

Feminism, Chauvinism and Masonic Allegory:

The Role of Pamina in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*

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Published in *Goldberg: Early Music Magazine* 40 (June 2006): 40-51

Works of art sometimes convey message that make their audiences cringe: the artists we admire do not necessarily present ideas and ideals that we share. On the face of it, two of Mozart's operas – *Cosi fan tutte* and *The Magic Flute* – seem to illustrate this point. Both works seem to present, in different ways, a disturbingly chauvinistic, even misogynist view. Not only do they present some of their female characters in a negative light, but some of the characters speak out openly against all women. But do these characters speak for Mozart – or does Mozart speak against them?

In this article, I seek to explore the alleged misogyny of *The Magic Flute*. There are two main heroines in this opera: The Queen of the Night and her daughter, Pamina. The Queen and her Three Ladies are villains, whereas Pamina is “a gentle, virtuous maiden”, to quote Sarastro’s words in Act II. The opera’s “good guys” are, primarily, the priests of the Order of Isis and Osiris, headed by Sarastro, and the prince Tamino, who ends up joining them. From their stance as upholders of virtue, members of this Order issue unambiguously anti-feminine statements, ranging from the paternalistic to the misogynist. Yet, in the end, they admit Pamina as a full member of the Order.

The case against the opera is by no means negligible. Even the virtuous Pamina is clearly treated by Sarastro with paternalism – he abducted her, supposedly, to protect her from the vile influence of her mother (as if she couldn’t make moral judgement on her own), and callously allows his licentious and violent slave Monostatos to guard her (the fact that the character’s only male villain is a black slave raises the spectre of racism, but this is beyond the scope of this article). Both the Queen and Sarastro promise her as rewards to Tamino, and in this sense seem to treat her merely as an inert object.

It is no surprise, then, that when musicologist Susan McClary sought to denounce the alleged chauvinism of western classical music, she included *The Magic Flute* among her illustrations. In her view,

there is a bogus tradition of ‘how women sound’ in European classical music – a code transmitted by men, in which women are either docile and passive (Monteverdi’s Euridice, Bizet’s Micaela, Mozart’s Pamina) or else man-devouring harpies (Monteverdi’s Poppea, Mozart’s Queen of the Night, Bizet’s Carmen, Strauss’s Salome). (*Feminine Endings*, p. 114)

The case seems further strengthened by the opera’s historical context. The Order of Isis and Osiris is a thinly veiled depiction of the real-life Order of the Freemasons; Mozart himself was a Brother within this Order. There is little doubt among scholars that the opera indeed derived considerable inspiration from Masonic ideals, imagery and personalities – one hypothesis is that Mozart sought to present a defence of the Order, which was under attack at the time (and was indeed closed in the Austro-Hungarian Empire by royal decree in 1795). The Order’s precarious position was due, in no small part, to its liberal and egalitarian ethos; in pursuing enlightened brotherhood, the Freemasons seemed to embody the values of the French Revolution, and were therefore regarded as dangerous by Europe’s monarchs. But their quest for equality was strictly restricted to men. The Freemasons did not admit women into their ranks. At most, they allowed the formation of separate female “lodges of adoption”, and even this option did not exist in all countries; it is not clear, for example, whether such lodges existed in 18th-century Vienna. Many of the misogynist statements in *The Magic Flute* echo views expressed in Masonic treatises. In praising the Masons, Mozart allegedly endorsed their misogyny as well.

This was indeed the view, for instance, of the historian Margaret Jacob:

The rich masonic symbolism found in *The Magic Flute* [...] where it is gender specific – and what could be more gender specific than the evil Queen of the Night – may relate to many contemporary themes with which Mozart was familiar. If there were lodges of adoption in Vienna, we can only wonder what they would have made out of the evil personified by the Queen and her entourage. Equally we may ask, What were the reaction to female freemasonry to be found among Mozart and his brothers, and do any of those responses find their way into the portrait of Mozart’s evil queen? (*Living the Enlightenment*, p. 135)

Jacob, however, fails to ask the complementary question: What would Mozart’s Brethren have made of Pamina’s eventual admission, as a full member, to the Order of Isis and Osiris – and of her characterisation in general? This consideration has led the musicologist H. C. Robbins-Landon (in the notes to Georg Solti’s recording of the

work) to propose an opposite interpretation of the opera. In his view, the opera clearly demonstrates Mozart' wish “to reform the St John Masonry to which he belonged by asking that women be included in the Craft’s membership”.

