



Mozart: Portrait of a Genius

Norbert Elias

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"Mozart's need for love had grown uncertain of itself in early childhood. His feeling of being unloved found constant confirmation in his changing experiences over the years, and the intensity of his unsatisfied desire to be loved, detectable as a dominant wish throughout his life, very largely determined what had meaning for him and what did not."—From the book

One of the most important social thinkers of our time provides a haunting portrait of Mozart's life and creative genius. German sociologist Norbert Elias examines the paradoxes in Mozart's short existence—his brilliant creativity and social marginality, his musical sophistication and personal crudeness, his breathtaking accomplishments and deep despair.

Using psychoanalytic insights, Elias examines Leopold Mozart's carefully honed ambitions for his son and protege. From the age of six Mozart traveled with his father, performing in the major courts throughout Europe. The elder Mozart worked on his son "like a sculptor on his sculpture," and this deep bond formed the lietmotif in understanding Mozart's early talent and complicated psyche.

Mozart chafed at the constraints of Viennese courtly culture. Growing up in a society which viewed musicians as manual laborers producing entertainment for the court, he fought for an independent livelihood. Vienna's aristocracy ultimately turned its back on the composer, who faced mounting debts, no work, and no prospect of fulfilling his innermost desires. He died feeling that his life had become empty of meaning.

Elias ponders the concept of genius, which he sees as a complex marriage of fantasy, inspiration, and convention. In exploring the tension between personal creativity and the tastes of an era, he gives us a book of startling insight and discovery.

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