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*Opera on the Couch*  
*Music, Emotional Life, and Unconscious Aspects of Mind*

Chapter 3  
**Across the Great Divide: Reflections on the Moral Reversal  
in Mozart's *The Magic Flute***

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**Introduction**

There are several ways of bringing a psychoanalytic sensibility to the exploration of an opera. One approach assumes that an opera may be examined in order to discover traces of unconscious concerns and conflicts that have crept into the creative process, whether or not consciously intended. This method follows a tradition begun by Freud in his analyses of numerous works of sculpture and literature (1910a, 1911, 1914, 1928), even if he declared himself tone-deaf and unable to do this with music (1914, p. 211). Yet another approach is to consider the characters as real people with individual inner motivations that could be analyzed as if they were on the couch. This method, itself worthy of discussion (Frattaroli, 1987), has a long and venerable tradition followed by many of the contributors to this volume. A third approach assumes that successful operas that endure with the public will transcend the particulars of characters, settings, and plots, and will tend towards universal unconscious themes. From this angle, opera may be approached as a genre of collective myth or psychodrama in which the characters symbolize aspects of ourselves in conscious and unconscious interaction expressed

through dramatic and musical narrative. I will follow this last premise here, focusing more on the dramatic action in examining the enigmatic *The Magic Flute*.

### ***The Magic Flute***

*The Magic Flute*, an opera in two acts with music by Mozart (1756-1791) and a libretto by Schikaneder (1751-1812), has been one of the most popular works of the repertoire, charming many generations of opera lovers since its premier just two months before Mozart's death. It is presented in the form of a *Singspiel*, a genre characterized by spoken dialogue interspersed with folk-like ballads and formal arias in the context of plots that blend serious, comic, romantic, and magical elements often using exaggerated depictions of good and evil in order to present moral lessons.

For a psychoanalyst, the plot of *The Magic Flute* resembles a convoluted, surrealistic, and often confusing dream, complete with abrupt shifts in tone and an abundance of fine-grained detail. At first glance, it seems to be a rambling fairy tale depicting a hero's quest for true love and wisdom in world of risks and dangers. As in many fairy tales, one notices a maturational sensibility in which childhood hopes and fears are laid out, worked through, and ultimately conquered. However, in spite of its appeal, *The Magic Flute* remains puzzling because of its enigmatic symbolism, and especially because of a surprising and inexplicable moral reversal that occurs midway through toward the end of Act 1. The enigma of this reversal and its psychological significance is my focus here. But, before moving on, I will present a short synopsis that covers the most salient aspects of the dramatic action I will discuss.

### **The Story**

Tamino, a prince alone in the woods, is calling for help as he flees a deadly serpent. Fainting from fear, he is saved by three ladies who fawn over him before going for their mistress, the Queen of the Night. When Tamino awakes, Papageno, a comical bird-catcher, boasts that he slayed the dragon. The three ladies return, punish Papageno for his braggartly lie, and show Tamino a portrait of the Queen's daughter, Pamina. Tamino falls instantly in love. The Queen arrives in much distress that her daughter has been kidnapped by the wicked sorcerer, Sarastro. Tamino vows to rescue Pamina, and the Queen offers him Pamina's hand if he succeeds. To aid in this perilous mission, Papageno is given a set of magic bells and Tamino is given a magic flute which was crafted by the Queen's late husband.

However, a surprising twist occurs when Tamino arrives at Sarastro's temple and discovers that the Queen of the Night is an untrustworthy and wicked one, and that Sarastro is actually the high priest of wisdom. A temple priest promises Tamino that the confusion will be lifted during the initiation rites to the brotherhood. He also promises Papageno a wife at this point.

Papageno scouts on ahead and discovers Monostatos, a Moorish slave, trying to force himself on Pamina. Papageno mesmerizes him with the magic bells and he and Pamina escape. The Queen of the Night appears before Pamina and reveals that her late husband was once the owner of the Circle of the Sun temple. When he died, he willed the Queen all his lands and riches but he willed the temple to Sarastro, leaving the Queen weakened and powerless. She tries in vain to convince Pamina to kill Sarastro with the dagger she has given her and sings her famous aria of revenge, *Der Hölle Rache* (Hellish Revenge). Pamina refuses and begs Sarastro to forgive her mother. He reassures her that revenge has no place in his domain.

