

Wolfgang's "Angels": Two New Publications on Maria Anna von Berchtold zu Sonnenburg (née Mozart) and Constanze Nissen (Widowed Mozart)

Elisabeth Hilscher



All content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Received: 21/04/2020

ORCID iD Elisabeth Hilscher: [id 0000-0003-1302-3247](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1302-3247)

Institution (Elisabeth Hilscher): Austrian Academy of Sciences; Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage; Department of Musicology

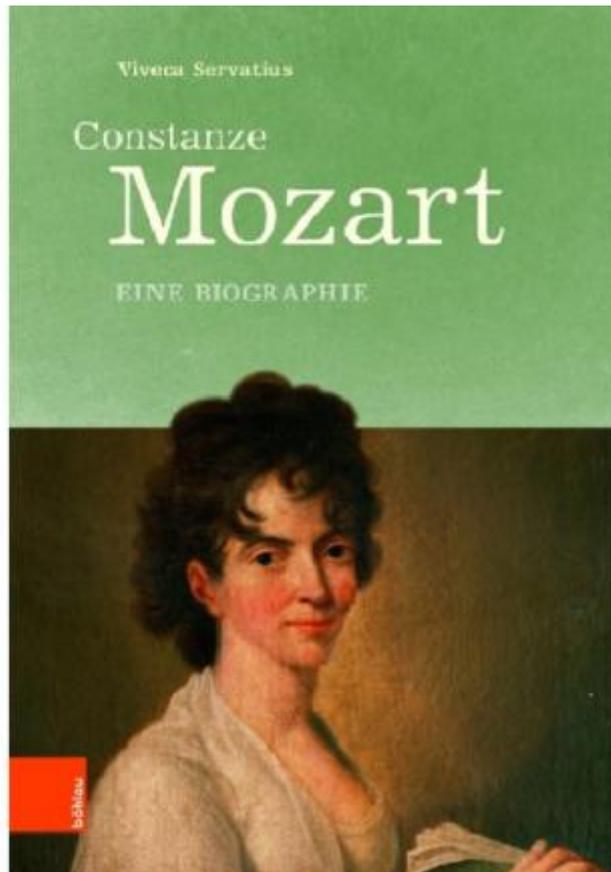
Published: 05/11/2020

Last updated: 05/11/2020

How to cite: Elisabeth Hilscher, Wolfgang's "Angels": Two New Publications on Maria Anna von Berchtold zu Sonnenburg (née Mozart) and Constanze Nissen (Widowed Mozart), *Musicologica Austriaca: Journal for Austrian Music Studies* (November 05, 2020)

Tags: [18th century](#); [19th century](#); [Biographical studies](#); [Denmark](#); [Gender](#); [Mozart, Constanze](#); [Mozart, Maria Anna](#); [Musical life](#); [Salzburg](#); [Society](#); [Socio-cultural studies](#); [Vienna](#); [Women's musical history](#)





Maria Anna Mozart: Facetten einer Künstlerin

ed. by Eva Neumayr

Vienna: Hollitzer, 2019 (Schriftenreihe des Archivs der Erzdiözese Salzburg 20)

308 pp., € 45.00, ISBN 978-3-99012-561-8

<http://www.hollitzer.at/wissenschaft/programm/produktdetail/programm/schriftenreihe-des-archiv-s-der-erzdioezese-salzburg/produkt/maria-anna-mozart-facetten-einer-kuenstlerin.html>

Constanze Mozart: Eine Biographie

by Viveca Servatius, trans. by Krister Hanne

Vienna: Böhlau, 2018

653 pp., €39.99, ISBN 978-3-205-20596-8

<https://www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com/themen-entdecken/literatur-sprach-und-kulturwissenschaften/sprach-und-literaturwissenschaften/literaturwissenschaft-komparatistik/38347/constanze-mozart>

Maria Anna Mozart: Facetten einer Künstlerin

[1] For a long time, monographs of famous people were written without considering their immediate surroundings. But it was often precisely this environment that guaranteed the “great men” the freedom to create “milestones.” And not infrequently it was women who regulated everyday life, which could be quite arduous until well into the twentieth century; it was they who kept annoying visitors and fans away and often acted as secretaries and “psychotherapists.” The fact that many of these people in the background were female may have contributed to the fact that a historiography fixated on male protagonists was only too happy to forget them. And yet there is a saying, in English and in German, that “behind every great man is a strong woman” (“hinter jedem großen Mann steht eine starke Frau”). Anna Magdalena Bach or Celestine Truxa may be mentioned here as representative of many others who have been frequently marginalized, such as Einzi Stolz or Constanze Mozart. Maria Anna has thus remained the eternal child “Nannerl” and featureless “sister of ...,” whereas Constanze, about whom opinions differ until today, has been the subject of a more complex historiography.

The anthology edited by Eva Neumayr is the result of three conferences on Maria Anna Berchtold zu Sonnenburg, née Mozart. The volume’s stated concern is to present Maria Anna as an adult woman and artist, as an independent personality, a committed and popular piano teacher, and an important mediator in the publication of her brother’s works. It was also important to do justice to the changing image of women in society between 1750 and 1820, to take into account their social status, and to shed light on the new opportunities that arose for the widowed Baroness von Berchtold in Salzburg from 1801—for the first time in this breadth, I think. But there are still many traps that tempt us either to play down the biography from the perspective of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as marginal compared to that of the men of the Mozart family, or to let the pendulum swing in the other direction. Eva Rieger, who has herself written a “Nannerl” biography,^[1] devotes her contribution (13–22) to the various images that have been brought to bear on Maria Anna Mozart in research literature to date. Few authors had taken the trouble to deal with the prevailing images of women in the age of Enlightenment as they manifested in different social classes and social groups, which is why even in literature that is already very gender-sensitive, there have been relapses into old clichés in recent times. (Charlotte von Greiner, for example, describes very precisely in her memoirs the tendencies towards gender segregation, which, for her, who very much appreciated scholarly dialogue between men *and* women, caused her trouble from 1800 onwards.)^[2]



