

William Stafford

## All about Eve: Mozart and Women

THERE ARE TWO STORIES ABOUT MOZART AND WOMEN. One, part of the image of him as sensuous and dissipated, is the story of Mozart the philanderer. The other is the story of a weak man who tragically fell victim to women's wiles. These stories are not as opposite as they seem, for they mirror one of the oldest archetypes. Woman as Eve the temptress deprived man of his immortality. The myth binds together sex and death.

Instead of tracing the legend of Mozart's love-life forward from the earliest hints, let us reverse the procedure and hunt it back.

[Constanze] attested after his death that his friendship with fair pupils or fair singers sometimes led to infidelities which he at once confessed to her and which she freely forgave.<sup>1</sup>

Apparently he also seduced the servants:

Some of the less slatternly ones may have been sent about their business by Constanze in little fiery fits of jealousy, more or less justified. For oddly enough – and yet understandably in a way – the young man who before his marriage had prided himself on his fastidiousness, now began to play with paltry temptations to extra-marital diversions, some of them none too dainty. How far his little infidelities went we do not know at all definitely, but we hear that before long Constanze had to listen, half dismayed and half amused, to lighthearted and loose-tongued confessions from a husband who was so entertainingly frank and at the same time so sincerely repentant that she could never refuse him an impulsively affectionate forgiveness.<sup>2</sup>

These narrations, from 1959 and 1935 respectively, might convince an unwary reader. The second is so specific, and both convey the impression that they rely upon the testimony of the widow herself, who could scarcely have had a motive to lie about this. But where does the information come from? Paumgartner, writing in 1927, reported that Constanze was willing to forgive affairs with servant girls – 'Stubenmädeleien', she called them – but not with artistic or

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1. John Naglee Burk, *Mozart and his Music* (New York, 1959), 189

2. Eric Blom, *Mozart* (1935)(London, 1962), 120

educated women who might be a challenge to herself.<sup>3</sup> The same information is to be found in Abert's standard biography of 1919 and Schurig's of 1913. Belmonte's study of Mozart and women of 1905 recounts the 'Stubenmädleien' story, adding that Constanze did not always forgive him readily; according to her sister there were furious rows.<sup>4</sup>

Somewhere about here, part of the trail goes to ground. I can find no earlier reference to seducing the servants. Where did Belmonte get it from? At one point he refers to 'Salzburg tradition', and informs us that he has gleaned family traditions from the granddaughter of Joseph Lange, who married Aloysia Weber, Mozart's sister-in-law. But what possible value can be attached to stray oral traditions, recorded over a century after the alleged events? The other part of the trail, the violent rows about Mozart's affairs, can however be traced back further – to no less an authority than the classic scholarly biography of Otto Jahn of 1856:

'He was so good, it was impossible to be angry with him; one was obliged to forgive him.' Her sister, however, betrays that Constanze was not always so patient, and that there were occasional violent outbreaks.<sup>5</sup>

Many details of Mozart's alleged amorous entanglements are preserved in Jahn, and a good many stories were published in the 1840s, to which we must return in a moment. But for the time being let us stick to the trail of his confessions to Constanze. Yet another part of it has now come to a dead end. I can find no earlier reference to the violent rows. Jahn had collected oral traditions in Vienna and Salzburg, so perhaps his uncited source lies there. But if the sister in question was Sophie, it is strange that the sources which record Sophie's reminiscences – Nissen, Holmes and Lyser – make no mention of it.

We are still hot on the trail of Constanze's forgiveness, and two passages from Nissen lead us to think that we have cornered our quarry. One of them tells that he loved his wife truly, and told her everything, even his little sins, which she forgave. According to the other, he indulged in many gallantries outside marriage which his good wife willingly overlooked.<sup>6</sup> But this passage is simply plagiarized from Arnold's little book of 1803:

At the same time he was a married man, fathered four children, loved his wife dearly and also outside the marriage bed indulged in many gallantries with pretty actresses and such fine maidens and married women, which his good wife gladly overlooked.<sup>7</sup>

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3. Paumgartner, *Mozart*, 273

4. Carola Belmonte, *Die Frauen im Leben Mozarts* (Augsburg, 1905), 102

5. Jahn, *Life of Mozart*, ii, 269

6. Nissen, *Biographie*, 690, 569

7. Arnold, *Mozarts Geist*, 65

The fact that material from other writers was scissors-and-pasted into Nissen cannot be taken to prove that Nissen and Constanze endorsed that material, much less that it told the truth. Nissen's principal contribution before his death was to assemble the material. The final compilation was by no means entirely his and Constanze's work, for the widow enlisted the help of Johann Heinrich Feuerstein to complete the task. This is one of the few scraps of information in Arnold not plagiarized from Niemetschek – and Arnold gets the number of children wrong. In fact it may be nothing more than an imaginative expansion of Niemetschek: 'He loved her truly, confided everything to her, even his petty sins – and she rewarded him with tenderness and true care'.<sup>8</sup> This is the source also of the first passage in Nissen mentioned above. Here at last, it may be surmised, is Constanze's own testimony, given to and recorded by Niemetschek; here is the seed out of which it all grows. But it does not prove that Mozart was a philanderer. 'Petty sins' is unspecific. The sowing of wild oats is a possible meaning; but, if Constanze really did feel aggrieved about money, it might mean that instead.