Pamina and Tamino, protected by the magic flute, pass unscathed through chambers of fire and water. The priests hail their triumph and invite the couple to enter the temple. Papageno, who was previously teased by a haggard old woman who disturbed him by saying she has a boyfriend named Papageno, now feels that he has failed to find his Papagena, but he is advised to summon her with his magic bells. When she appears, the happy couple stutter in astonishment in sing-song bird-like courting sounds as they dream of the many children they will have together.

The Queen of the Night, furious and envious at everyone's good fortune, plots with Monostatos to regain power by destroying the temple. However, all ends well as they are thwarted and cast into the darkness forever as Sarastro declares the dawn of a new era in which day triumphs over night.

## **Discussion**

The most obvious appeal of *The Magic Flute* is first and foremost Mozart's transcendently beautiful music and an astounding collection of captivating arias that include: Papageno's "Bird Catcher" aria (*Der Vogelfänger*), Tamino's "Portrait" aria (*Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön*), the Queen of the Night's "Hellish Revenge" aria (*Der Hölle Rache*), Papageno's "Girl or a Woman" aria (*Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen*), Pamina's "Lost Love" aria (*Ach, ich fühl's*) the Papageno-Papagena duets including *Pa-Pa-Pa Papageno*, and finally, Sarastro's "Holy Temple" aria (*In diesen heil'gen Hallen*).

The other major charm of the opera is its fantastical fairy-tale quality: A handsome young prince is saved from a deadly dragon and shown a portrait of a princess with whom he falls instantly in love. Armed with a magic flute, and accompanied by a colorful sidekick, he embarks to rescue a damsel in distress at the behest of a distraught mother

who offers her daughter's hand if he is successful. Along the way, trials and tribulations are weathered, wisdom is gained, and, unlike many operas, all ends well. When a production brings all of this altogether with beautiful music, sets and costumes, and, perhaps plays up the comic moments, there's something for everyone. Despite its reputation for having a confusing and jumbled plot, it's no surprise that *The Magic Flute* is often chosen to introduce children to opera, casting its spell on all.

### **The Enigma of the Moral Reversal**

When the final curtain falls and the spell begins to wane, the rather inexplicable moral shift of the fairy tale lingers. While the dramatic direction may have seemed clear early on, the clouds move in quickly. In the first scenes, the Queen of the Night is depicted as a true-hearted mother distraught that her daughter has been kidnapped by the evil villain, Sarastro. But by the end of Act I, we are thrown a one-two punch and our assumptions are turned upside down. First, when Tamino arrives at the Sarastro's temple he seems to have forgotten that there is a damsel in distress, and inexplicably begins asking for initiation into the temple's mysteries. Soon after, the moral scales are inverted as Tamino and the audience learn to our surprise that the evil kidnaper is actually a holy man, the High Priest of the Sun, and that the Queen of the Night, who was presented as an innocent victim is actually a treacherous woman who has plotted against him and needs to be brought under control. He has abducted Pamina only to protect her from her mother's bad influence. In Act II, we learn that Sarastro is actually Pamina's father. Then, before we can think about this moral reversal, we're off on a series of initiation rites whose nature is vague, and we are left to consider what the moral reversal has to do with the quest for mature romantic love and wisdom. As we shall see, there is a moment

where some backstory is provided, but what's unexplained is why the moral order of Act I needs to be dramatically reversed. As beautiful as it may be, *The Magic Flute* is bewildering with regard to this major shift in the moral characterizations of the Queen of the Night and Sarastro.

While some critics have dismissed the plot as somewhat nonsensical or incomplete, opera goers accustomed to the reality-bending genre of opera might be willing to let it all go by in soft focus, not allowing a seemingly incoherent plot spoil an otherwise wonderful opera. Perhaps they've read that Schikaneder tinkered with the libretto right up until the end, and, given that Mozart fell deathly ill a month before the premier and died two months after, they should forgive a less than totally polished libretto. Either way, we might turn a blind eye to the dramatic inconsistencies and, buoyed by the comic relief offered by Papageno and Papagena, focus on the music and singing.