Figure 1: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart making music with his father Leopold and his sister Maria Anna (lithograph by Eduard Friedrich Leybold after a painting by Johann Nepomuk della Croce); by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)

In the following contributions, various aspects of Maria Anna Mozart and her life are singled out and even well-known sources are thoroughly reinterpreted through a very broad and comprehensive contextualization. It is exciting that in the course of reading the volume it becomes clear how one and the same source can have different facets and readings, and how a change of perspective can thus allow the familiar to appear in a new light. Eva Neumayr, who not only acts as editor, but is also one of the foremost experts on the sources of Maria Anna, devotes herself to Maria Anna the piano teacher and copyist (23–33 and 203–30). This is an aspect that has been studied scarcely, since for a long time the opinion prevailed in scholarship that Maria Anna, after her career as a child prodigy, had turned to the “female virtues,” managing the household for her father and in her free time only chatting with friends or attending mass. The fact that Maria Anna’s “friends” were first and foremost piano students and that she was mentioned in contemporary publications among the Salzburg *Tonkünstler* in the same breath as Michael Haydn (25–27) was readily overlooked. Monika Kammerlander also puts forth a similar argument (267–86), cautiously examining the teacher-pupil relationship between Margarethe Danzi-Marchant and Maria Anna and showing the differences between their artistic paths: on the one hand the “theatre child” Marchant, on the other Maria Anna Mozart, who is firmly anchored in the new “Second Society” (*Zweite Gesellschaft*), comprised of the emerging *Bürgertum* and the lower nobility. A number of music manuscripts from Maria Anna’s hand (Wolfgang Plath was able to clearly identify her handwriting as early as the 1960s)^[3] also prove that she was a copyist (and orchestrator), supporting her brother and father, and demonstrating a high level of compositional

technique. The Mozart edition at Breitkopf & Härtel would hardly have come about without Maria Anna's expert work. In her contribution to Maria Anna's musical notation, Eva Neumayr does not present any new findings, but reevaluates the well-known works in view of their historical context.

Maria Anna seems, as this volume concludes, to have been much more a child of the Enlightenment philosopher Leopold Mozart than her brother: systematic and orderly in her work (as shown not least by her musical notation), attracted by the educational ideals of the Enlightenment or practicing them as a teacher and educator, and also interested in the natural sciences. Gerhard Ammerer (35–70) sheds light on this latter aspect, which would probably not have been suspected in "Frauenzimmer" (gentlewomen), by following up on two small references in Maria Anna's diary, which alluded to public physics lectures at the University of Salzburg she attended.

Four contributions are devoted to the construction of relationships within the family in the houses of Mozart and Berchtold zu Sonnenburg and show that even well-known documents allow changes in perspective through differentiated readings. Geneviève Geffray (71–88) attempts to reconstruct aspects of Maria Anna's personality from the writings of the Mozart family. Anja Morgenstern (89–109) devotes herself to the relationship of the sisters-in-law Maria Anna von Berchtold zu Sonnenburg and Constanze Mozart/Nissen, which has been evaluated very differently so far, with a focus on their time together in Salzburg. Ulrike Kammerhofer-Aggermann's contribution (111–41) leads to a re-evaluation of Maria Anna's marriage with Johann Baptist von Berchtold zu Sonnenburg. Here it becomes clear that this marriage, although a traditional marriage of convenience, was a "good match" in many respects. Not only did it secure a living for Maria Anna even after the death of her father and, moreover, also after the death of her husband. In addition, she married beyond her state and, despite all her work and seclusion at Sankt Gilgen, she still had the opportunity to continue her artistic education. Compared to the biographies of other Salzburg women from around the Mozart family, Maria Anna had made a good choice—certainly more rational than emotional, but in keeping with the customs of the time and the social milieu of the rising Mozart family. Käthe Springer-Dissmann devotes herself (231–65) to the second underestimated woman in the Mozart family, the mother Anna Maria Mozart, who is usually marginalized in current Mozart literature in similar fashion. She shows how perfectly the Mozart couple worked together in the promotion of their children and presents a thoroughly modern couple, who communicated on almost the same level on many topics. The most comprehensive contribution in the volume is probably also the most exciting: Christoph Großpietsch conducts a criminological investigation (143–201) of all the supposed portraits of Maria Anna Mozart—with the sobering result that apart from the children's portrait by (presumably) Lorenzoni, the large family portrait (probably by Johann Nepomuk Della Croce), and the small family portrait (Carmontelle/Delafosse) there is no authentic portrait of Maria Anna. All the others—this is demonstrated by Großpietsch with great meticulousness—represent other, anonymous ladies of the Second Society from the second half of the eighteenth century. Just as with pictures attributed to Wolfgang Amadé, the wish was often the father to the thought, so that despite their ill-suited appearance and questionable provenance, many other pictures were declared to be of Maria Anna.

All in all, this volume is an excellent compilation of various aspects of Maria Anna Mozart, and portrays a woman's life in its social and intellectual context (at last assigned correctly). And above all: "Nannerl" was finally allowed to grow up!