Apart from this tradition stemming from Niemetschek, a wealth of stories and speculations gradually appeared in print, most of them half a century or more after Mozart's death. No doubt some of them were based on the gossip of his contemporaries; but none of them can be securely anchored in the testimony of a witness who was in a position to know.

Suard's 'Anecdotes sur Mozart' of 1804 not only claim that he indulged in extra-marital affairs. Suard also relates and disputes a rumour that Mozart was persuaded to write *Die Zauberflöte* by a woman of the theatre who gave him her favours in return and a fatal illness in the process.<sup>9</sup> This story was amplified in an anonymous article of 1857 which named Barbara Gerl, the first Papagena.<sup>10</sup> But the 'Joseph Deiner' memoirs point the finger at the first Pamina, Anna Gottlieb, still living in 1856 at the age of 88, as does Lyser in the *Mozart-Album* of that year.<sup>11</sup> The fanciful may imagine for themselves what went on in Schikaneder's wooden summerhouse, where Mozart is said to have composed the opera.

In 1827 Zelter remarked to Goethe in a letter that Mozart had destroyed his health by womanizing.<sup>12</sup> In 1829 the banker Henickstein, whose sister had been one of Mozart's piano pupils, told the Novellos that Mozart was always in love with his pupils and that he would not take pains with any he did not love. According to Stendhal, the first Don Giovanni, Luigi Bassi, told him in 1813 that Mozart 'was very popular with the ladies, in spite of his small size; but he had a most unusual face, and he could cast a spell on any woman with his eyes'.<sup>13</sup>

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8. Niemetschek, 64

9. *MDB*, 498

10. Chailley, *The Magic Flute*, 303-4

11. *MDB*, 654; Kayser, *Mozart-Album*, 85. Lyser claims to have obtained his information from the first Pamina herself, but refers to her as Mme Uhlich.

12. Schurig, *Konstanze Mozart*, 146

13. Novello, 144, 150; *NMD*, entry for 1787

The most damaging scandal associated with Mozart's name was the Hofdemel affair. Hofdemel, a government official and Masonic lodge brother of Mozart's, had lent the composer money. His wife was Mozart's piano pupil. The day after Mozart's death he attacked his wife, who was pregnant, with a knife, severely wounding her about the face and neck. Then he cut his own throat. A short story published in 1841, 'Mozart and his lady friend', is obviously based on this incident although it does not name the Hofdemels.<sup>14</sup> According to the story, the Baron is jealous of his wife's (Platonic) adoration for the dying Mozart; he is also a miser. He asks his wife to lend him 3000 florins. She has to confess that she has already lent the money to Mozart; part indeed she has paid for the Requiem, which she has secretly commissioned in order to help him out. The Baron is furious but consoled by the doctor's statement that Mozart will not die. The doctor meant that Mozart's fame will be immortal, but the Baron has understood him literally. Friends burst in to announce Mozart's death: the Baron realizes that the money is gone forever. Left alone, they quarrel. The wife admits she has kissed Mozart's hand and forehead, and her husband insults her. She throws her wine at him, and he lunges with a table-knife, wounding her. She faints and he cuts his throat.

The author insists that the story is a true one, already leaked in the press. But it contains details that are patently false, such as the attribution of the commissioning of the Requiem to Frau Hofdemel instead of to Count Walsegg. It seems likely however that rumours had been around, perhaps since the suicide. According to Jahn, Beethoven once refused to play before the widow Hofdemel because she had been Mozart's mistress.<sup>15</sup> Jahn and most subsequent scholars have not credited the story.

An unusually rich vein of gossip appeared concerning the Prague connection and the première of *Don Giovanni*. According to Lyser in the *Mozart-Album* of 1856, Mozart was Josepha Duschek's 'Anbeter' or 'Cicisbeo' – recognized admirer (platonic, Lyser unconvincingly adds). He had a passion for Teresa Saporiti, the first Donna Anna. She remarked on one occasion on his unprepossessing appearance. Caterina Bondini, the first Zerlina, reported this to him, so as to transfer his attentions to herself: he had an especially long relationship with her.<sup>16</sup>

According to Rochlitz, when Mozart arrived in Berlin in 1789 *Die Entführung* was being performed. He entered the theatre unannounced, drew attention to himself by his travelling garb and interjections when he did not like the performance, and finally brought the whole thing to a halt by shouting out: 'Damn it - why won't you play D natural!'. The part of Blonde was being sung by

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14. L. Schefer, 'Mozart und seine Freundin', *Orpheus*, ii (1841), 273-339. The earlier press reports claimed by Schefer have not been found. When Jahn questioned Schefer, by then an old man, he could not remember his sources.

15. Otto Jahn, *Gesammelte Aufsätze über Musik* (Leipzig, 1866), 230-5. Jahn first heard of the affair in 1852 from Karl Czerny, Beethoven's piano pupil. Czerny's father had known Frau Hofdemel well. No testimony other than this and Schefer's story links Mozart to the Hofdemel tragedy. No testimony suggests that Hofdemel murdered Mozart, as Francis Carr claims, in his *Mozart und Constanze* (London, 1983).

