpt. 6, and Anderson 2008.) Even well into the nineteenth century, *Menschenhaß und Reue* remained sufficiently in the public eye to serve as a reference in the subtitle of Adolf Bäuerle's farce *Der Leopoldstag, oder: kein Menschenhaß und keine Reue*, first performed in the Leopoldstadt Theater in Vienna on 14 Nov 1814. Yet within ten years of his death, Kotzebue's star had fallen so far in the German-speaking world that Carlyle could write:

> ll-fated Kotzebue, once the darling of theatrical Europe! . . . Were not those Plays translated into almost every language of articulate-speaking men; acted, at least, we may literally say, from Kamtschatka to Cadiz? Nay, did they not melt the most obdurate hearts in all countries, and . . . draw tears from iron cheeks? We ourselves have known the flintiest of men, who professed to have wept over them, for the first time in their lives . . . [from Carlyle's "German Playwrights," 1829, quoted in Mandel 1990, 8]

Menschenhaß und Reue was published in 1790 by Himburg in Berlin; this is generally considered to be the first edition (Meyer 2010, 155), and is the one cited here. At least two other German-language editions appeared that same year, and many more were issued over subsequent decades. The play was soon translated into many other languages, becoming a persistently popular stage work in many other countries, as Carlyle recalls. The play was a huge hit in France; it was reported that in Paris, women were fainting in the audience at every performance (Stock 1971, 113). *Menschenhaß und Reue* was produced at the Théâtre Français as late as 1855, long after enthusiasm for the play had faded elsewhere (Stock 1971, 113).

An English version by George Papendick with the title *The Stranger; or, Misanthropy and Repentance*, "faithfully translated, entire, from the German," was published in London in 1798, and the play was produced by Sheridan that same year at Drury Lane, with Sarah Siddons in the role of Eulalia (Mandel 1990, 43–44; Schröter 2011, 30). This version was likewise a tremendous success, and the play was frequently performed in England and America until well into the nineteenth century. *The Stranger* retains the references to Mozart and Paisiello:

> "Then the winter is the season for enjoying our books, and we improve the mind and amend the heart by reading; or I have my harpsichord tuned, as well at least as our parish-clerk can perform that office, and play a sonata of Mozart, or sing an air of Paisiello."

Kotzebue's play also exists in a version adapted for children by Giesecke: *Menschenhaß und Kindliche Reue . . . nach Aug. v. Kotzebue für die Jugend*, Magdeburg, 1792, that likewise retains the reference to Mozart, in a slightly simplified version of the speech, given in this version by the character Eduard Müller: "Oder ich gehe an mein Clavier, und spiele mir selbst eine Sonate von

Mozart, oder singe mir eine Arie von Paisiello." Google Books includes a Dutch version from 1792, *Menschenhaat en Berouw*, that likewise retains the references to Mozart and Paisiello:

> "Of ik laat mijne klavier stemmen zo goed als onze schoolmeester dat verstaat, en speele voor mij zelven eene sonata van *Mozart*, of zinge eene aria van *Paësiëllo*."

Menschenhaß und Reue is not the only play by Kotzebue in which Mozart's name appears. In *Die Verläumder* (Google Books copy: Leipzig, 1800, 82, act III, sc. 12), a conversation between Emilie and Jenny concludes:

> Jenny. [....] Gute Nacht Schwesterchen.
> Emilie. Gute Nacht.
> Jenny. Mein Klavier wird dich doch nicht stören?
> Emilie. O nein.
> Jenny. Mozart soll mir die Grillen vertreiben.
> (sie geht ab.)

In his account of his Siberian "exile," *Das merkwürdigste Jahr meines Lebens* (1802), Kotzebue compares one of his experiences to that of Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*:

> Wenn ich aufgelegt wäre zu scherzen, so könnte ich sagen: ich habe, wie Prinz Tamino in der Zauberflöte, durch Feuer und Wasser gehen müssen, um in die Sibirischen Mysterian eingeweihet zu werden; denn ein ander Mal erreichten wir in der Nacht einen brennenden Wald, und zwar (was ein seltener Fall ist) einen Wald, der zu beiden Seiten des schmalen Weges heftig brannte.—(Gewöhnlich pflegt nehmlich die Landstraße dem Brande eine Grenze zu setzen; hier war sie aber vermuthlich nicht breit genug.)
>
> Anfangs, als wir noch ziemlich weit von der brennenden Strecke entfernt waren, ergetzte mich dieses Schauspiel, das wirklich, besonders in der Dunkelheit, einen erhabenen Anblick gewährte. Als wir aber näher kamen, und ich gewahr wurde, daß unser Weg gerade hindurch führte, erschreckte mich besonders die Neuheit dieser Gefahr. Lichterloh brennende Tannen hatten sich hier und da quer über den Weg an gegenüber stehende Bäume gelehnt; und so mußten wir gleichsam durch eine brennende Ehrenpforte passiren. [vol. 1, 140; see also Schröter 2011, 55–56]