It is not my intention to judge whether Mozart sought such sweeping reforms of the real-life Masonic Order. I do wish to show, however, that within his opera, Mozart seeks to place men and women on an equal footing. Julian Rushton, in his entry on the *The Magic Flute* for *New Grove Opera*, concedes that gender equality might have been “alien to Freemasonry”, but adds that “the implication that women should become initiates is the opera’s title to true Enlightenment”. The fact that Mozart allows his characters to express anti-feminine views should be not be read as an endorsement; as Rushton observes, we should not “confuse the attitudes of characters [...] with the meaning of the drama”.

Some comments on women in Mozart’s operas

As Robbins-Landon points out, women play “a vital role” in many of Mozart’s operas, and that Mozart was particularly keen “to investigate the hopes, loves and tragedies of the female sex, to interpret lovingly their motivations and reactions”. Indeed, many of Mozart’s operatic heroines act with courage and resourcefulness that equal and sometimes surpass those of the men around them (Brigid Brophy, in *Mozart the Dramatist*, offers some striking illustrations of this).

This was not merely an accidental result of the libretti that Mozart happened to set. Mozart was quite selective when it came to operatic libretti, and sought out those that would suit his own musical-theatrical purposes. On May 7, 1783, having read and rejected several operatic texts, he told his father what sort of libretto he is looking for – two years before he received, from Lorenzo Da-Ponte, three operatic libretti that would indeed meet of his requirements:

The most essential thing is that on the whole the story should be really *comic*; and, if possible, [the librettist] ought to introduce *two equally good female parts*, one of these to be *seria* [in the vein of serious opera], the other *mezzo caratere* [between serious and comic], but both parts equal *in importance and excellence*. The third female *character*, however, may be entirely *buffa* [comic], and so may all the male ones, if necessary. (translation from Hildesheimer’s *Mozart*, p. 155)

It is interesting to note here that Mozart, quite literally, took women more seriously than men; at the very least, he found the portrayal of serious women more challenging and interesting than the portrayal of serious men. He seems willing to

entrust the thrust of the drama to the women, leaving men in the role of comic relief. This doesn't actually happen in any of his major operas, but that's because he elevated the men – not because he downgraded the women.

As I said in the beginning, the charge of chauvinism has nonetheless been raised against *Cosi fan tutte* and *The Magic Flute*. *Cosi* certainly complies with the demands of the 1783 letter: of the three women portrayed in this opera, one is *seria* (Fiordiligi), one is *mezzo-caratere* (Dorabella), and one is *buffa* (Despina); the same division applies to the three men. But the opera's plotline is indeed chauvinistic: two women, allegedly standing in for all womankind, break their oaths of loyalty to their lovers and change their affections within less than 24 hours.

The actual opera, however, is far more complex. Da-Ponte's libretto clearly suggests that, had the men been put to the test, they would have failed just as miserably as the women. The overall message, then, hovers between chauvinism and misanthropy: "Women are incapable of loyalty – and men are probably just as bad". Mozart's music adds its own layer: its expressive humanity – and in particular his musical empathy with the four lovers – subverts the cynicism of Da-Ponte's text. There is a lot of frivolity in this opera, and direct mockery of both the men and the women; but the characters still seem more like fully rounded individuals and less like the cardboard symbols for all men and all women suggested by Da-Ponte's libretto.

Mozart among the Masons

The Masons' egalitarian ethos is suggested in several of Mozart's earlier works, most notably *Figaro*. In *The Magic Flute*, it is referred to explicitly in the libretto, along with oblique references to Masonic images and rituals. These have been discussed in great detail and explicitness in Jacques Chailley's *The Magic Flute, A Masonic Opera*. While some scholars dispute specific details in Chailley's exegesis, the general connection between *The Magic Flute* and the Masons has rarely been questioned.

The Masonic messages in the opera might well have originated from Mozart himself. As a composer, Mozart was often involved in the shaping of his operatic texts – above and beyond the power of his music to interpret and transform them. In addition, his links with the Masons were much stronger than those of his librettist, Emanuel Schikaneder (who commissioned the opera from him, and played the role of Papageno in the premiere production). Both Mozart and Schikaneder were Masons;

Schikaneder, however, was dismissed from the Order in Regensburg in 1788, and it is not clear whether he even tried, let alone succeeded, to join one of the Viennese lodges. Mozart, on the other hand, became a Mason in 1784, and remained a respected member until his death in 1791; he wrote several musical works for the Masons, both before and after the composition of *The Magic Flute*.

