
FROM THE SUBLIME TO THE SUBLIMATED: MOZART'S INNER WORLD

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Introduction

The paper is about Mozart's most symbolical opera *The Magic Flute – Die Zauberflöte*.

Mozart was most certainly the world's greatest musical genius and often the beauty and charm of his music is linked to what is commonly described as a happy childhood. He had a close and loving relationship with his parents – reflected in volumes of affectionate letters which passed between him and them. Compared to some great composers, who often seem to have lived unhappy, frustrating and occasionally mentally disturbed lives, without the benefit of supportive parents, Mozart's life was not at all bad, by 18th century standards.

However, the biographies of Mozart as well as the letters also reveal much that would cause us, as curious psychotherapists rather than as musicologists, to wonder whether all was as well internally as his music and his biographies suggest.

I suspect that what most of us hear in his music is mostly happiness, merriment, serenity, harmony and integration. But sadness is also a characteristic of Mozart's music and just occasionally we may hear something else – the intimations of darkness, tension, loneliness and even grief. We are captivated but also moved. His music touches something deeply inside us. We cannot help but wonder what his music tells us about his feelings and his internal life. Was that as harmonious and as integrated as his music seems to be?

Music however is a very complex form of creative expression. Given the trials and pitfalls of musical interpretation, the operas of a composer might be a safer bet for psychoanalytic hypotheses. Operas are stories about characters whose feelings and motives are described in words and who interact with each other in ways that we recognise and can understand. The notes of a score do not speak to us in quite the same way.

At this point I am sure that you will want to point out that Mozart wrote the music for his operas and not the librettos. And of course you are right. But he did choose the stories, selecting from amongst hundreds that he read, and with his earlier operas he had insisted categorically that he had a say in preparing the librettos. He certainly worked very closely with the librettist of *Zauberflöte*, Emmanuel Schikaneder, who was an old friend and a fellow Freemason.

There was an added reason for close collaboration between the two. There is quite

a lot of information in the opera about Freemasonry and its ideals. This was quite deliberate. They wanted to be quite sure the information was correct.

The likelihood that this opera might contain hidden meanings is apparent even after a first reading or hearing. It is packed with symbolism. Moreover, the story is full of puzzling inconsistencies and contradictions. There is also a complete change of direction in the plot. For the last two hundred years commentators have agreed on one thing – that the plot was dramatically changed when Mozart was almost halfway through writing the music – though they disagree on the possible reasons. No one has yet come up with a generally accepted explanation for the change. It is as if the first part of the story and the way that some of the principal characters come across in it, doesn't match up in any logical way with the second part.

As music lovers we may not be too bothered by such matters. Nor might we be bothered by the opera's shameless sexism and racism. The fact that it remains so popular today despite such handicaps is a tribute to the genius of Mozart. It may also be a reflection of our awareness that, like any great work of art, it makes a statement about the artist's search for truth.

As psychotherapists, the contradictions in the opera will certainly have caught our eye, or our ear. We will most assuredly be asking ourselves what it all might mean, internally speaking, much as we ask the same question when considering the sometimes conflicting statements in a patient's account of his or her life.

Might it be the case that, if we look closely at the story and the characters of *Zauberflöte*, we might learn something about Mozart's inner world – about his internalised object relationships? Is it possible to understand this sublime musical creation as the very successful sublimation of otherwise inexpressible prohibited unconscious feelings and conflicts?

Therefore, I propose to look briefly at some of the facts about Mozart's early childhood and his growing up and to make some hypotheses about how some of his experiences may have helped to shape his unconscious. I would then like to explore the story and characters of *Zauberflöte*, to see whether they also can be understood to have relevance to Mozart's inner world.

Mozart's childhood and adolescence

Mozart was born on 27th January 1756. He died at the age of 35, after a life marked by many illnesses. He had been a small frail baby, over whom his parents fretted. He was their seventh child and only one other had survived, his older sister by five years, Maria Anna, known as Nannerl. Like her brother, she was a talented musician from an early age, also something of a child prodigy, though she never had the same range of musical abilities, nor the compositional genius of Wolfgang.

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The marriage of their parents is described as a happy and united one, despite the hardships of a small income and the personal tragedy of losing so many children. In that age, infant mortality was very high, though this would not necessarily mean that the deaths of their children would be any easier for the couple. It might mean that they could have been very anxious through Wolfgang's infancy, especially as he was not robust.

There is little documentation of the first couple of years. Almost the only clues we have about this early period, and the possible state of his internalised object relationships, are the stories, well-documented, of his intense need for reassurance that he was loved. Retrospective evidence may also be present in the fact that he remained very dependent on his father's approval.