16. Kayser, 18-19, 24-5, 85

Madame Baranius, a very attractive actress (who had been the king's mistress). She was reluctant to sing in front of the composer. 'Madame', he said to her, 'what nonsense is this? You have sung gloriously, really gloriously: and – so that you can be even better in the future, I will go through the part with you myself!'<sup>17</sup> Perhaps at this point Rochlitz withheld part of the gossip, perhaps others embroidered his story. Jahn says that, 'according to old tradition in Berlin', Mozart became deeply involved with her, and it cost his friends much trouble to extricate him. Apparently this tradition, which Jahn doubts, did not get into print until 1856.<sup>18</sup>

Some of this gossip has a suspiciously predictable look to it: he had an affair with Henriette Baranius, who was singing the role of the pert Blondchen in an opera about a harem, another with Barbara Gerl, who was playing Papagena, always portrayed as sexy; and when he went to Prague to mount the first performance of *Don Giovanni* he behaved like his hero.

The list of women with whom Mozart is alleged to have had an affair has continued to grow since 1856. The first Susanna was Nancy Storace, a very beautiful singer, separated from her brutal husband; she lived unmarried with Francesco Benucci, the original Figaro in Mozart's opera, Lord Barnard and John Braham the singer, and may even have been a mistress of the Prince of Wales (the future Prince Regent). The tale of Mozart's love for her is based upon the aria with piano and orchestral accompaniment, '*Ch'io mi scordi di te*' K505 which he composed 'For Mselle Storace and myself' – a 'declaration of love in music' – and upon the allegation that she kept his letters for her own eyes only, destroying them before her death.<sup>19</sup> All this is circumstantial and speculative.

It has been said that he had an 'amitié amoureuse' with his pupil Frau von Trattner. There was perhaps a scandal and the affair broke up in the autumn of 1784. The evidence cited for this is the Piano Sonata in C minor and fantasia in that key, dedicated to her and published in autumn 1784 and spring 1785 – 'tragic works impregnated with the most unmistakable passion'. He sent her two letters about how they should be played which she refused to hand over to Constanze after Mozart's death and which are now lost.<sup>20</sup> This is the story: in fact, it was not Therese von Trattner who refused to hand over these letters but her heirs. They had not been kept secret: Niemetschek had seen one of them, and Constanze herself may have read them.<sup>21</sup>

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17. *AMZ*, i (1798-9), 21-2 (10 October 1798)

18. Jahn, *Life of Mozart*, iii, 234

19. Einstein, 85. Nancy Storace's relationship with the Prince is touched upon in Curtis Price, 'Italian Opera and Arson in Late Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, xlii (1989), 66-7, 70, 72.

20. Massin, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, 426, 976

21. Niemetschek, 59; Schurig, *Konstanze Mozart*, 22

It has been suggested that he had carnal knowledge of his cousin, on the basis of possible sexual innuendo in his letters to her and his remark 'A propos, since I left Augsburg, I have not taken off my trousers, except at night before going to bed'.<sup>22</sup> It is fitting to conclude with one final allegation that he deflowered an unmarried woman – Constanze herself. Schurig suggests that this is why he had to marry her. It has also been surmised, on the basis of no evidence whatsoever, that she fled to the home of Baroness Waldstätten because Mozart had made her pregnant and that the illness for which Mozart pledged the C minor Mass K427, should she recover, was a miscarriage.<sup>23</sup>

Where Mozart's sex life is concerned, the authorial imagination has worked overtime. It would be wrong and indeed anachronistic to embrace the opposite extreme, reconstructing him on a nineteenth-century petty bourgeois model of respectability and marital fidelity. Insofar as eighteenth-century court society permitted sexual freedom, no doubt Mozart made use of that freedom. But what hard facts on this topic can be gleaned from the letters? Two of them, both by Mozart himself and both from the beginning of his Vienna period, show that there was gossip about him during his life. Someone has said that Mozart only left Salzburg for the Viennese women, and Leopold has heard that his son danced with a courtesan at a ball.<sup>24</sup> There is a letter, to Baroness Waldstätten, suggesting that Mozart affected a gallant and flirtatious approach to women:

Since the night when I saw your ladyship at the ball with your hair so beautifully dressed - gone is my peace of mind! .... I should almost be prepared to wager that your Ladyship had the same experience *a proportion!* You smile! You blush! Ah, yes I am indeed happy. My fortune is made! But alas! Who taps me on the shoulder? Who peeps into my letter? Alas! alas! alas! My wife!<sup>25</sup>

The letters prove beyond reasonable doubt that Mozart was a lusty man. When he was proposing to marry Constanze, he wrote to his father: 'The voice of nature speaks as loud in me as in others, louder, perhaps, than in many a big strong lout of a fellow'. He continued that he would not seduce an innocent girl nor frequent whores:

Besides, if such a thing had occurred, I should not have concealed it from you; for, after all, to err is natural enough in a man, and to err *once* would be mere weakness - although indeed I should not undertake to promise that if I had erred once in this way, I should stop short at one slip.<sup>26</sup>

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22. *LMF*, 403; Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Mozart* (1977) (London, 1983), 63

23. Massin, 389; Schurig, *Wolfgang Amadè Mozart*, ii, 91

24. *LMF*, 752, 743

25. *LMF*, 824

26. *LMF*, 783

Writing from Berlin in 1789, he not only threatened to take Constanze by the front curls, but also to give her a thorough spanking on her 'dear little kissable arse', and in the next letter he describes his mounting excitement at the thought of sleeping with her:

Arrange your dear sweet nest very daintily, for my little fellow deserves it indeed, he has really behaved himself very well and is only longing to possess your sweetest ... Just picture to yourself that rascal; as I write he crawls on to the table and looks at me questioningly. I, however, box his ears properly – but the rogue is simply ... and now the knave burns only more fiercely and can hardly be restrained.<sup>27</sup>

The letters do not prove, however, that Mozart strayed beyond the marriage bed, though of course it is possible to 'read between the lines' and interpret them that way. If the reader begins with the assumption that Mozart was Don Giovanni, his letter of good advice to his young friend Gottfried von Jacquin will be interpreted as cynical and rather sinister jesting:

Surely you are becoming every day more convinced of the truth of the little lectures I used to inflict upon you? Surely the pleasure of a transient, capricious infatuation is as far removed as heaven from earth from the blessed happiness of a true and rational love? Surely in your heart of hearts you often feel grateful to me for my admonitions! You will end up by making me quite conceited. But, jesting apart, you do owe me some thanks after all, if you have become worthy of Fräulein N—, for I certainly played no insignificant part in your reform or conversion.<sup>28</sup>

But if the reader approaches the correspondence with 'innocent' eyes, unprejudiced by the legends, she is likely to be impressed with Mozart's devotion to his wife, a devotion which verges upon obsession. He begs her to write more often, worries about her health and that she might fall when getting into the baths at Baden. He also worries that she is flirting with other men. Before their marriage he was horrified to hear that in a game of forfeits she had allowed a gallant to measure her calves. Many years later he wrote that she had been too free and easy at Baden, with men who consequently became too familiar:

A woman must always make herself respected, or else people will begin to talk about her. My love! Forgive me for being so frank, but my peace of mind demands it as well as our mutual happiness. Remember that you yourself once admitted to me that you were inclined to *comply too easily*. You know the consequences of that ... Oh, God, do try, my love! Be merry and happy and charming to me. Do not torment yourself and me with unnecessary jealousy. Believe in my love, for surely you have proofs of it, and you will see how happy we shall be. Rest assured that it is only by her prudent behaviour that a wife can enchain her husband.<sup>29</sup>

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27. LMF, 927, 929

28. LMF, 913

29. LMF, 933

Some have read this as proof that both husband and wife were playing around, others as testimony to Mozart's obsession with his honour, and devotion to the romantic ideal of the 'companionate marriage' as opposed to the laxity of court society. It certainly testifies to a love which had not gone cold; one is reminded of Kelly's remark that Mozart was passionately fond of his wife. The argument recently proposed, that Constanze was having an affair at Baden with Süßmayr, who was the real father of Franz Xaver Wolfgang, collapses utterly under scrutiny: the *coup de grâce* is the fact that both Mozart and his son had a hereditary deformity of the left ear.<sup>30</sup>

The disapproving story of a man destroyed by lechery is an archetype of great antiquity, set to music, indeed, by Mozart himself. Only in archetypes does exuberant sexual activity inevitably bring death. In Mozart's case any notoriety might have made it difficult for him to get young female piano pupils, and might also have earned the disfavour of Joseph II, who was more than a little puritan. Whether philandering is disapproved depends on the moral stance of the observer. Some biographers have accepted the tales about Mozart and have obviously thought them to his credit:

Also, in his disillusionment, and with an ill wife, he began to have intrigues. While he was in Berlin there is no doubt that he had a love affair with an actress called Henrietta Baranius, who was a mistress of the king's. It is futile to deny this, as does his biographer [Jahn]. ... But no lover of Mozart can grudge him this last warming of his blood: for soon he was to lie cold in his grave.<sup>31</sup>

Especially in the heyday of Romanticism it was thought that artists behaved like that. How could an opera composer convincingly depict emotions he had not experienced? The novel by Heribert Rau accordingly invents a passionate adolescent affair with Giuditta Uslinghi, daughter of the house where Mozart and his father lodged in Rome, just in time to prepare him psychologically for the composition of *Mitridate*. Rau has her renew the affair at the time of the composition of *Don Giovanni* in order to give him a booster dose. Schurig has a Nietzschean admiration for this opera in which he beholds the eternity of passion and a life driven by elemental powers; evidently he thinks that Mozart was no stranger to such drives. Schiedermaier argues that Mozart must have experienced the appetites of the Don in order to understand and depict the type. Abert insists that the role of love in Mozart's life is not to be understood in the gossipy way of philistines. The creative genius experiences love in a different way from ordinary men, passion being central to his nature. Mozart describes love in all its forms in his operas, and experienced it in all its forms in his life.<sup>32</sup>