It has been suggested that other Masons were also involved in shaping the libretto; it certainly owes much to an article on Egyptian Mysteries published by Iganz von Born in the Viennese *Journal für Freymaurer* in 1784. At the time, Born was a senior Mason; he might even have served as a model for Sarastro, despite his departure from the Order prior to the opera's composition. Some scholars also suggested that Karl Ludwig Gieseke, another Mason, was also involved in writing the libretto, though the evidence for this is circumstantial at best. In any case, of all the purported authors and inspirations for the libretto, Mozart is the only one who is known to have been an active Freemason in 1791. The Masonic message of the opera, therefore, must owe much to Mozart's own views – and any criticism it might contain towards the Masons' attitude to women is most likely to have originated from the composer. This criticism is expressed, most prominently, through the characterisation of Pamina, in text and music alike.

Pamina's character and background

From the start, there is a curious similarity between Pamina and Tamino: both make their first stage appearance in mid-flight, escaping from an enemy; and both are rescued by others, not by themselves. If we compare their escapes, however, it seems that Pamina emerges as the more active of the two. Tamino enters pursued by a serpent, carrying a bow but possessing no arrows. This suggests that he did try to defend himself – but clearly failed, and he now has no ammunition left. His first words on stage are a cry for help. We have no idea whether his plight results from a deliberate attempt to attack the snake or whether he is merely a victim. Pamina is first seen on stage dragged in by Monostatos. He has thwarted her in her attempt to escape from him (and from Sarastro). Unlike Tamino, she does not cry for help; this might be simply because she doesn't believe anyone will heed her cry, but her defiant stance against Monostatos (intensified in Mozart's music) is curiously contrasted with Tamino's more pathetic approach.

This impression is further strengthened as the opera proceeds. To some extent, both Tamino and Pamina are led and manipulated by the Queen and by Sarastro; but Pamina shows more independence of mind than Tamino, in a reversal of standard stereotypes which is quite typical of Mozart. To my mind, at least, Tamino emerges as rather gullible: at first, he falls for the Queen's story about her daughter's abduction and her own powerlessness; but when the Priest/Speaker at the temple tells him that Sarastro is not as bad as the Queen said he is, Tamino accepts this quite quickly, without receiving or even demanding evidence. Almost throughout the opera his actions are guided by instructions he receives from others – first from the Queen and her Ladies, then from the Three Boys and from Sarastro and his priests. He is rarely presented with any serious dilemmas, and seems curiously passive. This does not detract from his courage – he is quite willing to risk his life on several occasions – but even Papageno shows a greater ability to think for himself.

The most noticeable characteristic of Pamina is, perhaps, her yearning for love. Tamino has fallen in love with her picture; she falls in love with Tamino merely on hearing, from Papageno, that he is in love with her. She clearly expresses this in her Act I duet with the Papageno praising the union of man and woman – one of the few love-duets in all opera, perhaps, sung by two people who are not in love **with each other** (though both of them, in different ways, are in love with love itself; see also Brigid Brophy, *Mozart: The Dramatist*, p. 125).

This yearning for love is something that other characters in the opera – with the possible exception of Papageno and the Three Boys – seem to miss. This is clear, for instance, in the first on-stage encounter of Pamina and Sarastro. Pamina and Papageno, having failed to escape from the temple, come before Sarastro and his retinue. Pamina readily confesses that she tried to escape, pleading justification in her flight from Monostatos's violent advances; but she also says that she was driven by her filial duty and her love for her mother. Sarastro interrupts her, stating that her mother is within his power, and that Pamina has no chance of happiness with her. Pamina continues to plead love for the Queen, and Sarastro interrupts again, dismissing her mother as arrogant and stating that Pamina, like any woman, must rely on a man's guidance – without it, she would not fulfil her purpose in life.

Sarastro's words are unequivocally paternalistic. Pamina does not actually argue against him; but it is clear that they are talking on different planes: Pamina speaks of her emotions, and Sarastro answers in terms of power (asserting control over her

mother), interest (claiming she'll never be happy with her mother) and chauvinist doctrine.