Wolfgang's parents were quite opposite in temperament. His mother, Anna Maria, is described as very musical, compliant, good-natured, full of gaiety and of a loving temperament, especially to her children. Leopold was very different. He was an austere man, a stern disciplinarian. He had studied theology, logic and law at university, before turning to music as a full-time career. His own musical ambitions were totally sacrificed once he realised his son's genius.

Wolfgang's musical talent became obvious at a very early age. Leopold took over his education and all other aspects of his life when his son was three. As the extent of his genius became apparent, Leopold drew up a rigid and systematic plan for Wolfgang's musical development as well as for his exposure to the world. This plan was strictly adhered to. There were no holidays, no time out. The only interruptions were those enforced by Wolfgang's frequent illnesses. Then Leopold could hardly wait for his son to be well enough to return to his lessons, and to performing publicly.

When Wolfgang was six, Leopold organised the first of many tours for the family. The aim was to give the children wider exposure as child prodigies. They were already well known in Salzburg, where the family lived.

This first tour, to Munich, lasted only a few weeks but was followed in the same year (1762) by a much longer tour to Vienna, lasting four months. It was an arduous trip, not just because of the long detour they made to reach Vienna. The hardships of coach travel and cramped inn accommodation, plus the stresses of performing several times a day, at different venues, took their toll on the children. After three months, during a cold December, Wolfgang fell ill. Smallpox was feared, as it was prevalent in the city. It turned out to be scarlet fever. As soon as he recovered sufficiently, his father took him on a long cold journey to the Hungarian border, where Wolfgang had been invited to perform for a group of nobles. When the family returned to Salzburg in time for his seventh birthday, the pace didn't slacken.

By now, Wolfgang was performing his own musical compositions regularly. The

winter was severe and performances meant that he was often out in bitter weather. Not surprisingly, he became ill again, this time with a bad attack of rheumatic fever.

Six months after returning from Vienna Leopold took the whole family off on the first of their grand tours of Europe (1763 – 66). This one was to last three and a half years. The itinerary included Germany, France, Belgium, England, the Netherlands and Switzerland. It was in The Hague, towards the end of 1765, that Nannerl, now fourteen, became very ill with typhoid fever and almost died. As she recovered, Wolfgang went down with the same illness. The previous year, in Paris, he'd had a bad attack of quinsy.

At this point, we might wonder what Anna Maria felt as a mother, especially about her children's health and welfare. If she voiced her concerns they have not been recorded. Certainly they did not affect Leopold's plans. His domination and control of family life, even down to domestic arrangements, meant that she had no real sphere of influence, especially with regard to the children. We do know that Nannerl resented all the attention her younger brother had. But it was a questionable attention, since he never had a moment to himself for almost twenty years.

In Wolfgang's eleventh year, when the family were again on tour, this time for two years, he and his sister both caught smallpox, during an epidemic in Vienna. This time it was he who almost died. His face remained pockmarked for the rest of his life. He had barely recovered when he staged the first ever performance of an opera by himself. This was the comic opera *Bastien and Bastienne*. It was a great success – he was twelve years old. In the following year, 1769, he and Leopold set off on another grand tour, this time without his mother and sister. This tour also lasted two years and covered much of Italy.

He and his father had barely returned home when the second Italian tour was undertaken, in 1771. By now, at the age of fifteen, with his own published compositions numbering over one hundred, Wolfgang was receiving a steady stream of commissions. At the age of sixteen he was appointed leader of the court orchestra in Salzburg. During the summer and autumn of this year he composed seven symphonies, four divertimenti and six string quartets, before setting off with Leopold on the third Italian tour. On returning to Salzburg he suffered a serious illness, most likely viral hepatitis.

I hope I have said enough to make you wonder, as I have, whether – and if so, how – the experiences of illness and travel affected Wolfgang's internal world. I have spoken of only major instances of illness and the major travel events. Wolfgang was always frail, right up to his premature end. He had numerous respiratory tract infections, often contracted during the strenuous tours. He had recurrent attacks of rheumatic fever and in his twenties he suffered from kidney troubles. There were endless minor ailments, no doubt also brought on by the

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stresses of the life he lived. We must include in those stresses the constant seeking to ingratiate himself and his family with some or other potential patron.

Remember too, that in the eighteenth century medical science was hardly sophisticated. In his final illness, probably rheumatic fever, when he was in almost constant pain, the treatment prescribed and carried out by his medics was enough in itself to bring on serious heart failure.

There is one more period in Wolfgang's life that I need to mention. You will have noticed that the strict programme of training and tours continued through his adolescence. From his earliest years Wolfgang had always worshipped his father and had never questioned Leopold's rigid regime. In his adolescence Wolfgang's life continued to be dominated by the dictates of his father. He was given no choice, and as far as we know he did not express any wish for his life to be different.