A more serious operagoer may have done some further reading (i.e, Chailly, 1982, 1992) and learned that Mozart and Schikaneder were both members of the Freemason brotherhood that emerged in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe after the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment. Freemasonry describes itself as a "beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols" (Oliver, 1849/2016), one that embraces a supreme being, but rises above traditional religious orthodoxies. At the core of the Freemason ideology is an appeal for universal brotherhood to replace the class system and religious dogmatism of Europe. Mozart, Schikaneder, Goethe, Haydn, and Liszt were all Freemasons. To step into the substantial literature surrounding *The Magic Flute* is to be persuaded that the symbolism and the dramatic action suddenly make sense in depicting the values and initiation rites of Freemasonry. During the period in which *The Magic*

*Flute* was created, Freemasonry was a controversial subject and Maria Theresa, sovereign of the Hapsburg Empire, ordered the Masonic Lodge in Vienna to be closed over the objections of her husband (Francis, the Holy Roman Emperor), who himself was a member! With this historical context in mind, it is thought that Schikaneder and Mozart took an artistic opportunity both to promote the Freemason's cause and to capture the conflict within the house of Hapsburg. This includes borrowing upon its initiation rituals for the trials of Pamina and Tamino, setting the opera in Egypt where Freemasonry believes its rites originated, and having the Queen of the Night and Sarastro represent the battle between Maria Theresa and the Emperor.

In the modern era, the opera also lends itself to other commentaries from the points of view of gender, class, and racism. For example, William Kentridge, a South African artist who also designs stage sets for opera productions, has exhibited *Sarastro and the Master's Voice*. This multi-media work uses film footage and a recording of Sarastro's aria, *In diesen heil'gen Hallen (In these holy halls)*, to critique the abuse of Enlightenment ideals in European colonialism. While a discussion of such diverse interpretive tracks is beyond the scope of this chapter, it can be said the Masonic interpretation is compelling in explaining much of the deliberate symbolism of the opera and it also offers a historical point of view of the tensions between the Queen and Sarastro. Nonetheless, since the audience for the opera has been far broader than Masons and history buffs, we return to our task of putting *The Magic Flute* on the couch to plumb the depths of its psychological appeal.

The psychoanalytic question remains as to the nature of deeper resonances for operagoers, beyond beautiful music, fairy tale plots, and Masonic messages. Most particularly, approaching *The Magic Flute* as a psychological allegory, how can we

understand the moral shift of Sarastro and the Queen mid-way through the opera? When we, along with Tamino, discover that Sarastro is wise rather than evil, and that the Queen selfishly intent on keeping her daughter away from him, the question arises as to the psychological nature of the gulf between the Queen and Sarastro as well as the developmental task involved as Tamino and Pamina are challenged to make a psychological traversal from the lands of the Queen to the Temple of Sarastro.

### **Across the Great Divide**

The deep structure of *The Magic Flute* is essentially a developmental story of boys and girls needing to situate themselves in relation to mothers and fathers, or more specifically, to maternal and paternal function as elaborated below and represented allegorically by the Queen and Sarastro. In this sense, *The Magic Flute* resonates deeply because it portrays the challenging unconscious emotional dynamics involved in individuating away from the mother and encountering the world of the father. Psychoanalysts consider this journey essential as part of growth and maturity.

From the psychoanalytic theoretical viewpoint, the child's first sensual-erotic-love attachment is with the mother (Freud, 1905). Much like the Queen of the Night, she is a powerful presence, a goddess, in the eyes of the child. Both boys and girls initially form themselves within their bond with her. As the natural strivings to separate inevitably emerge, this leads to complications. Traditionally, the boy begins to form his sense of autonomy, gender identity, and masculinity by renouncing aspects of his initial merger with his mother as he is called upon to move across the great divide toward the father for identity. For the boy, this involves the rejection of what is registered personally and culturally as "feminine". The girl's task is differently complex. Since her mother also



identifies *with her* more strongly, the daughter's attempts to make the father a love object are complicated by the intense two-way bond with the mother as well as a conflict within both of them concerning how much separation is tolerable. Psychologically speaking, *The Magic Flute* traces Tamino and Pamina's challenges in navigating this journey from the maternal to the paternal world and building a bridge between them.