Mozart's music accentuates the difference. He brings out the turmoil in Pamina's soul – for instance, in the agitated orchestral accompaniment when she mentions Monostatos. When Pamina mentions her mother, the orchestra becomes even more excited, and there is a sense of pleading in the rising sequence in Pamina's own line. In both cases, Sarastro answers in calmer, more measured tones, though there is a hint of impatience when he interrupts Pamina in mid-sentence. His fury towards the Queen is revealed in the dotted rhythms, doubled by the orchestra; his line at this point has an angry edge, which (depending on the performers) can sound almost brutal. His tense, minor chords contrast markedly with Pamina's major-key lyricism.

This near-outbursts from Sarastro does not silence Pamina: she insists on expressing her own love, describing her mother's name as "sweet" – and this sweetness is vividly painted by the sensuous woodwind writing in the orchestra. But Sarastro interrupts her again in mid-sentence – using exactly the same music he used before. Mozart clearly suggests that Sarastro fails – perhaps doesn't even try – to listen to what Pamina is saying. He seems to demand that Pamina simply forget that the Queen is her mother and stop loving her at his command; he does not comprehend the intensity of Pamina's feelings or the effect that his words (and music) have on her. His doctrinal statement – "a man must guide your heart" – is delivered in calmer, more measured tones, but it does nothing to alleviate Pamina's feelings.

Thus, male paternalism, as endorsed by the Masons, is presented on stage in the presence of a woman at whom it is directed. This is not some abstract, archetypical woman; even at this stage, we know a lot about her – especially how vital it is for her to love and to be loved. Mozart, in his music, invites the audience to empathise more with this woman than with the man speaking at her; and points to us the effect of doctrinal paternalism at one specific victim.

Pamina's increased torment in the opera has several functions. It clearly increases the audience's sympathy towards her (and allows Mozart to write an achingly beautiful mourning aria and a tensely dramatic attempted-suicide scene); and it also shows Pamina's worthiness to enter the Order. The libretto does not tell us explicitly who decided to initiate her, and when that decision was taken; but Chailley

argues that this decision must have been taken at an early stage (and without Pamina's knowledge).

The Trials of Pamina

Tamino's initiation into the Order of Isis and Osiris is very explicitly mentioned in the libretto, and he is aware of what he's going through. When he is ushered into the two final Trials, two armoured men tell him that all initiates have to be tested by the four elements – Fire, Water, Air and Earth. Their words are quoted directly from *Sethos* by Jean Terrason (1731), whose presentation of Egyptian mythology and religion is clearly reflected in Masonic symbols and rituals; and testing by the elements is also part of Masonic initiation. Tamino is about to enter a raging furnace (Fire) and a waterfall (Water) to complete his test; so presumably he's already passed the Trials by Air and Earth. It is not too difficult to reconstruct when this happened. He was commanded to be silent twice: before his confrontations with Queen of the Night's Ladies, and when Pamina comes to him. The Ladies emerge from a subterranean cavern, and are therefore associated with Earth. They try to lure Tamino (and Papageno) away from the temple, but Tamino refuses to heed their arguments or even to speak to them. When the Ladies are driven away, Tamino is congratulated for resisting their temptations; he has definitely passed a test, and the identification with Earth is understandable. He again resists when Pamina comes before him, obeying the Priests' instruction not to speak to her. At least by elimination, this could well be his Trial by Air; the fact that Pamina was attracted by his flute strengthens the association.

Pamina also undergoes a series of trials. She is confronted with her mother, also emerging from below – her Trial by Earth, according to Chailley. She next has to overcome the grief caused by Tamino's apparent rejection of her; this is her Trial by Air. Finally, she and Tamino enter the furnace and the waterfall: they experience their Trials by Fire and Water together, and accepted into the Order as a couple.

One could argue on the precise symbolic significance of Tamino's and Pamina's Trials, and their identification with specific elements; Chailley himself admits that it's difficult to pinpoint Pamina's Trial by Air, and that the hints in the libretto "break all records for obscurity" (p. 150). For my purposes, however, the precise symbolism does not matter (though, for reasons of convenience, I will retain Chailley's labels). Whether or not Pamina's encounters with the Queen and Tamino constitute formal

Trials, they can definitely be described as ordeals. Her suffering in her Trials are far greater than Tamino's is his, and she therefore needs greater reserve of courage and fortitude in order to endure them.