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30. Dieter Schickling, 'Einige ungeklärte Fragen zur Geschichte der Requiem-Vollendung', *MJb* 1976-7, 265-76; answered by J. H. Eibl, 'Süßmayr und Constanze', *MJb* 1976-7, 277-80

31. Sacheverell Sitwell, *Mozart* (Edinburgh, 1932), 127-8

32. Schurig, *Wolfgang Amadé Mozart*, ii, 208-10; Schiedermaier, *Mozart*, 359; Hermann Abert, *W. A. Mozart* (1919-21) (Leipzig, 1985), ii, 12-13

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ACCORDING TO THE SECOND STORY OF MOZART DESTROYED BY WOMEN, he was no Don Giovanni, not masterful and successful with women at all. On the contrary, he was small, unprepossessing, and lacking in charisma. But he was susceptible and uxorious. It was his misfortune to be pulled into the orbit of the Weber family.<sup>33</sup> He first met them in Mannheim in 1777 or 1778. The father, Fridolin, had had a minor post as an official but had thrown it up in 1765 to live poor and insecure at Mannheim, as a singer, copyist and prompter. This unwise move, perhaps instigated by the mother, Maria Cäcilia, herself from Mannheim and doubtless longing to return from provincial obscurity to the bright lights, typifies the bohemian, gypsy-like, 'Weberisch' nature. Maria Cäcilia was the driving force and she was to become Mozart's bad fairy.

The second daughter Aloysia, a beauty and a fine singer, used all her coquetry to entrap the young man. Besotted with her, he dallied in Mannheim where he had no prospects instead of journeying on to Paris. When he eventually arrived in Paris he could not settle there because of the thought of her; indeed he turned down the promising offer of the post of organist at Versailles. But when he returned to her in Munich, where she had been hired as a singer with a good salary, it became clear that she, and the family, had merely been using him. He had trained her voice, and had seemed a source of useful contacts, but now she no longer needed a poor musician with no prospects. She dropped him.

Mozart renewed his acquaintance with the Webers in 1781, when he went freelance in Vienna. In the meantime father Fridolin had died, leaving nothing but debts. The mother now rented an apartment in a house called 'Zum Auge Gottes', heading a lax and disorderly household. She drank too much and the daughters gave their attention to dress rather than housework. Thrift was beyond them: they kept a maid even though they could not afford it. Mozart took lodgings with them, and the mother determined to offload the third daughter, Constanze, on to him. There was a bad precedent, had Mozart known about it. Aloysia had meanwhile married the actor Lange, and in return for her hand the mother had extorted a contract in which he agreed to pay the mother a lump sum of 900 gulden, plus an annual income of 700 gulden for life. Of course Mozart was not told about this; instead he was fed the lie that Aloysia had abandoned her destitute family without resource.

Soon Mozart was caught in her web. Constanze lacked all talent, was uneducated and not pretty; but the Papageno in Mozart was drawn to this primitive, sensual being. His father understood the Webers well enough and was horrified; he launched alarmed, angry letters from Salzburg. Maria Cäcilia now brought Constanze's guardian, Johann von Thorwart, into action. He compelled Mozart to sign a contract agreeing to marry Constanze within three years, or pay her 300 gulden per annum for life. Constanze artfully entangled him further by tearing the contract up before his eyes, declaring that she did not doubt his love.

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33. My account of Mozart, Eve's victim, is assembled from the following: Belmonte, *Die Frauen im Leben Mozarts*; Schurig, *Wolfgang Amadé Mozart and Konstanze Mozart*; Blümml, *Aus Mozarts Freundes- und Familien kreis*; Boschot, *Mozart*; and Einstein, *Mozart*.

The mother tried a new tactic; she forbade Mozart to see her daughter. Mozart now arranged for Constanze to take refuge with Baroness Waldstätten (novelists later delighted to call her flight the 'Entführung aus dem Auge Gottes' – *Die Entführung* was being premièred at this time). Maria Cäcilia threatened to have her brought back by the police; this brought matters to a head and the couple married, before Mozart had received his father's consent and blessing.

This was the catastrophe of his life; now his martyrdom began. If he was to succeed in Viennese society, he had to shake off all traces of provincial vulgarity; his marriage made this impossible, for Constanze was in no way superior to his Augsburg cousin, and she constantly pulled him down to her own level. When he took her to Salzburg Leopold and Nannerl were ashamed of her; relations between father and son never properly recovered. She should have levelled his path, for his own energies were totally absorbed in his creative life. But because she was incompetent as a housewife she failed to provide him with the secure, stable, comfortable home background he needed. Her extravagance and mismanagement led to the cycle of debt and overwork. She did not even feed him properly. She indulged her hypochondria and love of pleasure in expensive holidays in Baden while he was left to fend for himself like a young bachelor. His health was not up to it.