Constanze Mozart: Eine Biographie

[2] The biography of Constanze Mozart by Viveca Servatius is quite a different matter. The problem is already evident in the preface: Servatius aims to effectively rescue Constanze's honor, to depict her as "the most underestimated woman in music history," who in Servatius's opinion has been portrayed in an unjustifiably negative light in the literature precisely *because* she "was a strong woman at a time when women's freedom of thought and movement was subject to ever greater restrictions" (11).^[4] Although an overview of the literature on Constanze to date is provided on pp. 495–507, a critical examination of scholarly literature has been omitted, as well as a differentiation between different types of texts: pre-scholarly and popular works, monographs, editions, etc. are placed next to each other uncritically and as equal. There is also a lack of critical deconstruction of previous myths—an accusation that Servatius levels at quite a few authors of previously published works on Constanze Mozart. On the other hand, she systematically constructs new myths, in which she sweeps negative judgments about her "heroine" under the table as subjective, while asserting positive ones—regardless of who made them and in what context—as the only valid "truths." This becomes clear in the two concluding chapters "Constanze Mozart: Myths and Reality" ("Constanze Mozart: Mythen und Wirklichkeit," 514–17) and "Attempt at a Characterization" ("Versuch einer Charakteristik," 517–19), in which she tries to summarize Constanze's character once again, despite the fact that some of the characteristics that Servatius attributes to Constanze Mozart/Nissen contradict the sources quoted in the previous chapters: she is described as a "charming salonnière" ("charmante Salonnière," 517) with "her own elegant salon in Vienna" ("eigenem eleganten Salon in Wien," 520), who was able to achieve "high social status" ("hoher sozialer Status," 517), who furthermore "could effortlessly conduct conversation in both French and Italian" ("mühelessowohl auf Französisch als auch Italienisch Konversation führen konnte," 518), and who "quite certainly" was well-educated, "because she seems to have compensated for the shortcomings of her education by reading a lot" ("denn sie scheint die Mängel ihrer Ausbildung durch viel Lesen kompensiert zu haben," 518). However, Servatius earlier points out Constanze's poor command of French in a conversation with Marie-Céleste Spontini (415). It is true that Mozart's widow was able to improve her social status by marrying Nissen, but one can by no means speak of a "high status" (in this regard, Maria Anna von Berchtold zu Sonnenburg was already a significant step higher); and even the "von" that was unlawfully added to the name after Nissen's death could not turn the bourgeois into a noblewoman. (The biting irony of Servatius having inserted an ahistorical "von" into Johann Pezzl's name while quoting his *bon mot* [403] about title addiction in Austria, with which she tries to justify Constanze's actions, has escaped her notice.)



Figure 2: Georg Nikolaus von Nissen; by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)

Servatius persistently pursues the approach of stylizing Constanze Mozart into a salonnière—but why this is so important to her remains a mystery to the reader. Even before her engagement to Wolfgang Amadé, the Weber family and Fanny von Arnstein’s famous Viennese Salon are

associated with each other without any source evidence: “presumably Fanny von Arnstein was already acquainted with the Webers” (“vermutlich war Fanny von Arnstein bereits mit Webers bekannt,” 54)—Mozart and Aloisia Lange appeared in this salon. The reader who does know who frequented the salon of Frau von Arnstein must ask how one can come up with this rather absurd idea, since the social context of the Weber family’s behavior was like day and night to that of the Arnsteins. The salonnière hypothesis assumes strange proportions in chapter 33, “Salon und Soiree” (Salon and Soiree, 226–31). Starting with the two famous salons of the sisters Fanny Arnstein and Cäcilie Eskeles (whose salon, however, only blossomed after the Nissen couple had already moved to Copenhagen), the musical evening entertainments of the widow Mozart, with which she tried to establish herself in the so-called Second Society in Vienna (for which Nissen’s position was an ideal springboard), are puffed up into a salon. Servatius even goes so far as to claim that “one of the most important musical salons in Vienna ... was that of Mozart’s widow” (“einer der wichtigsten musikalischen Salons in Wien ... der von Mozarts Witwe,” 227). And it is self-evident to her that Constanze also frequented the salons of Charlotte Schimmelmann, Friederike Brun, and Kama Rahbek in Copenhagen (316–22), although she has to admit a few pages earlier that the Nissen couple only participated in Copenhagen’s social life to a very limited extent. Moreover, Danish was spoken in the Rahbek salon, a language that Constanze only spoke to a limited extent, as Servatius also notes. But she is satisfied with a single letter from 1818/19, in which a musical evening party at the couple’s home is mentioned, in order to construct a flourishing musical salon for the widow Mozart in Copenhagen as well (322).

The lack of a critical distance from the object of research and, in quite a few cases, a downright negligent “tweaking” of sources in order to rescue Constanze’s honor, runs like a red thread through the entire book. If Constanze Mozart/Nissen was accused by contemporaries of having manipulated her surroundings at her own discretion and for her own purposes, she has also done so posthumously with Servatius. This becomes particularly clear in the characterization of other people in the Mozart couple’s orbit. These historical personalities are not drawn by weighing the historical facts against Constanze’s very subjective assessments, but instead the latter are accepted uncritically—one would almost like to think exclusively. Thus, all singers are accused of being the mistress of noblemen. Antonio Salieri, in the spirit of Pushkin/Shaeffer/Forman, becomes the “evil spirit” of the Mozart family’s happiness and he is also the seducer of Catharina Cavaglieri (64)—even though he was considered one of the most faithful husbands and patriarchs in Vienna at that time! Abbè Vogler is also characterized in a consistently negative way, and Franz Xaver Süßmayr is even accused of mental illness (179). The commendable Josepha Duschek also becomes the target of negative assertions (108 and 116), due to a misinterpretation of an often cited *bon mot* from Schiller of her as resembling “a retired mistress.”^[5] Servatius is fortunate that these individuals have all been dead for a long time, as she would otherwise be confronted with a series of lawsuits for defamation, all of which she would lose due to the overwhelming source material. Whomever Constanze loved, because he or she allowed himself or herself to be used for her purposes, is also given positive testimony in this book: Abbè Stadler, for example, or Gaspare Spontini. The fact that Constanze actually had few friends and that many turned away from the widow over time or after closer contact with her, or, like Nissen’s friend Silverstolpe, increasingly distanced themselves from her, should be worthy of some consideration by Servatius—but this is not the case, since engaging in critical reflection could endanger the *Ehrenrettung*. Instead an attempt is made to relate Constanze Mozart/Nissen to prominent contemporaries and important events—a basic pattern of argumentation, as it were, that runs through the entire biography. Comments such as “certainly” (“sicherlich”), “quite sure” (“ganz sicher”), “very likely” (“sehr wahrscheinlich”) suggest facts or high probability, but this