Pamina's **Trial by Earth** consists of her confrontation with her mother. The Queen tells her daughter that upon his death, her father passed much of his power – symbolised and embodied in the “sevenfold circle of the sun” – to Sarastro, and orders Pamina to kill Sarastro and retrieve this powerful emblem. Pamina, who still loves her mother, refuses – despite her mother's terrifying curse that, if she doesn't kill Sarastro, “you will never be my daughter”. Monostatos, having heard it all, tries to blackmail Pamina into loving him, but she firmly rejects him as well, knowing that she might be sealing her fate by her refusal. This Trial involves Pamina resisting the loss of motherly love, and threats of blackmail, rape and death; it makes Tamino's Trial by Earth – which consisted merely of refusing to heed to gossip – almost laughable. It also proves that Pamina's moral fibre is stronger than Sarastro believes: when faced with this terrible dilemma, she needed no guidance in order to do the right thing. There is, however, no musical expression to any of this: Pamina is given a speaking role in this Trial, but she doesn't sing, and there is therefore nothing that Mozart can do to affect her characterisation at this stage.

The **Trial by Air**, on the other hand, encompasses three musical numbers for Pamina: an aria, a trio, and the first scene of the opera's Finale. Tamino, we recall, does not speak to Pamina because he's been ordered not to, but Pamina is ignorant of this, and interprets his silence – and his hand-signals that she should leave him alone – as rejection. Again, the strain on Pamina is much higher than on Tamino. The prince has to remain silent even in the face of Pamina's heart-rending aria, “Ach ich fühl's” (“Ah, I feel it”), lamenting the loss of his love; he displays some suffering through silent sighs, but seems to recover from it quite quickly. For Pamina, however, the effect of his silence is devastating. She has just been rejected by her mother – whom she still loves; the thought that her new-found love is also rejecting her is almost unbearable.

In her aria “Ach ich fühl's”, she expresses her despair as she tries, in vain, to make Tamino break his silence. The text already presages her attempted suicide: “If you do not feel love's longing”, she tells Tamino, “I will find rest in death”. Musically, Mozart seeks to express both the emptiness that Pamina feels and the depth of her pain. The strings – playing a repeated rhythm filled with pauses – express the

sense of numbness and despair; the woodwinds express the stabs and outbursts of pain, frequently appearing in the same range as the singer. These outbursts are separated from each other, leaving the expressive burden mostly to the singer's ornate yet hesitant lines. The suicide threat is delivered in a largely resigned tone.

The aria's overall effect is pained yet restrained – a sense of all passion spent (broken, at times, by the outbursts mentioned above). Since Tamino does not receive an aria of his own in response, we do not really know how he reacted to Pamina's pain (even the libretto does not provide many hints on this). The music emphasises, then, that this Trial by Air is much more harrowing for Pamina than for Tamino.

When she next meets Tamino, he and Sarastro attempt to calm her: Sarastro allows the two lovers to meet before Tamino undergoes his final trials. Some writers (e.g., Chailley) contend that this makes Pamina's subsequent suicide attempt inexplicable: after all, Tamino has made his love clear to her in the Trio that follows. In my view, the situation is not nearly that simple. In the dialogue immediately preceding the Trio, Sarastro bids Pamina to say her "last farewell" to Tamino – an ominous phrase, somewhat contradicted by his later promise (in the Trio itself) that they will meet again in happiness.

The music's effect is ambiguous. The Trio can be divided roughly into three parts. In the first part (bars 1-33), one can sense a certain insensitivity to Pamina's pain – and, as we noted, neither Tamino nor Sarastro have shown marked sensitivity to her feelings in the past. Tamino does not really speak directly to Pamina; for the most part, he and Sarastro sing the same words together – ignoring the fact that Pamina is speaking to Tamino alone (perhaps being Sarastro's "double" is an escape clause, allowing Tamino to speak without entirely breaking his vow of silence). Pamina's music becomes more and more agitated – but Tamino and Sarastro retain their blithe, confident tone; they respond to Pamina's words, but do not listen to her tone or to the emotions behind it (as she says, "if you loved as I do, you would not be so calm"). It is easy to understand, therefore, why they entirely fail to comfort her.