But around twenty-one something began to change. He was still living with his parents, apart from occasional journeys to perform in other cities. So far he had not had any noticeable romantic attachments. Suddenly, what seemed like a delayed adolescence hit him. He discovered girls, parties, dancing and billiards. He became impulsive, fun-loving, high-spirited and music became secondary for the first time ever. He offended his father constantly by his fecklessness and by his coarse sense of humour. For once, he was out of his father's control. All this sounds fairly normal, though twenty-one does seem a little late in the day.

The rebellion of his twenty-first year was not a strong one. It did not totally disrupt Wolfgang's musical career. He soon knuckled under to his father again, and did not proceed with the romance he was pursuing at the time and which his father thought totally unsuitable. There was a later rebellion, in his mid-twenties, which was more successful. He became engaged to and eventually married Constanze Weber, much against his father's wishes.

Earlier in the same year (1781) he had also defied his father by leaving the service of the Prince Bishop of Salzburg and settling himself in Vienna. Perhaps 'defied' is the wrong word. Even while making these more successful bids for independence Wolfgang could not bring himself to speak angrily or even directly to Leopold. At no time did he tell his father just how much he disagreed with him, or was fed up with being told what to do. The words he addressed to Leopold were totally conciliatory. He kept up a long campaign to win his father over and to persuade him that he was really doing what Leopold would wish him to do. There was also much flattery of Leopold and a constant attempt to appease the outrage which Leopold expressed at his actions.

Of course, he did know how much he owed his father, and he was genuinely grateful to him. It may have been difficult for him to handle any negative feelings he might have had towards Leopold because of this, especially if the positive

feelings he had amounted to an idealisation of his father, and therefore of his father's power. In passing, we might note that Wolfgang's departure from the service of the Prince Bishop of Salzburg, after heated words between the two, was an acting-out of his resentment against his father, which he could never bring himself to express directly.

There is much less material to draw on when we begin to look at Wolfgang's relationship with his mother. He knew that his birth had been difficult and that his mother had almost died in the process. His susceptibility to illness, and the child-rearing practices of the day, may or may not have coloured the image of his internalised mother. His real mother may have had little to do with his babyhood. We know he was not breast-fed by her. Nor was he given to a wet-nurse. As a baby, he was fed on a thin gruel of barley or oats, most likely given by a nurse-maid, as the Mozarts most certainly had domestic help. We have speculated that his weak constitution in infancy may have made his parents extremely anxious. We know they fretted over him. They may have been over-protective as a result. In which case his internalised objects may have been intrusive and overly powerful.

Remember too, that five infants had died before Wolfgang's birth. It is possible, some would say probable, that their deaths had a place in his unconscious. It is believed that, in the internal world of children whose siblings have died even long before their own birth, the deaths may appear as punitive attacks from wicked split-off internalised parental images. This could create a great deal of anxiety indeed about whether he was loved or not.

In adult life, Wolfgang was a very loving son and he was greatly distressed when his mother died while the two of them were on tour in Paris, in 1778. Wolfgang, who was twenty-two at the time, was quite unable to write to his father to tell him of Anna Maria's death. He wrote to a friend in Salzburg and asked him to inform Leopold. We will return to this curious behaviour later.

Let me then pose the questions which I believe arise, but are not answered, by a careful reading of Mozart's life story, undertaken as psychotherapists rather than as music lovers.

What effect did Leopold's excessive control and domination have on the internal world of his son? What effect did the life-threatening experiences of illness have, when they directly arose from the stresses imposed by his father's demands on him? What effect did it have that Anna Maria never intervened to protect the children, that she was so passive in the face of her husband's obsessive programme?

Does it all mean that, in Wolfgang's internal world, the ambivalence towards his parents remained strong even into adult life? An ambivalence that was repressed, unconscious, but nonetheless expressed indirectly in his need for reassurance, his

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inability to express anger and his continuing dependency on his father's approval? If this was the case then might we not expect to find evidence of the presence of conflicting images of father and of mother – images that reflect such unresolved ambivalence?

Could we expect to find one image of father that reflected Wolfgang's positive feelings – the good, loving, powerful and idealised father to whom he owed everything, the wise and all-knowing father who guided and arranged his life from the highest of motives? The other image a very bad father indeed – also powerfully idealised, but on the negative side – an unjust ruthless tyrant who controlled his life totally, put his life at risk, left him no choices, a cruel taskmaster who snatched away his freedom and forced his son to follow in his footsteps?