rhetoric is not backed up by sources and Servatius offers no evidence for her assumptions. They therefore stem solely from her gut feeling and the will to use all means to stylize Constanze Mozart/Nissen as a highly educated, socially respected lady. Everyone knows how quickly such constructed assertions can turn into “facts” which have to be painstakingly rectified by research—a grossly negligent and unscholarly procedure.

[3] What is extremely surprising are the numerous errors and inaccuracies in information directly concerning the Mozart family, since Servatius conducted the research project “Constanze Mozart and Scandinavia” in 2005–2008 and should therefore be familiar with current Mozart research literature. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that she consistently refers to Wolfgang Amadé’s sister Maria Anna as “Nannerl,” whereas Constanze got to know her only as a mature woman and just before her marriage to Johann Baptist von Berchtold zu Sonnenburg (this is particularly annoying if one has previously read the volume edited by Eva Neumayr—see above). Especially for their time together in Salzburg, when the two widows lived in the immediate vicinity, the child’s name is more than unsuitable for the respected piano teacher, composer, and member of the Second Society of Salzburg. Further one reads that Johann Baptist von Berchtold was not a “Pfleger” (Registrar of the court) in Sankt Gilgen, but a “divorce lawyer” (“Scheidungsanwalt,” 100), a profession which could not have existed in the Catholic imperial principality of Salzburg, if only because the Catholic Church at that time did not allow divorce. The education of little Leopold by his grandfather becomes a dark family secret (105–6) and for Leopold Mozart a new cause of death is presented, namely tuberculosis (114). Confusion is created around the fifth child, Anna Maria (*† November 16, 1789): not only does the term “women’s baptism” (“Frauentaufe,” i.e. emergency baptism by the midwife, which was precisely regulated by the state) seem unclear to Servatius, she mentions a protocol about the burial from the Vienna Stadt- und Landesarchiv, in which a male first name is given (136). She does not cite this source, but has taken it over from Emil Karl Blümml (1923)^[6] without verification, so that it can only be assumed that this would have to be the protocol of the coroner’s report (*Totenbeschauprotokoll*), since the burial was a matter for the parishes. (I will only mention in passing the fact that the source reference to the baptismal entry is also missing, although all matrices of the Archdiocese of Vienna are already [available online](#).) Wolfgang Amadé would have applied for the position of Kapellmeister at St. Stephen’s, not for that of Kapellmeister-Adjunct, as can be clearly seen from the file in the Vienna Stadt- und Landesarchiv (dated April 28, 1791), but there is neither a note in the relevant place (144), indicating where Servatius obtained her knowledge, nor is the relevant document mentioned in the list of sources. However, it is difficult for the reader to check the evidence in the notes, as these are found as endnotes at the end of the book and, in addition, the numbering restarts with each main section.

Marriage and (illegitimate) children are topics that have attracted Servatius’s attention in the first place: Not only does she interpret every marriage as a love marriage completely contrary to the customs of the bourgeoisie and nobility in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but she also wants to subsume Constanze’s marriages under this paradigm. This may still be true from the perspective of Constanze’s husbands, who both married “under the table” (Leopold Mozart would have hoped for a daughter-in-law from the higher civil service for his son and Nissen would have been more in keeping with the state), but the traditional aspect of provision cannot be dismissed completely from Constanze’s point of view. These aspects as well as the premarital cohabitation with both husbands are marginalized, however, whereby the marriage with Nissen was more of a *ménage à trois*, since Mozart was more than present in this marriage, which even Servatius, despite all tendency to whitewash, must note as strange at several points. As the crowning glory

of the marriage with Nissen, it is even assumed—based on a letter from Nissen from 1805 that it was difficult “to travel with wife and child” (“mit Frau und Kind zu reisen,” 258)—that Constanze, 43 years old, was pregnant, which would probably have ended in a miscarriage (259); as always without any source evidence. Since Servatius feels compelled to depict Constanze not only as a loving and faithful wife, but also as an ideal mother and grandmother, she does not stop at whitewashing her protagonist’s extremely problematic relationship with her two sons, Carl and Franz Xaver (Wolfgang); she goes a step further and gives them children of their own—since neither were married, illegitimate ones. Thus Constanza Casella—the daughter of Carl’s landlord in Milan, Giovanni Battista Casella and his wife Giovanna Bellocci—becomes Carl’s illegitimate daughter, whereby the name suffices for this assumption, although Servatius must admit: “Actually, there is nothing that could prove that she [Constanza] was Carl’s daughter” (“Eigentlich gibt es nichts, was beweisen könnte, dass sie Carls Tochter war,” 369). But Franz Xaver is also blamed for the daughter of his long-time lover and life partner Josephine von Baroni-Cavalcabó, Julie (341, 447, 486), although in this case there is at least a certain factual basis because of the long-standing relationship. Despite these romantic tendencies, there is an amusing attack of prudery—or has this point been lost in translation?—when discussing Mozart’s highly erotic letter from Berlin of [May 23, 1789](#), in which he asks Constanze to make the marriage bed “quite clean” (“recht sauber”), since his “Büberl” is so looking forward to Constanze, which apparently led to violent bodily reactions of Mozart’s “Büberl” while writing (129). Servatius negates its actual meaning and, on the contrary, associates the “Büberl” in the letter with the young Johann Nepomuk Hummel (however, Wolfgang Amadé had probably thought of anything but him when writing the letter).