Her flirting destroyed his peace of mind. For she did not give him the warmth and love he needed. It is to be doubted whether she actually loved him; she had no respect for the man who played the silly ass with her, and failed to establish himself in the world. Only after his death, when his scores began to fetch high prices, did she realize that she had been living with a genius. She was too uncultured and unmusical to be his soul-mate. None of the works composed specifically for her was ever finished; one can imagine him giving them up in despair when her boredom became apparent. She was insignificance personified, an insipid doll. Mozart was defeated and destroyed by his marriage.

Her disservices to him continued after his death. She did not attend his funeral, nor visit his grave, nor have it marked with a monument; hence his grave was lost. She destroyed letters which reflected ill upon herself, and broke his deathmask when dusting it, throwing the remains into the bin. Her trivial chatter entered and contaminated the biographical record; she delighted to pose as the long-suffering wife who forgave her husband's dissipation. By contrast she admired her second husband, the dull and worthy Nissen, who gave her a respectable position in the world. When he died she erected a monument to him in Salzburg and carefully tended it.

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THAT IS THE STORY: CAN WE BELIEVE IT? The alarms and excursions of his courtship are narrated in Mozart's own letters, and in one of them he surveys the Weber daughters:

The eldest is a lazy, coarse perfidious woman, and as cunning as a fox. Mme Lange is a false, malicious person and a coquette. The youngest – is still too young to be anything in particular – she is just a good-natured, but feather-headed creature! May God protect her from seduction! But the middle one, my good, dear Constanze, is the martyr of the family and, probably for that reason, is the kindest-hearted, the cleverest and, in short, the best of them all. She makes

herself responsible for the whole household and yet in their opinion she does nothing right. Oh, my most beloved father, I could fill whole sheets with descriptions of all the scenes that have troubled us both in that house. ... [Constanze] is not ugly, but at the same time far from beautiful. Her whole beauty consists in two little black eyes and a pretty figure. She has no wit, but she has enough common sense to enable her to fulfil her duties as a wife and mother. She is not inclined to be extravagant, that is absolutely false. ... most things that a woman needs she is able to make for herself; and she dresses her own hair every day. Moreover she understands housekeeping and has the kindest heart in the world.<sup>34</sup>

Mozart is evidently trying to arouse his father's sympathy; the story he is telling Leopold, and perhaps himself, is of the need to rescue the poor, deserving girl. He had a gift for sharp judgments; these were to be manna for later biographers, but they do not show that the Weber household was bohemian and slovenly. Mozart himself had insisted that he was comfortable and well looked after there.<sup>35</sup>

The "anonymous" postscript in Nannerl's letter to Friedrich Schlichtegroll (Mozart's obituarist, who as far as we know never met Mozart) contained the remark: 'He married a girl quite unsuited to him, and against the will of his father, and thus the great domestic chaos at and after his death'. Schlichtegroll did not use this, putting instead 'In Vienna he married Constanza Weber and found in her a good mother of the two children of their union, and a worthy wife who, moreover, sought to restrain him from many foolishnesses and excesses'.<sup>36</sup> Schlichtegroll's revised version was accepted by most nineteenth-century authors,<sup>37</sup> but the postscript ticked away in the archive like a time-bomb. Another mine waiting to explode was the question of Mozart's grave. Johann Andreas Streicher the pianoforte maker criticized Constanze to the Novellos. According to Vincent Novello, 'Mozart's monument a sore subject with Streicher as well as with Gyrowetz and every other person of good taste and feeling I have yet met with'.<sup>38</sup> The suspect 'Joseph Deiner' memoirs of 1856 told that at the time of the funeral Constanze had blithely assumed that memorial crosses were erected on graves by the authorities. Nissen's biography reported that she did not visit the cemetery to find the grave until 1808, when all traces of it had been lost.<sup>39</sup> The graves were regularly cleared and re-used and the gravedigger who interred Mozart was dead. Nissen also remarked that at first she had been 'perhaps more attracted by his talents than by his person'.<sup>40</sup>

Every scrap of evidence that could be used against her was marshaled, interpreted and over-interpreted when the anti-Constanze story took final shape in the first decades of the twentieth century. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this was part of the anti-feminist backlash at a time of growing women's emancipation. But the story of man destroyed by woman is an immemorial archetype.

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34. LMF, 784

35. LMF, 756, 763

36. MDB, 462, 469

37. Jahn thought she lacked the ability and culture to appreciate and influence him, that she blamed him for their money difficulties and that she was better pleased with Nissen as a husband; *Life of Mozart*, ii, 266

38. Novello, 187, 191

39. MDB, 565; Nissen, 576

40. Nissen, 415

The essentials of the story are to be found in Belmonte's book of 1905. It is the source of the story of Constanze destroying the death mask, which he attributes to 'Salzburg tradition'. Furthermore,

She, who had called perhaps the noblest man of his time her own, thought herself, as Madam Privy Councillor von Nissen, sufficiently distinguished to throw a letter of Mozart's, which had been brought to her for authentication, *contemptuously to the ground*, when she came across the expression of the 'Hagenauer Mensch' (a common word at that time for servant girls) in it.<sup>41</sup>

Too much weight should not be placed upon such 'traditions'.