Readers familiar with psychoanalytic thinking are aware of Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus myth, based on Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, as an allegory reflecting the cornerstone of psychological development (Freud 1897, 1910b, 1925). The traditional Freudian emphasis is on the dynamics of the child's desire, competitive strivings, and the anxieties within the triangular interpersonal space of child, mother, and father. Two analysts after Freud developed additional interpretive approaches that have enriched clinical understanding. First, Melanie Klein (1945) theorized that Oedipal dynamics begin earlier in life and involve the child's conflicted relationship to mother and father as parental couple. Somewhat later, Bion (1963) contributed an additional perspective by highlighting the way the Oedipus myth reflects the human difficulty in balancing psychological curiosity with the dread of full emotional truths.

In contemporary thinking, a growing distinction is made among analysts between the various complexes that may arise, and "oedipality" itself, as a process in which the fundamentals of personality are grounded (Barratt, 2019). It is common amongst analysts now to refer to *paternal and maternal functions*.

The essence of maternal function emerges from the traditional ideal of close bonding and attachment of infant and mother as a unit. Her body and presence are to be fully available, and, in an optimal situation, the child has some experience of a necessary illusion that its needs rather than hers are primary. In this ideal, the mother is content to

let her child simply be, to celebrate its unique specialness, and to shield the child from the impingement of demand from the outside world, The mood and ethic is one of merger and unconditional acceptance. Rooted in the romantic sensibility, the child will be encouraged to become its own unique self.

Gradually the father, as a third figure, makes a more definitive entrance into this idyllic simplicity. The father carries the symbolic function of being the “other” who is not the mother and bringing word of a world beyond the maternal orbit. Paternal function is that which intrudes as the symbolic “third” into the previous dyad of maternal function. In this way, paternal function mediates and influences the child’s access to the maternal world. Freud went so far as to pose this as the foundation of the superego, the earliest of which is to say “No” to easy gratifications and merger with the maternal. Clinical explorations suggest a need for a child to construct a symbolic figure who says no even if no actual father is present. This becomes generalized into a range of superego prohibitions under the law of the father. Another dimension is that paternal function is connected with the demand functions of the world external to the mother-child orbit. While maternal function is concerned with *being*, the paternal sphere deals with *doing*, i.e., creating and achieving in the world, and gradually arriving at wisdom concerning the greater order of things outside oneself (the law of the father).

It is important to note that, in contemporary psychoanalytic thinking, the terms maternal and paternal function are not discreet roles carried out by actual mothers and fathers respectively, but rather are symbolic functions that do not necessarily rest on essentialist readings of gender. The function may be carried out by either or both parents depending on time, situation, and personalities. Additionally, the encounter with each function may involve significant figures other than the biological parents. These

distinctions are more important than ever in an age when social roles, gender, and family arrangements (i.e., single parents, same-sex parenting, communal parenting) are undergoing radical change. As social roles and family arrangements have diversified and undergone radical change, it now seems useful to refer to paternal and maternal functions, without in any way applying essentialist concepts to gender. In any case, the general idea is that both maternal and paternal symbolic functions must be provided and then integrated into the child's own relationship to itself and to the world.

Considering this theoretical scaffolding as background, we can note that at the beginning of the opera immediately following the overture, Mozart's stage directions have Tamino running onto the stage carrying a bow, but no arrows. The serpent of male development pursues him, but he lacks the phallic internal strength to deal with it as yet. He needs to be rescued, protected, and loved by the maternal order represented here by the Three Ladies and the Queen of the Night. With their background support, Tamino will be able to set out on the quest for his arrows. Papageno can be viewed as an even younger version of Tamino, a sort of little brother, who lives an idyllic life in a little hut and spends his days playfully catching birds with his little panpipe. He is cared for, nurtured, and fed by the Three Ladies with wine, sugar-bread, and figs. He knows nothing of life outside his little maternal valley and is shocked to learn from Tamino that there is a bigger world beyond the mountain forest he calls home. Papageno's world symbolizes the idealized world of maternal function. Supporting this musically, Mozart provides Papageno with a simple major key folk melody for his introductory aria, *Der Vogelfänger* (*The Birdcatcher*). The music is innocent, child-like, and reflects the idealized life of the maternal orbit in sing-song fashion. In fact, only when he asserts some growth instinct, pretending to be more powerful than he really is and claiming to