[translation:]

> If I were inclined to jest, I could say: like Prince Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, I had to go through fire and water in order to be initiated into the Siberian Mysteries; for once in the night we reached a burning forest, a forest that, in fact (and this is a rare occurrence), was burning fiercely on both sides of a narrow path.—(Usually, a road serves as a boundary to a fire; here, however, it was not wide enough.)
>
> At first, as we were still quite far from the burning stretch, this drama enthralled me, as it truly, especially in the darkness, provided a noble spectacle. As we came nearer, and I became aware that our path led directly through it, I was especially frightened by the novelty of this danger. Brightly burning fir trees had here and there leaned across the path

to trees on the other side; and thus we had to pass, as it were, through a burning triumphal arch.

Notes (⇧)

John Rice, on the first page of his *Mozart on the Stage*, includes a translation of the sentence in *Menschenhaß und Reue* that refers to Mozart (Rice 2009; the original German is given in note 3); this seems to be the first reference to the passage in the Mozart literature. Rice cites an edition of the play published in Mainz in 1790; in a personal communication, Rice has said that he consulted a copy in the Beinecke library at Yale. Rice's transcription gives "Klavier" instead of "Clavier," but is otherwise identical to the one given above.

Google Books hosts scans of a variety of different editions of *Menschenhaß und Reue*, but apparently not, at the time of this writing, the 1790 Berlin edition. A chronologically constrained search on the name "Mozart" on Google Books returns (among many other hits) Eulalia's speech in a 1793 edition of the play published in Frankfurt and Leipzig (from a scan based on a copy in the library of Stanford University). Digital images of an edition published in Cologne in 1790 are available on the website of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (SBB). Our transcription is based on the digitized copy of the 1790 Berlin edition in the Deutsches Textarchiv (DTA), likewise based on a copy in SBB.

Although the earliest editions of the play appeared in 1790, we have assigned the document to 1789, as *Menschenhaß und Reue* was already widely performed in German-language theaters in that year, and there is no reason to think that the Mozart reference was missing in these early performances.

At the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society in Indianapolis in 2010, Peter Hoyt gave a paper that seems to have drawn broad conclusions about Mozart's reception in Estonia and Prussia based on the reference to the composer in *Menschenhaß und Reue* (see Hoyt's abstract, "Mozart in Estonia (1788) and Prussia (1789)" in the program book for that meeting; neither of us was present at that meeting, and our commentary here is based on independent research by DE). To our knowledge, this paper has not yet been published. Hoyt's abstract speculates that Mozart traveled to Berlin in part in order to be present during preparations for the performance of the play, but elides the fact that Mozart left Berlin before the play's premiere, which would have been an odd thing to do if Hoyt's thesis is correct, namely that Mozart hoped to capitalize on the reflected publicity (from what was, after all, only a single passing mention in the play). Mozart arrived home in Vienna on 4 Jun 1789, and the premiere of *Menschenhaß und Reue* had taken place the previous evening in Berlin, so Mozart obviously cannot have been in the audience. It is also difficult to see how Mozart could have known in advance about the reference to him when planning his trip to Berlin, as Hoyt's abstract seems to imply; the play had not yet been published, was not yet famous, and had not yet been performed in Vienna, and Mozart is not known ever to have been in contact with Kotzebue.

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Credit: John Rice

Author: Dexter Edge

Link(s): DTA (Berlin 1790); SBB (Köln 1790); Google Books (Frankfurt & Leipzig, 1793)

Search Term: mozart

Source Library: SBB: SBB-PK, Yr 9341<a> (Berlin, 1790); SBB: 2 an: Yr 9491 (Köln, 1790); Stanford: PT2386 .A17 1791 V.4 (Frankfurt & Leipzig, 1793)

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