Figure 3: Franz Xaver Wolfgang Mozart; by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)

Servatius cannot fail to mention Constanze Mozart's misconduct in the matter of Mozart's grave (165-67, 473-74), in the *Requiem* dispute (175-79, 389-94, and repeatedly in between), the Hummel affair (455-58), and in various publishing matters. Even here she does not manage—despite the overwhelming source and research material—to force herself to deliver an

objectively balanced pro and contra portrayal but feels morally obliged to do her utmost for her “heroine.” And it is precisely with regard to Mozart’s funeral and burial place that a somewhat irritating ignorance of the Josephinian burial order is noticeable, although Brauneis’s contribution from 1991 is quoted.^[7] (The fact that the most recent contribution on this subject by Franz Forster, which appeared in the *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* in 2016,^[8] was not included, may be excused, however.) Constanze’s excuse that she did not know that she herself had to provide for the erection of a burial cross was already implausible during her lifetime, but especially in the later years, after she had risen “holy hell” in Salzburg because of the burial and gravestone for Nissen. That perhaps (or surely?) a veritable marital crisis in the Mozart family might have played a significant role in Constanze’s strange behavior in the case of her first husband’s terminal illness and his funeral, is something that the reader is reminded of, but is not even considered by Servatius, as this would add a bitter aftertaste to the “great love story” of Wolfgang and Constanze and the role of the deeply grieving widow. The story about the widow’s pension from the court (172–73) is described in a maudlin way, even though the approval of such pensions was by no means an act of great mercy (and the audience reported by Franz Xaver Niemetschek and Nissen was probably solely a figment of Constanze’s wishful thinking). It rather was a standard bureaucratic procedure regulated by the Josephinian *Pensions-Norma* (retirement regulation), which not only had been published, but is also easy to find in the files of the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv or the Hof- und Finanzkammerarchiv. (It was already the 147th petition for pension and clemency donations to be processed by the Hofkammer by March 1792—a routine procedure, nothing unusual.)

The fact that this pension was probably one of the reasons why Constanze Mozart and Nissen hesitated so long with their marriage is not discussed (197–98), but the widow would have automatically lost her claim to the pension if she had remarried. Instead, the different denominations of the two is given as a reason, although interdenominational marriage would have been possible in Hungary as early as 1799 (which both finally did in Bratislava in 1809). The clear failure of Constanze in publishing matters, which was only (somewhat) set in motion by Nissen, is embellished, whereas Nissen’s share is played down just as much as that of his sister-in-law Maria Anna von Berchtold (see above), whereby it also becomes obvious that Mozart’s widow had only limited musical abilities, as she could neither do copyist work nor systematize the musical estate (in contrast to her sister-in-law). On the other hand, Servatius insists in many places in the book on the musicality and high level of musical knowledge of Constanze, without providing any evidence for this assertion. Servatius’s remark that André had introduced lithography as “a new printing technique that soon replaced the old engraving” (“eine neue Drucktechnik, die bald den alten Kupferstich ersetzte,” 241) is irritating.

[4] Also somewhat anachronistic appear her efforts to trace Wolfgang Amadé’s compositions during his and Constanze’s marriage back to her influence (see numerous remarks in chapters 5 to 22). Here, a romantic concept of the muses seems to be in the background, as well as the idea—also originating in the Romantic period—that music is (solely) the product of inner impulses and creative urges, and is therefore not primarily a craft, as it was in Mozart’s time and beyond. Servatius denies any deliberate manipulation of the composer’s legacy by Constanze, who did not shy away from blackening out and deliberately selecting documents during her long period as a widow, nor does she acknowledge Constanze’s dogged struggle against everyone and everything that could disturb or even destroy the Mozart myth she had thereby curated (one in which she played no small role in). There is also a complete lack of discussion of theories of myth formation.

The approach of placing the biography of Constanze Mozart/Nissen in the political, social, and intellectual historical context of the time is praiseworthy. The section on the Copenhagen period is reasonably successful, as Servatius feels noticeably at home in Northern European history, but the book on a whole fails due to a lack of knowledge of the much more important periods of Constanze Mozart's/Nissen's life in Vienna and Salzburg (the standard literature is missing from the bibliography).^[9] Here, platitudes, long exposed clichés, and half-knowledge of Austrian and Salzburg history and music history become a mixture that is brimming with mistakes. This in combination with the inadequate critical work on sources (the most diverse types of sources are used without critical questioning of their historical significance, whether they are anecdotes, third-hand reports, newspaper reports, travel diaries, or letters) makes the book slip into a dangerously biased territory close to fiction. It can by no means be recommended as a scholarly text (especially not to students).