Could we find the images of mother also conflicted? One image that of the good idealised powerful mother who had given him life and the ability to survive its hardships, whose love had protected him when he was most in danger. The other image, that of a very bad mother indeed, who deserted him, let the tyrant father take over his life, who was powerless to rescue him and indifferent to his fate. With these questions in mind we shall now turn to *Zauberflöte*.

The story and the characters of *Zauberflöte*

The Magic Flute is a comic opera but it has a very serious side which is announced in the opening bars of the overture. The characters often pause in the action to declaim on moral standards and behaviour and the major theme of the opera is that the pursuit of knowledge and truth is mankind's highest duty. This theme, and a secondary theme about equality and fraternity, were beliefs central to Freemasonry at the time. The opera is clearly an attempt to win some support for the Freemasons, under attack from the Catholic authorities who saw them as subversives.

The story, originally drawn from a number of sources, including oriental and German fairy stories, is very like any good pantomime and includes a monstrous serpent, a wicked witch and a powerful, good magician. There is also a prince and a princess. As you might expect, the story is about all the problems they have in getting together. The most obvious symbolism in the story is about good overcoming evil.

A brief synopsis: Prince Tamino, a youth lost while hunting in a forest, is saved from the huge serpent pursuing him by three female attendants of the Queen of the Night. He learns that the Queen's daughter, the Princess Pamina, has been abducted by a wicked scoundrel of a magician called Sarastro. Seeing her portrait, the Prince falls in love with Pamina. He agrees to rescue her after the distraught Queen tells him the story of the violent abduction. The Queen provides Tamino with a magic flute to protect him from danger and she also provides three

boys to guide him on his way. Papageno, bird-catcher for the Queen, is also sent along, to provide companionship for Tamino, as well as light relief.

After a comical and tuneful skirmish between Papageno and Monostatos, the black slavemaster of Sarastro, Tamino eventually meets up with Sarastro, is given a very different account of the reasons behind the abduction and is told that the Queen of the Night is an evil woman. It is from here on that the story has obviously been changed. Tamino now perceived Sarastro as a good noble and wise man – after all, he is the high priest of the temple of the sun, he has come on stage in a triumphal chariot drawn by six lions, and the gathered populace keep singing his praises. In the eyes of all, he represents wisdom, piety and virtue.

Tamino and Papageno are taken off, to begin undergoing the trials and purification they must have, if they are to become initiates in the priesthood of the sun. It is made quite clear to Tamino that he must go along with this if he values his life and wishes to see Pamina. Not that he is given any choice in the matter. Tamino successfully resists the temptations in the first trials and Pamina is allowed to join him to face the final ordeals of fire and water. At Pamina's instruction Tamino plays his magic flute and together they pass safely through.

The Queen of the Night, now unmasked in her wicked plot to overthrow Sarastro and take over his power, is forced back into the bowels of the earth – into eternal night – together with Monostatos and her three ladies. Blinding sunlight illuminates the stage. Sarastro and his priests give thanks to the sun for driving away the evil powers of darkness.

The characters: Papageno is the bird-catcher of the Queen of the Night and his appearance is quite amazing. He is covered in feathers. He is the funny man of the opera – there to amuse the plebeian audience who might otherwise become bored. He is a compulsive talker with quick wit. He is always ready to fool around – he doesn't take life at all seriously. He is also a terrible coward, all too ready to lie, to prevaricate, to run away, to avoid any dangers including the danger of self-examination. He is not the least bit interested in truth or knowledge. All he wants is a lovely little wife to tend to his needs, a life of pleasure and ease. So his costume also tells us this – that he wants to flit through life like a bird.

We might say then that he is an undeveloped man, one who has no interest in facing up to the responsibilities of life. As long as the Queen provides him with good food and wine, he is content. He is horrified to be sent on such a perilous journey with Tamino. His presence often proves a handicap and an embarrassment to the prince. But despite his cowardice, Papageno does have some scruples. He endears himself to us by the way he makes fun of the serious and often pompous priests. Being a servant, and unable to resist temptation for long, Papageno doesn't make it into the priesthood as Tamino does.

His counterpart in the story is Monostatos, the black servant and Slavemaster of

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Sarastro. Monostatos is also a comic role – mainly because his lustful designs on Pamina are always foiled, to his own cost. He is, we might say, further along the continuum towards id, than Papageno. He is all desire and he has no scruples at all. His whole being is driven towards satisfying his sexual and aggressive needs, and he has no other way of achieving these except directly. In other words, he has no capacity to sublimate or otherwise deal with his drives. His tolerance of frustration is very low and pushes him to recklessness. He is found out and eventually banished by Sarastro. Therewith he goes off to offer his services to the Queen of the Night.