The classic version of the anti-Constanze story is Schurig's. It also displays the most striking anti-feminism. The Countess in *Figaro*, with her bourgeois view of sexual morality, deserves what she gets; the faithful Ottavio is a weakling beside the strong seducer Giovanni. *La clemenza di Tito* is about the mad jealousy of an insignificant woman. Yet he has a distaste for *Così fan tutte*, which depicts 'Venus vulgivaga, who gives herself to whoever pleases her at the moment'. Evidently, sexual freedom is right for men but not for women. Schurig exhibits a distaste for female sexuality. Constanze was a primitive, sensuous being and 'now the marriage robbed his artistic productivity of its intensity'.<sup>42</sup> So if Mozart had had less sex, there would be more symphonies.

Schurig was a good Mozart scholar, and he later brought out a valuable book on Constanze herself. In it he claims to have revised his opinion in her favour. He now thought that Constanze was not primarily responsible for the domestic disorder and debts. She was a woman who took on the character of those she lived with. Hence when she married Nissen she became dull and respectable, a good housewife and mother. When she lived with Mozart, she adapted herself easily to his bohemian way of life; the fault then was primarily his. This is surely to damn with faint praise, and the anti-feminism is still in evidence; for instance, Nannerl was an embittered woman because she had not found herself a man.

The most extended indictment of the Weber family is by Blümml, who makes a great deal out of very little evidence. He reads Cäcilia Weber's character (unfavourably) from her silhouette, claims that she was responsible for Fridolin's giving up his safe official position and that the girls devoted themselves to dress rather than housework – for all this there is no evidence. He insinuates that their keeping a servant was extravagant, which is surely anachronistic. To have a servant played an important part in the maintenance of status, and maids were very cheap. The part played by the mother in Aloysia's and Constanze's marriage negotiations is susceptible of a less black interpretation. Blümml depicts her playing a clever game of cat-and-mouse in order to entrap the suitors, Lange and Mozart. But her behaviour could have been the result of indecision rather than cunning and policy, of reluctance to let her daughters go rather than determination to get rid of them. The financial settlement with

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41. Belmonte, 71, 84

42. Schurig, *Wolfgang Amadé Mozart*, ii, 131,249,296,315-6

Lange, unreasonable from a twentieth-century point of view, may have seemed entirely reasonable in the eighteenth. There is no evidence that Lange, a well-paid actor about to marry a well-paid singer, entered the arrangement reluctantly. The lump sum of 900 gulden was to pay off a loan, an advance on Aloysia's salary from the theatre which employed her, given to tide the family over when they settled in Vienna. Mozart himself was not dragged kicking and screaming into marriage. When the tiff occurred over the episode of the measuring of Constanze's calves, she gave him the opportunity to break the relationship off, as his letter makes clear.<sup>43</sup>

The sources will support a much more favourable assessment both of the Weber family and of Constanze.<sup>44</sup> In spite of his sharp remarks before his marriage, Mozart appears later to have enjoyed friendly relations with the mother and all the daughters: Blümmel himself provides the evidence for this. When Leopold visited his son in Vienna, he had lunch with Frau Weber: 'I must tell you that the meal, which was neither too lavish nor too stingy, was cooked to perfection. The roast was a fine plump pheasant; and everything was excellently well prepared'.<sup>45</sup>

Leopold also wrote about his son's domestic arrangements: 'So far as eating and drinking is concerned, the housekeeping is economical in the highest degree'.<sup>46</sup> Nothing about extravagance here; but perhaps a hint at meanness? Almost a year earlier Mozart wrote that he had opened a letter by his maid, Liserl Schwemmer, to her mother:

Then she complains about the food and that too in the most impertinent fashion. She says she has to starve and that the four of us, that is, my wife, myself, the cook and she do not get as much to eat as she and her mother used to have between the two of them.<sup>47</sup>

This incidentally is a black mark on Mozart's own record; he opened the maid's letter and then decided to get rid of her because of what he read in it.

Apart from the "anonymous" postscript in Nannerl's letter to Schlichtegroll, there is absolutely no evidence that Constanze was a bad manager – and that postscript probably comes from a Salzburg source.<sup>47bis</sup> An unprejudiced reading of the evidence suggest the contrary. Mozart's own letter, in which he insisted on her good sense and thriftiness as a house keeper, has already been quoted. It appears that he had sufficient confidence in her practicality to leave the arranging of a loan of 2000 gulden in her hands.<sup>48</sup> As a widow she strode purposefully through life, establishing security for herself and her sons. Doubtless she was aided by good friends, but she is the connecting thread. The completion of the Requiem was organized, and she obtained a pension

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43. *LMF*, 802-3

44. Constanze has recently been defended by Braunbehrens, *Mozart in Wien*, and Robbins Landon, *Mozart's Last Year*.

45. *LMF*, 887

46. *LMF*, 889

47. *LMF*, 878    47bis. "Albert von Molk: Mozart Myth-maker?", *Mozart-Jahrbuch 2005*, 155-191 (also present elsewhere in the website)