have killed the serpent, does he run into trouble as he is scolded and punished by the Three Ladies. Tamino, may be thought of as a more grownup version of Papageno. He has entered adolescence and the music of his love aria (*Dies Bildnis is bezaubernd schön*) reflects a growing experience of the complex tensions of the inchoate feeling of desire triggered by the portrait of Pamina.

As Tamino and Papageno begin to separate from the maternal valley, they are guided by three boys. Their singing subtly forecasts the encounter with the paternal since although their voices are pre-adolescent, Mozart has given them a somber, serious, and hymn-like melody. Meanwhile, Tamino and Papageno continue to exhibit their developmental contrast. For example, when Tamino imagines what he would do with a woman like Tamina, he sings: “What would I do? Full of delight, I would clasp her to my fiery breast,” alluding to sexual passion. By contrast, when Papageno fantasizes about a “Papagena,” he is more innocent and chaste as he sings “She’d fall asleep by my side and I’d rock her to sleep like a child.” Papageno seems to envision something more like a playdate than a burning romance. Even the names, Papageno and Papagena, differentiated by a single vowel, suggest a kind of undifferentiated child’s world. Of the four young characters, Papagena is by far the least developed, perhaps because she is more a projection of Papageno’s childish narcissism than a person in her own right. As they set out to face their initiation trials, Tamino is bold and brave in moving toward the paternal while Papageno is so frightened at Sarastro’s appearance he wishes he were a mouse or a snail so he could crawl back to his hut and hide. As the opera progresses, we get the sense that while Tamino and Pamina strive for enlightenment offered by Sarastro and the temple, Papageno and Papagena want simply to reproduce.

And what about Pamina and Monostatos? In moving across the great divide toward the father-paternal, the young woman has much to deal with. Here, I will omit discussing the latent aspects of racism in portraying Monostatos as a Moor. First, she has to deal with misogyny of men as represented most obviously by Monostatos in his attempts to enslave and molest her. From a psychoanalytic and feminist perspective, the need for the boy to separate from mother too often results in a hyper-machismo posture, and a tendency to demean and dis-empower women. While such a man appears arrogant and domineering on the surface, what lies underneath is a fear of women's power left over from the experience of being a child with a mother (or a Queen). Additionally, his own disowned longings for maternal reunification may also be projected onto the woman who consequently appears as someone who wants to swallow him up or trap him. Such a man may cover over his unconscious fears with behaviors and attitudes of power and dominance aimed not only at degrading women, but often other men as well.

Pamina must not only fight her way through this aspect of men, but she must also sort out her own conflicts and guilt about separating from a mother who is bitter toward men and wants to keep her daughter for herself. This is represented by the Queen of the Night's vengeance toward Sarastro, and her offering her daughter help in the form of a dagger to kill off the paternal. Pamina is now caught between the paternal and the maternal. If she were to kill Sarastro, psychologically speaking, she would be symbolically killing off her future prospects of romantic love (expressed in the aria of loss), so she begins consider suicide rather than suffer such a fate.

In her spectacular aria *Der Hölle Rache*, the Queen expresses her fury and longing for revenge. Mozart chose the key of D minor for this aria, a key often associated with tragedy, and prevalent in his later *Requiem* (1791) that would dominate his thoughts in

the weeks following the premiere of *The Magic Flute*. After the opening bars, the music suddenly moves to F major, the relative key of D minor. This key switch signals that the Queen is moving from tragic despair and vulnerability to threatening power. Gathering herself together, she tells Pamina that if she does not kill Sarastro, she will no longer be her daughter. The Queen's power, influence, and trickery over Pamina are well-demonstrated by the coloratura vocal heights she achieves. The role requires a soprano of virtuosic capacity with its unusually large leaps between notes that will be recalled in its most famous passages. The recurrent gestures, manic twists and turns, and final ferocious D minor cadence place a thrillingly dark cloud of wrath over Pamina as her mother reaches a series of high Cs before ascending even further to the F above high C. Such a note is nearly impossible to reach and conveys an impression that nothing can stop her.