One of the curious questions about Monostatos is why Sarastro took him on in the first place. Or perhaps that's a curiosity about Sarastro. However, Monostatos does serve one major function in the story – to highlight the theme of good conquering evil. This is also achieved by the symbolism of colour (and I'm sorry to say that the symbolism hasn't changed in two hundred years). Black represents evil, darkness, lechery, baseness and ignorance, according to this symbolism. And white represents goodness, knowledge, light, nobleness and pureness. Monostatos hasn't a show in his attempts to be someone – even Papageno can overcome him (with a little help from the magic chime of bells he has received from the Queen of the Night).

Sarastro is the antithesis of Monostatos. He is the powerful good wise High Priest of the temple of the sun. At least, that is how he is presented once Tamino reaches the temple. It is only then that we learn that Sarastro is not the evil tyrant described by the Queen of the Night. He tells Pamina that she could not be left in her mother's hands, for then she would be robbed of her happiness "... a man must guide your heart for without a man a woman would not fulfil her aim in life".

A little later, Sarastro tells his priests "The gods have destined Pamina, the virtuous maid, for this gracious youth. That is the reason I took her from her arrogant mother. That woman imagines herself to be great and hopes by deception and superstition to ensnare the people and destroy our strong temple. That she shall not do".

Sarastro is now represented as the embodiment of enlightenment, and the Queen of the Night now represents continuing ignorance. We learn that the temple of the sun contains the shrine of light, i.e. truth, and that all who wish to acquire reason, virtue and wisdom have to take the difficult and frightening path of initiation that leads to the shrine – as Tamino must do.

At this point the changes in the story are very obvious. We are left wondering about a great many questions – not posed and certainly not explained or answered in the opera. For example, what has happened to Tamino? His aim was never to become an initiate. All he set out to do was to rescue Pamina and return her to her mother. Somewhere along the way, never explained, is his transition from the

accuser of Sarastro to his admirer, and his transition from the willing believer of the Queen of the Night to a most scathing and dismissive critic of women.

Tamino does not say that he wants to be an initiate. He isn't given the choice. Sarastro has long since decided that Tamino **shall** be initiated. Sarastro's behaviour towards Pamina is equally questionable. He tells her plainly that he will not give her her freedom. We might add that the violent abduction was hardly the action of a wise and humane father figure. Furthermore, it is Sarastro who decides what Pamina's happiness is to consist of. Significantly perhaps, Pamina never expresses gratitude to Sarastro for any of this. In fact, once we begin to look beneath the words of acclaim, there are many weak points in the character of Sarastro. The wise pronouncements he utters, in his deep and resonant bass voice – itself a powerful symbol – do not fit with his conduct. Even if we believe his abduction of Pamina was done for the best and most loving of motives, his execution of it was unforgivable. And what about his entrance on stage, to confront the terrified youngsters – “in a triumphal chariot drawn by six lions”? Doesn't this give the lie to all his talk? Isn't this a blatant and grandiose display of power totally unfitting a man of wisdom and virtue? And what about all his talk of fraternity, and of men loving their fellow men? Sarastro has slaves and does not hesitate to use his power to enforce his wishes. Nor does he hesitate to behave cynically and punitively towards a menial who is already disadvantaged by his colour, Monostatos, who is certainly, like the slaves, **not** treated as an equal. Sarastro is the major puzzle of the opera – perhaps things aren't as black and white as they seem?

The Queen of the Night is also a puzzle. She is initially presented in a sympathetic light as a distraught grief-stricken mother who fears for the safety and welfare of her missing daughter. It is her attendants, the three ladies, who save Tamino in the opening scene of the opera. It is the same three who punish Papageno, a little later on, for telling lies. This surely indicates that the Queen values truth. Remember too that the Queen gives Tamino the magic flute, to help and protect him on his dangerous journey to find Sarastro and rescue Pamina.

When the Queen is later presented as the wicked witch of the plot, we are left with the contradictions about her initial goodness and about her gift of the flute. It clearly is good, yet it is given to Tamino by the Queen who is now bad. There is also the anomaly of the three boys, provided by the Queen to guide Tamino. The boys are definitely good. They help Tamino and Papageno whatever the situation, and they also help Pamina to survive her suicidal despair later on. In a brief discussion with her daughter Pamina, the Queen reveals the source of her hatred for Sarastro. It turns out that Pamina's father was Sarastro's predecessor. Sarastro inherited from him the seven-pointed solar orb, worn on the High Priest's breast. It is the orb which gives Sarastro his supreme power. The Queen of the Night desires it for herself. She believes she should have had it when her

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husband died. But he, like Sarastro, believed that “knowledge was beyond a woman’s comprehension. The duty of a woman was to entrust herself to the guidance of wise men”. This was certainly the belief of Freemasons in the eighteenth century. In the last part of the opera, the Queen demands that her daughter stab Sarastro. If Pamina does not obey her, the Queen will abandon her daughter forever. In vain, Pamina protests. The Queen sweeps off leaving her daughter in a terrible state of conflict and distress. She loves her mother and has looked to her for rescue, protection and guidance.