48. *LMF*, 942-3

from the emperor even though she was not officially entitled to one. She began to raise money on the scores. From 1795-7 she mounted a series of benefit concerts in Vienna, Prague, Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Graz and Weimar. At the end of this period she was able to lend 3500 florins to the Duscheks. This, moreover, was before she made the acquaintance of Nissen, so Schurig's claim that her later good qualities owed much to his influence must be rejected. The later letters to publishers in her name were written by Nissen. They reveal a tenacious determination to drive a good bargain. Is the determination Nissen's, or hers? When she died her estate had the considerable net value of 27,192 gulden - worth more than Haydn's, and two-and-a-half times Beethoven's. Less than a third of this came from the estate of her second husband Nissen. The rest, therefore, derived from her exploitation of Mozart's legacy of fame and unpublished scores.<sup>49</sup>

The tale that Constanze was completely unsuitable as a companion for Mozart, indeed not particularly musical, must also be doubted. Mozart wrote to Leopold that Constanze liked fugues, particularly those of Handel and Bach, and had encouraged him to write some.<sup>50</sup> Naturally the anti-Constanze biographers dismiss this as a lie, told by the son to his father to reconcile him to his bride-to-be. But Mozart composed things for her to perform, including soprano solos in the C minor Mass, which she sang when Mozart directed it in Salzburg.<sup>51</sup> And she played and sang his compositions with him when he wanted to try them out.<sup>52</sup> She also sang in some of her benefit concerts as a widow.

Constanze is elusive; constantly in the picture, rarely in focus. We have Mozart's letters to her but not hers to him. Her testimony lies behind the biographical information of Niemetschek and Nissen, but we can never be sure that it is her voice we hear. Nissen wrote her letters for her. By far the best eyewitness account of her, admittedly by observers strongly biased in her favour, is in the diaries of the Novellos, who met her as an old woman. She told them that Mozart liked to hear her sing 'Se il padre perdei' from *Idomeneo*, and that they had sung the quartet 'Andrò ramingo' when they visited his family in Salzburg. She knew the operas by heart, but could not bear to hear the Requiem or *Idomeneo* performed; the last time she heard *Don Giovanni* she was not calm for a fortnight. When the Novellos' daughter Clara sang 'Non più di fiori' from *La clemenza di Tito* to her she was moved to tears.<sup>53</sup> From a friend's letter we hear of her reading through the score of a mass by Keller which had caught her eye.<sup>54</sup>

When they met the pianoforte-maker J.A. Streicher in Vienna they found he had a low opinion of Constanze: their own impressions were quite different. She was a 'well-bred lady, whose conversation is particularly attractive', 'Her voice is low and gentle, her manners well-bred and prepossessing, unconstrained like a person who has lived much in society and seen a good deal of the world'.<sup>55</sup>

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49. Julia Moore, 'Mozart in the Market-Place', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, cxiv (1989), 42

50. *LMF*, 801

51. This is stated in Nissen and confirmed by Nannerl's diary; *MBA*, iii, 290

52. Schurig, *Konstanze Mozart*, 28; Novello, 94, 126

53. Novello, 94, 102, 115, 216

54. Robert Münster, 'Nissen's "Biographie W. A. Mozarts"', *Acta mozartiana*, ix (1962), 6

55. Novello, 218, 82

The inhabitants of Salzburg showed her great respect. Her son was very proud of his mother, and Aloysia Lange thought that her sister's understanding was very superior.<sup>56</sup>

If the real Mozart is hidden by layers of myth, then the real Constanze is obscured by anti-feminist stereotypes. Some cluster around the archetype of the petty and scheming woman, who fails to support, indeed acts as a drag on the greatness of her man. Others revolve around the archetype of the woman who fails to fulfil her duties as wife, mother and household manager; she flirted with other men, did not love Mozart, neglected her children, was slovenly and bohemian. Most or all of this is myth and injustice.

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Oh, I could say a great deal more in reply to your last letter and make many remonstrances, but my maxim is: what does not affect me I do not consider it worthwhile to discuss. I cannot help it – such is my nature. I am really shy of defending myself, when I am falsely accused. I always think that the truth will come out some day.<sup>57</sup>

Mozart wrote this to his father in 1782. In this instance at least he was naive. The truth has *not* come out; instead there are legends, often contradictory.

Mozart was not a perfect human being, if such a thing is possible. His letters prove that he could be waspish, snobbish, uncharitable and a liar. The anti-feminist story about Constanze must be recognized for what it is. But if Constanze was a perfect wife, it would follow that Mozart was less than a perfect husband. Many of the discreditable tales about him, especially where money is concerned, appear to stem from her. So either he was imprudent, or she was not a reliable witness.

When one contemplates all the legends about Mozart's extravagance, unreliability, tactlessness, drinking and womanizing, it is tempting to conclude that there is no smoke without fire. No doubt there was exaggeration, but a grain or two of truth must be at bottom of it all. But such a verdict is by no means secure. Here we have traced the history of some of these legends, showing how they grew. Very often a cloud of witnesses evaporates when it becomes plain that they have all plagiarized and embroidered upon a single original source, itself of doubtful validity. The legends are like inverted pyramids, vast superstructures resting on vanishing points. The most appropriate attitude towards them is one of skepticism.

William Stafford

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56. Novello, 102, 150

57. *LMP*, 791