As examples, I will mention a few stylistic blossoms: the Habsburg hereditary lands (*habsburgische Erbländer*) are repeatedly referred to as the "österreichisches Imperium" or "Austrian Empire," even though the *Kaiserreich Österreich* (Empire of Austria) did not exist until 1804. Around 1770, the "Queen Dowager" ("Königinwitwe") Maria Theresa is described as reigning together with her son, "the reform-minded emperor of the Austrian Empire, Joseph II" ("dem reformfreudigen Kaiser des österreichischen Imperiums, Joseph II," 42); Maria Theresa was, in fact, the widow of emperor Franz I ("Kaiserinwitwe") and herself queen of Bohemia and Hungary, while Joseph II was emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, not of the then non-existent Empire of Austria. Confusion as to the House of Habsburg's correct title also leads to some rather amusing problems in some places in the book: for example, on the occasion of the Prague coronation the imperial family is demoted to royalty (154)—this is not entirely wrong, for they were royal too, but they were very proud of the title of emperor. Empress Maria Ludovika also becomes the "princess" she never was, because even before her marriage to emperor Franz she was an archduchess (275). Maria Ludovika, the bride of Napoleon and later empress of France Marie Louise, also becomes a princess (279), because the title "Erzherzogin" ("Archduchess") does not seem familiar to Servatius. An almost amusing mistake is the confusion of "Empress Dowager" ("Kaiserinwitwe") and "Emperor's Mother" ("Kaiserinmutter," 482): in 1842, of course, the Empress Dowager (and not the emperor's mother) Caroline Auguste, widow of emperor Franz II/I, visited Salzburg, because the mother of the reigning emperor Ferdinand I, Maria Theresa, the second wife of emperor Franz II/I, had already been forced into eternal *stabilitas loci* in the Kapuzinergruft since 1807. New details can also be found on the history of Sardinia-Piedmont, which was "ruled by the conservative king Karl Felix" in 1822 ("vom konservativen König Karl Felix regiert," 371)—but this kingdom, newly established after the Napoleonic wars, was ruled until 1824 by king Victor Emanuel I (who was, indeed, also conservative to the point of reactionary).

The correct names of the two court theatres in Vienna, Theater nächst der Burg and Theater nächst dem Kärntner Tor, are missing, as well as a description of the developing public concert system and of private and semi-private first music circles. While the important circle around Gottfried van Swieten, for example, is only mentioned in passing (51)—and only according to Otto Jahn (1858)^[10]—the Society of the Associated Cavaliers and the societies of the barons Kees and Braun are overlooked completely. The admittedly confusing theatrical developments in Vienna between 1780 and 1800 are presented contradictorily (e.g. 44), which might derive from vital research literature overlooked by Servatius. While she cites Michtner's book on the Burgtheater as a national theatre in the bibliography,^[11] the corresponding publication by Zechmeister on the

Kärntnertortheater^[12] (judged by its absence from the bibliography) apparently escaped her notice, even though this institution was no less important for Mozart and the theatrical development of his time. The fact that both Gottlieb Stephanie (55) and Lorenzo Da Ponte (110) are styled as “court librettists,” a title which at best would have applied only to the old “poeta cesareo” Metastasio, can almost be described as a marginal note in view of the total number of errors, as can the thoroughly misunderstood role of applause at the court theatres (218). Some of the errors may be due to multiple back and forth translation, which might apply to using the term “Kassenbücher der Universität Wien” instead of “Nationale” (210) or the description of the Vienna Hofburg as a “kaiserlicher Palast” (“imperial palace”), the designation “Vorsteher der Armenhilfe” (“head of poverty relief”) for “Armenvater,” or the Protestant term “Kirchengemeinde” (“church community”) for a Catholic parish. But this does not explain the large amount of blurriness, especially when it comes to terms from the immediate Mozart context, such as *Freihaustheater*, for which Servatius also uses the confusing term “Theater an der Wieden” (144, 217)—or was it mentally associated with the Theater an der Wien, also built by Schikaneder in 1797–1800?^[13] Many Viennese would probably have wished that the public “Redouten” during *Fasching* (carnival) had taken place in the Redoutensäle of the Hofburg (e.g. 219), but the Court Redoutes were only accessible to a select few; the colorful Viennese Fasching activity, on the other hand, took place in the Mehlgrube and other dance halls in the city.



Figure 4: Representative grave of the Mozart family, funded by Johann Evangelist Engl (ca. 1910); by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)

[5] But there are also many mistakes to be found in relation to Salzburg: For example, it is true to say that Salzburg did not belong to Austria at that time (1783), but to claim that parts of Tyrol and Bavaria also belonged to Salzburg at that time is wrong. Here, Servatius gets the history backwards, because the cession of territory to Bavaria only took place in the course of the reorganizations following the Congress of Vienna, the combination with Tyrol in the Salzach

district (“Salzachkreis”) was a brief intermezzo in the course of the Napoleonic Wars. The territory is claimed to be “in principle an independent principality of the Holy Roman Empire (“im Prinzip ein selbständiges Fürstentum des Heiligen Römischen Reiches,” 75–76). The correct term would have been an ecclesiastical principality of the Holy Roman Empire (“reichsunmittelbares geistliches Reichsfürstentum”). The description of Leopold Mozart’s course of study and his path to becoming a professional musician (76) reads as a negative counterpoint to the precise description of Käthe Springer-Dissmann in the volume discussed above. Regarding the exempt Erzabtei (Archabbey) St. Peter, the following can be read: “The cloister was a separate monastery and thus had a somewhat independent position vis-à-vis the archbishop” (81).^[14] The Benedictine monastery (Benediktinerinnen-Hochstift) of Nonnberg is also characterized in a somewhat peculiar way (412). Only Franz Esterl (1841) is cited as a source, not a modern work on the history of Salzburg;^[15] Esterl as well as Servatius seem to have overlooked the fact that the Josephinian reforms, which would have harmed the monastery, were irrelevant for the independent Reichsfürstentum of Salzburg, except for those by Archbishop Colloredo. The information given on church music in Salzburg is contradictory: on the one hand, the decline of both the Nonnberg and the cathedral music, where only choral music was sung, is deplored, but the report of the Novellos (436–37) shows that this was not the case. This contradiction is neither discussed nor examined by means of current research literature on the musical history of Salzburg of the relevant period (see [note 9](#)). There is a lack of understanding (probably also due to a lack of understanding of Catholic rites) for the behavior of the high clergy of Salzburg—which made enormous concessions to Constanze—in the matter of the Nissen funeral. Actually, Constanze Mozart/Nissen’s behavior can only be described as impudent, arrogant, and excessive, which would, however, be contrary to the principle of “saving her honor” (398–99). The list of various “stylistic blossoms” could be continued for a long time, but these few are sufficient to show the basic problems of the present volume.