The Queen's desperate histrionics stand in high contrast to Sarastro's emotional serenity. Musically, Mozart conveys the intense morality of Sarastro best in his aria "O Isis und Osiris." This aria reaches four octaves lower than the highest notes of the Queen's, thereby contrasting her soaring emotional lability with his deep and steady wisdom. Sarastro's basso profundo tones occupy the depths of the bass range and are meant to symbolize the idealized foundational wisdom of the paternal linking the child to the law of the outside world. *The Magic Flute* finally arrives at its destination in the final scene in which the Queen and her maternal world are banished, paternal function and authority prevail, and everything ends happily ever after.

### **The Absence of a Third Act**

Although everything seems to work out in the end, a psychoanalytic reading of the allegory calls this into serious question. In so far as the maturational arc in *The Magic*

*Flute* is a presented progression in which the maternal is finally cast out forever, the moral of the story is the exaltation of the paternal and the banishment of the maternal. What is missing is an integration of the two, and as my following reflections will suggest, it is missing a third act.

The number three is traditionally associated with harmony, wisdom, and understanding, and given prominence in religious traditions. For example: in Christianity we find the Holy Trinity; in Judaism, the three patriarchs as well as the three parts of the Torah given in the third month of the Jewish calendar by Moses, the third child of his parents; in Hinduism, the three major deities: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva; and, in Buddhism, the three jewels of awakened mind: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Likewise, the number three is also repeatedly ritualized in Masonry. A candidate seeks initiation by knocking on the door three times (the so-called Three Distinct Knocks). Upon entrance, there are three degrees of initiation to pass through as the initiate progresses to the ultimate goal of the Masonic Third Degree. And, finally, three Grandmasters preside over the Lodge.

Mozart makes many references to Masonic rituals and symbols with the frequent repetition of patterns of three. This begins with the first chords of the overture, set in the home key of E flat, a key with three flats. This is repeated in the second section of the overture, where rhythmically speaking, the timing of the three chords is identical to that of the Three Distinct Knocks (Thomson, 1977). The triadic pattern is also found throughout Schikaneder's libretto as well as we encounter three boys, three ladies, three slaves, and Tamino's knocks on the three doors at the temple. In this respect, it is notable that *The Magic Flute* lacks an Act III.

In psychoanalysis, the number three also becomes deeply significant in the theoretical concept of “the third.” The idea of the third entered psychoanalysis through Lacan’s views on intersubjectivity, in which he considered the symbolic position of third to be that which prevents the relationship between two persons (or points of view) from either rigidifying into power struggles or collapsing into the oneness of merger. The term has since gathered a plethora of nuances, including many ideas about how this third function develops and plays out in relational and cultural configurations. However, for our purposes here, the essence of the concept is that the symbolic third function forestalls polarized and stagnating thinking and fosters generativity of new perspectives.

With reference to the Oedipus situation, the third is grounded in the advance from pre-oedipal dyadic relations (mother and child) to triangular oedipal relations (mother, father, child). This move is seen as a major developmental achievement in which the child, by, metaphorically speaking, learning to count from one to three, not only enters the Oedipal phase, but also begins to integrate the sense of a generative parental couple in creative interaction with each other (Rather, 2008; Britton, 1989).

Overall, the third element creates the potential to modulate dissonance and conflict between the first two, allowing emotional processing to become less black and white, and more complex and three dimensional. One could speculate that omnipresence of this truth gives us a sort of intuitive or unconscious striving toward the number three as exemplified in the religious examples above, and the integration of paternal and maternal function in psychoanalytic thinking.