As Sarastro urges the lovers to depart, however, something changes: Tamino breaks away from him, and joins Pamina: he is now her double, in words and music alike. Has he broken the vow of silence, then? Perhaps; but another interpretation is that the words they sing – "How bitter is the pain of parting" – represent their inner thoughts, rather than the words they speak.

In the third and last part of the Trio (from bar 60 onwards), the two lovers draw even closer. Sarastro sticks to a single, insistent note, as he repeats the words “the hour strikes”, urging Tamino to move on. Tamino and Pamina sing, together, “O golden bliss, return!” – but here, too, it is not clear whether their singing represents speech or thought, and whether or not they hear each other. Only at the end do they definitely speak, as they bid each other farewell.

Later, when the Three Boys stop Pamina from committing suicide, she claims that Tamino did not speak to her. We also know that Tamino is still under his vow of silence – he is only released from it before his Trials by Fire and Water, when the Men in Armour tell him expressly that he is now allowed to speak to Pamina. For these reasons, I suggested that their words to each other in the Trio represent thought rather than speech, and that the only actual words that Tamino speaks to Pamina on his own are “Pamina, Lebewohl” (farewell, Pamina), for which he perhaps received special permission. The music clearly informs the **audience** the both lovers feel intense pain at their parting; in his heart, Tamino indeed senses Pamina’s suffering and shares her longing. But he does not express this openly, and Pamina therefore remains ignorant of his true feelings.

Three people can be held responsible, therefore, for Pamina’s attempted suicide (in addition to Pamina herself). Her mother rejected her – and gave her the dagger with which she tries to kill herself. Tamino made her feel rejected, leading her to believe that no-one in the world cares for her now. Pamina indeed blames both of them for driving her to despair. She does not mention Sarastro, but he too can be held accountable: he ignored Pamina’s feelings, failed to alleviate her suffering or comfort her – and also failed to take the dagger away from her when he had the chance. It is left to the Three Boys – working, admittedly, for Sarastro and the Order – to rescue her.

The suicide scene completes Pamina’s Trial by Air. The intense pain which she expressed in resigned, static tones in her aria is now vented in a more dynamic, dramatic manner, breaking the sense of serenity which prevailed earlier (the finale opens with the Three Boys’ calm, hopeful hymn to the Sun and the Truth). In the end, the calm returns – the Boys finally succeed in convincing Pamina that Tamino still loves her, and the scene ends with another hymn, sung by Pamina and the Three Boys and celebrating the power of love.

This hymn is followed immediately by the last two Trials. This scene opens with dark solemnity, as the two men in armour read out the words from Terrason's *Sethos* (Schikaneder did alter the words slightly, and Jacques Chailley gives a detailed explication of the differences between the two texts). The words also function as a quote within the opera: they are inscribed on a pyramid at the centre of the stage, clearly illuminated and visible. The music also suggests that the text is part of an ancient ritual: Mozart sets the words in the form of a Bachian chorale-prelude, reminiscent of the section "Gute Nacht, O Wesen" in Bach's motet *Jesu meine Freude*, and using the Lutheran hymn "Ach Gott, vom Himmel sie Darein" (though it is doubtful how many audience members in Catholic Vienna would have recognised the tune). It is clear, therefore, that the Men in Armour are reciting a familiar text, and that Tamino is hardly the first initiate to hear it. His response retains the chorale-prelude's solemn atmosphere.

This atmosphere changes rapidly as Pamina is heard off-stage. She sings in the major key; her voice releases the men from their ceremonial solemnity, and their style becomes cheerful, almost perky. As musicologist Erik Smith puts it, "the Two Men in Armour, who had seemed so inhuman [during the chorale-prelude], reveal themselves as really good fellows after all" (*Cambridge Opera Handbook*, p. 137). In this light-hearted dialogue, they allow Tamino to speak to Pamina – and also mention, for the first time, the idea that Pamina herself might be allowed to join the Order: "A woman who is not afraid of night and death, is worthy, and will be initiated"

Pamina dominates the rest of the scene, both musically and textually. Remarkably, no-one needs to inform her what needs to be done next. On the contrary: she knows exactly what Trials lie ahead, and it is she who tells Tamino how they might survive them. She knows that Tamino's flute – which he received, initially, from her mother's Ladies – will protect them; it was made by her father, who instilled it with magic, and she instructs Tamino to use it during the Trials.