Annoying to amusing are various linguistic inaccuracies (not all of which are possible to explain in English), such as a persistent transcription error of the word “davor” with “daken” in Constanze’s letters to Silverstolpe (230–31). On the amusing end, we are told of a musical society in Copenhagen that was “eingegangen” or “received” (instead of the more appropriate “aufgelöst” or “dissolved”—the German term is ambiguous [311]), as well as the “antike Hinterlassenschaften” (lit. “antique legacies”) at Bürgelstein Castle (408), which Constanze visited—one hopes they were artefacts or relics and not the droppings of an antique dog (also here the ambiguity of the German term leads to involuntary comedy). Also, it cannot be true that Sophie Haibel made her sister’s death, “known by a special public display” (“durch einen besonderen Anschlag bekanntgemacht,” 476), but instead had a *Partezettel* or *Todesanzeige* (“obituary notice”) printed (as the caption of figure 41 correctly expresses). One of my special favorites, however, is: “Wolfgang must have been informed immediately about his mother’s death, presumably already before she died” (“Wolfgang dürfte sofort über den Tod seiner Mutter unterrichtet worden sein, vermutlich schon, bevor sie starb,” 478). Occasionally, it is unclear whether these inaccuracies emerged from the translation process or whether they have to be credited to Servatius. In any case, the publisher’s proofreading department is to be held accountable, which should at least have been aware of the linguistic (and also historical) inaccuracies.

Has Constanze Mozart’s/Nissen’s honor been successfully saved? No, because it is impossible to ignore the sources, which, over long distances, document a problematic personality: egomaniacal (if not narcissistically immature), addicted to making a name for herself at the expense of others

(such as her two sons and also her late first husband), excessive in her claims and addicted to status (more illusion than reality), manipulative, but astonishingly uneducated for a woman of the Second Society (although Nissen would have given her every opportunity to fill in the gaps). Even in this book, these qualities are evident. Her behavior and manners did not grow with the tasks and roles she had to fulfill (something that even Wolfgang Amadé noticed in the last years of their marriage, see 127 and 135). One can—even after reading this biography sworn to “rescue her honor”—only agree with all of the contemporaries who rather preferred to keep their distance from Mozart’s widow, than be “harnessed to her wheel.” But she was not the only widow in the history of music with these basic character traits, but acted as a role model for all those who followed, be they Einzi Stolz or Vera Kálmán.

Writing women’s history is often a difficult undertaking, not only because the state and amount of sources is usually much worse than those used for prosopographic studies on men, but also because the different role models of women in the various social classes and societies must be taken into account in order to be able to place the statements from these sources in the correct context. There is one aspect, however, where men’s and women’s biographies should not differ: in the observation and processing of the sources with critical distance and scholarly best practices. That this can be achieved is shown not only by the volume on Maria Anna von Berchtold zu Sonneburg edited by Eva Neumayr but also by a recently published study on Anna von Paszthory.^[16] Historical women deserve to be treated with the same academic care in their biographies as men and must not be misused as projection surfaces for socio-political discourse or personal desires.

References

1. Eva Rieger, *Nannerl Mozart: Das Leben einer Künstlerin im 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1990). ↑
2. Caroline Pichler (née Greiner), *Denkwürdigkeiten aus meinem Leben*, ed. Emil Karl Blümml, 2 vols., *Denkwürdigkeiten aus Alt-Österreich 5–6* (Munich: Georg Müller, 1914). For an online version of this book, see [Caroline Pichler, *Denkwürdigkeiten aus meinem Leben*, 2 vols. \(Vienna: A. Pichler’s sel. Witwe, 1844\)](#). ↑
3. Wolfgang Plath, “Zur Echtheitsfrage bei Mozart,” in *Mozart-Schriften: Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, ed. Marianne Danckwardt, Schriftenreihe der Internationalen Stiftung Mozarteum Salzburg 9 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1991), 184. ↑
4. Original wording: “Constanze Mozart-Nissen war eine starke Frau in einer Zeit, als die Bewegungs- und Meinungsfreiheit der Frauen immer weiter eingeschränkt wurde. Dennoch darf sie wohl als die meist unterschätzte Frau der Musikgeschichte gelten.” ↑
5. It is not Friedrich Schiller but Duchess Amalie who characterized Duschek as “not dissimilar to a retired mistress” (“einer abgedankten Mätresse nicht unähnlich”); this refers, however, only to her appearance, not to her past, as Servatius seems to believe. [Schiller to Gottfried Körner, May 7, 1788](#): “Among other things, the reigning Duchess made the remark about her [Duschek] that she looks not dissimilar to an abdicated mistress. I must confess to you myself that I liked Duscheck [sic] much less here, where I saw her often, than in Dresden: she had so much (I don’t like to call it impudence) so much audacity, and in her outward manner, in which one perhaps does her wrong, such a sneering quality.” Original wording: “Unter anderen machte die regierende Herzogin die Bemerkung über sie, daß sie einer abgedankten