Allegorically, *The Magic Flute* falls short of reaching a third position in integrating the maternal and paternal. Further psychological evolution movement would be required for a higher state of mind. In this sense, the conclusion of *The Magic Flute* dramatizes a



tilted personality development in men and women that is no doubt relevant to considerations of the social construction of gender and the tendency toward the devaluation of women cross-culturally.

It is interesting to contrast this sensibility of Mozart-Schikaneder with that of Richard Wagner. Also in the key of E flat, the opening of *Das Rheingold* (the first opera in the *Ring Cycle*) begins an extended arpeggio (the nature motif) that emphasizes the origins of life in the maternal. Although the *Ring*, too, establishes that one cannot remain there forever, there is much more of a sense that the masculine and feminine are both fully legitimate and also must be integrated for maturity. Along these lines, it is the wisdom of the central female character, Brünnhilde, that brings the *Ring Cycle* to its developmental climax as she integrates her strong nature with her father's will. As Wagner wrote and portrayed more straightforwardly in *The Flying Dutchman*, masculine and feminine must be re-integrated for wholeness in love (Rather, 2014). This lesson seems entirely absent in *The Magic Flute*, as we are never able to bring the Queen of the Night and Sarastro together within the two acts presented.

Given the fact that the Queen is so marginalized, it is fascinating that she alone has any emotional complexity compared with the other principle characters. Tamino's steadfast virtue, Pamina's earnest love, and Sarastro's calm wisdom are all simple, almost cardboard cutouts. Papageno is at least by turns childishly cowardly, sometimes brave, and comically witty, but only the Queen is drawn with more emotional complication and ambivalence. In the first scenes she appears overcome with grief and worry and her aria, *O zittre nicht mein lieber Sohn* (Oh, do not tremble my dear son), is tender and sad. At the end, we are might still wonder whether she was deliberately and cunningly lying in calling Sarastro evil, or whether motherly love and anxiety have twisted her perspective.

Interestingly, it is she who enlists the three boys to guide Tamino and Pamina to the temple. The gentle manner and hymns of the boys presage the quiet serenity of Sarastro and perhaps suggest that she may be more complexly ambivalent, resenting Sarastro, but also aware of the need for Pamina to make the emotional link to her father. On the other hand, when she fails to persuade Pamina to kill off the father and return, she even agrees to marry her daughter to the boorish Monostatos if he can bring her back. At the very least, one can say that it seems dramatically incomplete to have banished the most complex character. To play with this idea, it is almost as if the Queen's banishment unconsciously destines her to live on in the minds of the audience, giving them a chance to reintegrate her in a creative third act of their own imagination!

### **Final Comments**

To sum up, *The Magic Flute* is one of the most beloved operas in the repertoire but also among the most perplexing with its moral plot shift. The fairy tale plot, the love story, and the mostly light and accessible music have made it one of the more common operas used to entice new generations to the genre. Nonetheless, beneath its charming, simple, and confusing aspects, deeper levels of meaning can be found upon closer examination.

In the imaginative conjectures I have conjured up in this chapter, I do not mean to suggest any conscious or even unconscious intentions on the part of Mozart or Schikaneder. Again, the historical evidence is strong that the manifest content of *The Magic Flute* may be best understood through the rituals of the Freemasons and the historical context of political opposition posed by the Hapsburg court at the time the opera was being created. However, since one of the characteristics of great creative art is

its capacity to evoke multiple levels of emotional, intellectual and psychological response, I have attempted here to examine and play with one strand of psychological resonance which I have proposed is not only implicit and but also unconsciously evocative for all who have been moved by *The Magic Flute*.

At times, psychoanalysis and art may converge with regard to the impossibility of arriving at singular or final meanings. Even in psychoanalysis, contrary to popular opinion, there can be no complete interpretations. For example, the very different readings of the Oedipus myth arrived at by Freud, Klein, and Bion suggest that any single reading would be reductionistic given the complexity of unconscious mental life. So, with reference to the dream-like structure of *The Magic Flute* alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, I will end with a passage from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* that captures this sense of almost infinite possibilities of meaning:

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware in the work of dream interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unraveled and which moreover add nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the *dream's navel*, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite ending; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought.

(1900, p. 525, emphasis mine)

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