Here then, is another character ambivalently presented. We have been told that the Queen is bad, and we have observed her badness. But in the first part of the opera we observed that good things came from her, including the magic flute itself. So – we have a bad mother who is also good, and a good father who is also bad.

Tamino, the young prince, is also introduced to us in a way that invites analytical interpretation. Throughout the opera he is referred to as a youth – in German, Jungling. If we are in any doubt just where he is, developmentally speaking, the stage directions for his entry at the beginning of the opera make this quite clear: Tamino carries a bow but there are no arrows in his quiver. When he meets the Queen and agrees to rescue her daughter, he has no idea what lies ahead of him except that he must confront the wicked Sarastro and persuade him to give Pamina up. What happens is quite different. He quickly sees he hasn’t a show of persuading Sarastro to do anything. He has to submit if he is to survive. Even the old priest he first meets outside the temple, and who appears so reasonable, makes a veiled threat as to his fate if he doesn’t do as he’s told.

Tamino’s trials and ordeals in the latter part of the story become an allegorical journey into manhood. He learns to withstand temptations, face his fears, endure uncertainty and loneliness. When he successfully comes through it all he becomes one of the chaps – fit to take his place in the world of enlightened adults. In the final scene of the opera he and Pamina are seen dressed in the white robes of the priesthood.

As we have seen, Tamino is not wholly consistent. His initial support for the Queen of the Night evaporates instantly when Sarastro appears. Later, he further allies himself with Sarastro by making statements about the lying tittle-tattle of women and the feebleness of their minds. Yet it is Pamina who takes him by the hand and leads the way into the ordeals by fire and water – and Tamino trusts her implicitly, even though she is but a feeble woman.

Pamina is the most straightforward character in the opera and she seems to know what is right and what is important from the outset. When she and Papageno have been captured trying to escape and are about to face Sarastro to explain themselves, Papageno asks her what on earth he should say to this terrifying

person. In a line which has been described as one of the great affirmations of all music, Pamina answers: The Truth, the Truth, Even if you are Guilty.

Perhaps one thing that strikes us, about both Pamina and Tamino, is that neither of them have any say in their destiny. They are swept up into other people's ambitions. We don't even know if they manage to get together sexually or not, in the end. They are both accepted into the priesthood, but this only seems to mean more rituals and a very proscribed way of life, however enlightened. They are now to live out their lives as Sarastro ordains. I suggest that there is more to this so-called happy ending than meets the eye.

And, what is the magic flute itself, surely as powerful a symbol as any in the opera? Is it a phallic symbol, given by the mother to the son? What do mothers give their sons to help them become real men, strong but loving, able to deal creatively with their powers and passions and to find a safe and satisfying way through life?

Tamino does not abuse the powers of the flute. He plays it only when he needs protection, comfort and encouragement, or when he needs to retain hope in himself and faith in his endeavour. At one point in his journey, alone and despondent in the forest, he plays the flute and immediately all kinds of wild animals come out of the undergrowth to listen. At another stage, threatened by the lions of Sarastro during his trials, he plays the flute and the lions withdraw.

It does appear then that the flute is what gives a man courage, helping him to overcome his fear, but also helping him to tame his own unruly passions – represented by the wild animals – giving him self-control and gentleness. The flute is a sign of the real strength of manhood, a true phallic symbol. I believe the flute stands for the harmonious and creative expression of our libidinal energy and natural aggressiveness. I'm quite sure that this is part of what good parents give to their children.

Interpretation

Mozart wrote *Zauberflöte* in the summer of 1791, the year of his death. He had completed it, except for the overture and march of the priests, when in mid-July, he received a commission for another opera, *La Clemenza di Tito*, written in August and first performed early in September, in Prague.

Mozart returned to Vienna in mid-September, wrote the Clarinet Concerto (K 622), completed *Zauberflöte* and supervised rehearsals before the premiere of the opera on 30th September, which he conducted. The opera was an immediate success. During the first two weeks of the production he went to the performance almost every day. Two months later, on 5th December 1791, he died.

We do not know if Mozart had any awareness during that summer that he had not long to live. He was far from well, his friends were concerned. But he did not

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slacken the pace of his working life. He had been composing almost constantly during this year. Since the end of March he'd been overwhelmed with commissions. He did not need to write *Zauberflöte* for financial reasons, though he would certainly earn well from it.