Maitresse nicht unähnlich sehe. Ich muß Dir selbst gestehen, daß mir die Duscheck hier, wo ich sie öfter sah, viel weniger gefallen hat, als in Dresden: sie hatte soviel (Frechheit möchte ich es nicht gern nennen) soviel Dreistigkeit, und in ihrem Aeußern, worin man ihr vielleicht Unrecht thut, soviel Moquantes.” Servatius does not quote the original letter, but Johann Friedrich Reichardt’s travel reports in Gustav Gugitz’s edition: [Johann Friedrich Reichardt, *Vertraute Briefe geschrieben auf einer Reise nach Wien und den Österreichischen Staaten zu Ende des Jahres 1808 und zu Anfang 1809: Eingeleitet und erläutert von Gustav Gugitz* \(Munich: Georg Müller, 1915\), 1:54](#). In Reichardt’s original, this *bon mot* is nowhere to be found, but his characterization of Duscek is far more complimentary than that of Duchess Amalie: “I can no longer find my former patrons and friends. But in Madame Duscek I have found another dear and talented friend from that joyful youth, who still possesses her old sincerity and ardent zeal for everything beautiful.” [Johann Friedrich Reichardt, *Vertraute Briefe geschrieben auf einer Reise nach Wien und den Österreichischen Staaten zu Ende des Jahres 1808 und zu Anfang 1809* \(Amsterdam: Im Kunst- und Industrie-Comtoir, 1810\), 1:132](#). Original wording: “Meine frühern Gönner und Freunde find’ ich nicht mehr. Doch habe ich noch eine liebe talentvolle Freundin jener frohen Jugendzeit, in Madame Duscheck, wiedergefunden, und in ihr die alte Herzlichkeit und den heißen Eifer für alles Schöne.“ ↑

6. Emil Karl Blümml, *Aus Mozarts Freundes- und Familienkreis* (Vienna: Strache, 1923). ↑
7. Walter Brauneis, “Mozarts Begräbnis,” in *Zaubertöne: Mozart in Wien, 1781–1791; Ausstellung des Historischen Museums der Stadt Wien im Künstlerhaus, 06.12.1990–15.09.1991* (Vienna: Museen der Stadt Wien, 1991), 542–47. ↑
8. Franz Forster, “Mozarts Begräbnis: Datum?—Winterwetter?—Und auf welchem Friedhof wirklich?—Zwei Trauerzüge,” in *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 71, no. 4 (2016): 325–31. ↑
9. See, for example, *Geschichte der Stadt Salzburg*, ed. Heinz Dopsch and Robert Hoffmann (Salzburg: Anton Pustet, 1996); *Salzburger Musikgeschichte: Vom Mittelalter bis ins 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jürg Stenzl, Kurt Bisak, and Lars E. Laubhold (Salzburg: Anton Pustet, 2005); and *Wien: Musikgeschichte; Von der Prähistorie bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Elisabeth Fritz-Hilscher and Helmut Kretschmer (Vienna: Lit, 2011). Many facts about Vienna’s history could have been researched easily via [Wien Geschichte Wiki](#). ↑
10. [Otto Jahn, *W. A. Mozart*, 4 vols. \(Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1856–59\)](#). ↑
11. Otto Michtner, *Das alte Burgtheater als Opernbühne: Von der Einführung des Deutschen Singspiels (1778) bis zum Tod Kaiser Leopolds II. (1792)*, *Theatergeschichte Österreichs* 3/1 (Vienna: Böhlau, 1970). ↑
12. Gustav Zechmeister, *Die Wiener Theater nächst der Burg und nächst dem Kärntnerthor von 1747 bis 1776: Im Anhang chronologisches Verzeichnis aller Ur- und Erstaufführungen*, *Theatergeschichte Österreichs* 3/2 (Vienna: Böhlau, 1971). ↑
13. Although two recently published books by Tadeusz Krzeszowiak, *Theater an der Wien: Seine Geschichte und Technik, 1801–2001* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2002) and *Freihaustheater in Wien, 1787–1801: Wirkungsstätte von W. A. Mozart und E. Schikaneder; Sammlung der Dokumente* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2009) may have escaped her notice, it is surprising that neither the study by Otto Erich Deutsch, *Das Freihaustheater auf der Wieden, 1787–1801*, 2nd ed. (Vienna: Deutscher Verlag für Jugend und Volk, 1937) nor that by Anke Sonnek, *Emanuel Schikaneder: Theaterprinzipal, Schauspieler und Stückeschreiber* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1999) are represented in the bibliography. ↑
14. Original wording: “Das Kloster stellte ein eigenes Stift dar und besaß damit eine einigermaßen selbständige Stellung gegenüber dem Erzbischof.” ↑

15. [Franz Esterl, *Chronik des adeligen Benediktiner-Frauen-Stiftes Nonnberg in Salzburg: Vom Entstehen desselben bis zum Jahre 1840* \(Salzburg: Franz Xaver Duyle, 1841\).](#) ↑
16. Anna Schirlbauer, "Eine Mozart-Schülerin: Die seltsame Lebensgeschichte der Anna von Paszthory," *Studien zur Wiener Geschichte: Jahrbuch des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Wien* 75 (2019), 181–303. ↑

Cover picture: silhouette of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart by Hieronymus Löschenkohl; by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)