

forms. He writes about food, the Bomb ("It's going to kill us, sure as gonif/and gizmo gravitate and groove"), sex and love, the "spell of spelling" ("Why do they always say heighth, but never weighth?"), American places (especially Boston), and American people. Starbuck's linguistic virtuosity, his witticisms, and his puns sometimes conceal his strongly moral vision. But in certain poems, he speaks with forceful directness: "Nations convulsing, their great thought gone static, / try your mere voices; try small work of hands."

MOZART

by Wolfgang Hildesheimer
trans. by Marion Faber
Farrar, 1982
408 pp. \$22.50



The work of Wolfgang Mozart (1756–91) at- tests, in Hildesheimer's words, to "perhaps the greatest genius in recorded history." Yet, insists the biographer, a German-born writer and artist, the music reveals almost nothing about the man; indeed, it camouflages an er- ratic, infantile, and obsessively scatological personality. Friends, relatives, and earlier biographers have further obscured the pic- ture by bowdlerizing Mozart's lyrics and his letters. Hildesheimer's book, a labor of 20 years, dismantles many of the popular myths. Romantics of the 19th century portrayed Mozart as an otherworldly spirit, a creature of exquisite feeling. Hildesheimer exposes the cold, commercial motives behind such sub- lime works as *The Magic Flute*. Mozart was, in fact, surprisingly boorish and insensitive (he even used borrowed phrases in letters to his dying father). Some biographers have re- garded Mozart as a revolutionary because of the irreverent depiction of the upper classes in *Figaro*. Hildesheimer explains that Mozart was merely working within the tradition of received texts. Content was always less im- portant to him than theatrical potential. Without his intending it, *Figaro* did upset Vienna's nobility and thus hastened the com- poser's financial decline. But Mozart (con- trary to legend) had never truly liked Vienna, and Vienna had appreciated him less as a composer than as a performer. As other, more well-mannered musicians rose in public fa-

vor, Mozart became increasingly solitary and, judging by letters to his wife, somewhat mad. Yet it was during these last years that he produced some of his more triumphant works, including *A Little Night Music* and *Don Giovanni*. Immediately upon Mozart's death, Viennese society, once tired of him, began hailing their "little genius." Then the myth-making began.

A BARTHES READER
edited and with an introduction by Susan Sontag
Hill & Wang, 1982
495 pp. \$20

Literary critic, semiotician, sociologist—these were but a few of the labels affixed to the name of one of France's leading intellectuals, Roland Barthes. Though a quiet and unassuming figure (unlike Sartre or Camus), he created a stir in France with his controversial book, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953). In it, he argued that literature should not serve political or utilitarian ends; the "utopia of language" was its own ample justification. Barthes seldom failed to be provocative, whether analyzing the allure of Greta Garbo's face, the language of fashion, or the treatment of death in Tacitus's *Annals*. In his more self-reflective essays, he lived up to the standards of Montaigne, discovering universal truths in personal quirks. His essay on Voltaire, "The Last Happy Writer," exposed the shallowness of that much-overrated philosophe: "He ceaselessly dissociated intelligence from intellectuality, asserting that the world is an order if we do not try too much to order it. . . . This conduct of mind has had a great career subsequently: We call it anti-intellectualism." Before his death in 1980, Barthes's lectures had become popular events. These 30 selections help explain why.

Science & Technology

THE TANGLED WING:
Biological Constraints
on the Human Spirit
by Melvin Konner
Holt, 1982
543 pp. \$19.95.

Somewhere between *Aegyptopithecus*, a small apelike monkey who lived some 30 million years ago and who "makes as good an Adam as any," and the Cro-Magnon people, who 25,000 years ago drew "masterpieces of realism" on cave walls, a distinctly human