He began work on the score as soon as he received the original libretto. That the opera was special to him is reflected in something he said on his deathbed: "if only I could have heard my *Zauberflöte* once more".

I do not believe that the libretto of this opera was accepted by Mozart purely by chance. I do believe that there were unconscious reasons for choosing it, whatever the conscious ones – and it is generally agreed that his membership of the Freemasons was a major conscious factor.

It is my hypothesis that the story of *Zauberflöte* is the story of Mozart's unconscious, of his inner life and world, peopled by the internal representations of his significant objects – his parents and himself. All the inconsistencies and contradictions in the story and the characters can be understood if we see them as the evidence of the difficulty we all have in coping with good and bad co-existing in the same person. Especially if we see *Zauberflöte* as a reflection of the difficulty of a small child in coping with the 'goodness' and 'badness' of a parent and of himself.

I think that Sarastro is Wolfgang's internalised father. Leopold, the father in reality who controlled his life for so long, was also dedicated to a higher end and he pursued it no matter what the personal costs to his family. To a young child, perhaps especially to one who adored and idolised his father, he could also be experienced as a powerful tyrant whom nobody questioned. The ordeals that he put young Wolfgang through almost cost the latter his life – in the end did claim his life prematurely.

Just as few seem to have noticed this darker side of Leopold, so Sarastro's dark side is totally ignored (or perhaps denied?) by everyone around him. Having forcibly wrested Pamina from her mother he totally ignores her distress and refuses her freedom, mapping out her future according to his own priorities. It gets worse. Despite all his talk of friendship and of acting in the name of humanity, Sarastro is quite prepared for the two young people, Pamina and Tamino, to lose even their lives in their journey to enlightenment – a journey that he, and not they, has decided is supremely important.

Sarastro addresses his gods: "if they should meet with death, reward their virtuous bravery and admit them into your dwelling place". This is surely taking the search for truth a little too far? The high-minded ideals of Sarastro, and his certainty that he has the right to pursue them whatever, cover something that could be described as ruthlessness. Isn't this all rather like the goals that Leopold set for Wolfgang and Nannerl and which he pursued with a single-mindedness

that put the lives of both children at risk?

The Queen of the Night has to be Wolfgang's mother. In the eyes of her young children, of course, every mother is a Queen – beautiful, powerful and rich. While we are still toddlers, frustrated by helplessness and impotence to control the world, mother appears to us as absolutely powerful, magically in command of all events and all resources around us, her insides an imagined treasure house of fecundity.

Initially in the story, the Queen is a good caring mother longing for the return of her daughter. We hear too that Pamina loves her mother and wants to return to her. She says to Sarastro "To me, the sound of my mother's name is sweet". Remember too, that the Queen and her attendants have punished Papageno for lying and have given good magic to Tamino and Papageno.

The Queen's failing is that she loses interest in the welfare of her daughter and abandons the two young people to their fate, becoming increasingly powerless as they journey further onwards. Or is it that she simply does not use the power she is endowed with? Like Wolfgang's mother she seems to opt out. No, not quite. The Queen provided Tamino with three guides at the beginning of the journey. The three boys stay close and are on hand when things get tough in Sarastro's temple. But they now seem to be serving Sarastro. Yet another inconsistency that is not explained. But perhaps it does indicate some union or connection between Sarastro and the Queen?

Wolfgang's feelings about his mother were only ever expressed in loving terms, as far as we know. His love for her has to be accepted as fact. But what of his curious behaviour when she died and he could not bring himself to write directly to his father? Was it guilt? Did he fear his father would blame him? Did he blame himself for occasionally, in his innermost world, wishing his mother dead?

In that inner world perhaps she had been experienced as a very bad mother. She had failed to save him from his father, she hadn't used her power to intervene in her husband's strict and obsessional programme. She hadn't saved him from the terrors of illness that stemmed from his father's constant demands. How does a small child handle such wicked thoughts and such ambivalent feelings? Initially, by splitting – by keeping his bad mother quite separate from his good mother – two distinct people.

Eventually he recognises that the bad mother (whom he wishes to destroy) is the same as the good mother (whom he loves and needs). This is what we describe as the stage of whole object relations, when the child can integrate good and bad into a whole person. It also involves the child's recognition that the bad mother's 'badness' was really to do with his own frustration (and the bad feelings arising from that) – projected onto her. In later life if all has gone reasonably well, we can allow ourselves to be aware of our mixed feelings towards others. There is

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no longer the extreme ambivalence, which initially demanded a splitting defence.

It has to be said that the opera is not really a fairy story, or a real pantomime. This is partly because the characters of the Queen and Sarastro are neither purely good nor purely bad. They are both good and bad. There is no separate character who is pure good mother (such as a fairly godmother) and there is no separate character who portrays a purely bad father. The Queen and Sarastro have to contain both aspects within themselves, even though our awareness of this may not be always conscious.

Tamino naturally is Wolfgang, and I'm inclined to think that Pamina is also – the feminine side of himself. The story of their journey, and the ordeals they must go through to reach the shrine of light, and to be united together, is the story of Wolfgang's life. Papageno is also Wolfgang – the fulfilment of his wish to be free as a bird, to be free of the responsibilities his genius had laid on him. Papageno is not “chosen by the gods”. Unlike Tamino, he has no destiny to fulfil. As Papageno is a companion to Tamino, an associate, this signifies that he is not really a disowned and split-off part of the self. Wolfgang was presumably quite aware of this aspect of his character.

Monostatos expresses a more deep-seated wish – one which has to be firmly split-off and dissociated from the self by the dramatic trick of giving the character a black skin. Presumably Wolfgang had no conscious wish to own the lustful Moor in any respect, yet he unconsciously recognises that the character has something to do with himself. The presence of Monostatos in the story gives us all a chance to project our own sexual desires and frustrations onto someone else.

If the major characters of *Zauberflöte* are the principal characters of Mozart's inner world – the representations of himself and his parents – then the significance of the number three, recurring throughout the opera, takes on a psychological meaning. Three ladies, three boys, three slaves, three temples, three important chords – repeated in the overture and again later in the opera – three trumpet blasts.

I think Mozart changed the story to make it fit more closely his own internal life-story. He had recognised unconsciously that the unchanged version had meaning for him. But if he was to tell the truth about his internalised objects, if he was to reveal that he ambivalence was still extreme, his internal parents still powerfully good and bad – as like as not to be magically helpful as they were to be murderously indifferent to his true welfare – then he had to reflect this in the appropriate characters.

Let us return to the apparently happy ending of the opera, the scene of blinding sunlight. Tamino and Pamina are now standing amongst the ranks of the priesthood. All are dressed in white. The stage directions call for Sarastro to take

an elevated position. I think that, far from being a happy ending this is the ultimate white-out – or should I say, whitewash. We get the distinct feeling that these two young people are now prisoners, as colourless as the other priests and as totally identified with Sarastro. I think the unconscious message is that Mozart felt that he never really escaped from the power of his internalised father and that this father had killed off a vital part of his being.

Erna Schwerin writes (of Wolfgang) “the transformation of infantile narcissism into normal self-confidence seemed always to be limited to his sublime gifts as a composer and musician. In his personal relationships he had an almost insatiable affect hunger, needing to be loved and praised. When in his later years the pressures of daily living increased and he had to cope with the frustrations of fruitless efforts for a position outside Salzburg and his father’s recriminations and projections, his coping skills became adversely affected, and his high spirits were unconsciously placed in the service of denial to fight an underlying depression and narcissistic depletion”.

The opera also pays a tribute to his real parents, who had sacrificed much to give him all the help they could.

The magic flute had come to Tamino from the Queen. It is only near the end of the opera that we learn of its origin. It was the Queen’s husband who had “in a mystical hour, hewed it from the depth of the thousand year old oak, amid thunder and lightening”. Whether we regard this as a reference to conception or not, clearly both parents are involved in the gift of the flute to Tamino. Both parents had given Wolfgang life and talent and the chance to develop it. Their unity had also protected him safely through the vicissitudes of oedipal conflict. It was through his musical genius, given by both parents, that he could make his own statements about truth. And it is thanks to his musical genius that he could face the approach of his own death. Music would make him immortal – he would join the gods. But more than that, it would help him to endure the process of death. Pamina says to Tamino as they prepare to enter the ordeal by fire:

“Come now and play upon the flute.
It will shield us on our fearful path.
We walk by the power of its music
Joyously, through death’s dark night.”

However questionably we regard some of the values implicitly expressed in *Zauberflöte*, we have to admit that, musically speaking the opera is a triumph of harmony and integration, and this is the lasting impression it makes on us all. Anthony Storr, in *The Dynamics of Creation* says, in respect of any serious work of art, “its function as a reconciler of opposites and as a bridge between outer and inner worlds should be the aim of the artist”. (p 274).

Whether *Zauberflöte* does reconcile the opposites I leave to you to decide. I do

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believe the opera serves as a bridge between the outer and inner worlds, our own as well as Mozart's. We all know that good and bad, loving and hating, ruth and ruthlessness, feminine and masculine, exist in us all. What most of us don't share with Mozart is his genius for sublimation.

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