Her most significant words, however, are: "I myself will lead you, and Love shall guide me". This goes directly against Sarastro's position: he told Pamina that women must be guided by men, and now she offers her own guidance to Tamino. Brigid Brophy sums it up well:

It is as though Mozart were expressly telling Sarastro that, if anything, it is the man who goes astray without a woman to guide him, but [...] both will lose their way unless directed by the presiding deity of all Mozartian dramas, love. (*Mozart the Dramatist*, p. 164)

Pamina's statement reminds Chailley of the Conjugal Avowal, a ceremony celebrated when a Freemason gets married, with the purpose of

"acknowledging" his wife in the bosom of the fraternity of the Order – without her being really initiated. The Brothers form a chain broken by a vacant place, that of the husband, who is "kept close to his wife." The Venerable then express the wish to see the Brother retake his place and reconstitute the chain, and begs the wife herself to lead him there. "She thus will learn that the wife of a Freemason always must encourage her husband to fulfil his Masonic obligations regularly." (*The Magic Flute, Masonic Opera*, pp. 151-152)

Chailley concedes that this is not exactly what happens in the opera, where the woman herself is admitted as a full member; but I think he underestimates the difference. Pamina must guide Tamino because she is the one who knows the flute's secrets; this suggests that she was educated by her father, not just by her rebellious mother. In her origin, upbringing and knowledge alike, she therefore excels Tamino; she also sacrificed more, and suffered more, in the previous Trials. She is therefore more than worthy to join the Order – and lead Tamino into it.

These elements can all be found in the libretto, and are therefore not the exclusive products of Mozart's mind; though there is much logic to the suggestion – made, *inter alia*, by Brigid Brophy and H. C. Robbins-Landon – that Mozart himself steered the plot in this direction. In any case, his music drives the points home with clarity and subtlety. Tamino and The Men in Armour announce Pamina's acceptance in blithe, cheerful tones; but Pamina's own music invites us to take her far more seriously. Her speech, describing the power of music and love, is characterised by a noble combination of simplicity and intensity. In her last sentence – "we'll go, with the power of music, through the darkest night of death" – she is joined by Tamino and the men in armour; their music now acquires the sense of noble poise which it lacked prior to her arrival.

From now on, Tamino and Pamina are indeed united as a couple. They sing two phrases, in perfect coordination – one as they move from Fire to Water, and another when they emerge victoriously from the Water, and are accepted into the Order. These phrases are preceded by the intimate sound of Tamino's flute (whose melody is reminiscent of some of Pamina's phrases), punctuated by oboes and timpani which describe, perhaps, the lovers' slow yet confident steps. Their joy in being accepted into the Order is the last we hear from them; but at the end, we see them on stage, both robed as priests. Their equality is confirmed once more.

Nowhere in the libretto does anyone, man or woman, directly contradict the priests' anti-feminine views (though Mozart does make fun of it: the Priests' Duet in Act II, which contains the most libellous statements against women, is set in perky tones, getting lighter precisely as the words become darker and more foreboding). But the opera disproves them by example: there is no similarity between the stereotypic images presented by the Priests and the real, live woman that Pamina embodies. In the end, even the Priests are forced to accept this. Whether or not she was formally tested, she indeed endures several ordeals; in recognition of this, she is admitted. It is true that she joins, in part, thanks to her union with Tamino. But the reverse is also true: Tamino might not have passed the Trials of Water and Fire without her guidance.

It does seem, therefore, that Mozart regarded the Masons' anti-feminine stance as unfair and irrational. The solution he offers in *The Magic Flute* indeed focuses on the redemptive power of love; but for him, love redeems men and women alike, and their union is perceived as more equal than most of his Brethren – and most of his contemporaries – contemplated.

Conclusion

Pamina's admission into the Order of Isis and Osiris comes as something of a surprise in the plot. Before the Finale of Act II, no-one mentions the possibility of her admission: Sarastro only tells his priests that she is destined to marry Tamino after the young man joins the Order. Pamina's father was a member of the Order, but his wife, the Queen of the Night, was not; she was thereby denied considerable power, explaining much of her resentment towards the Order. Yet Sarastro seems to envision, initially, a similar arrangement between Pamina and Tamino. No-one tells Pamina – or indeed any of the other characters – that her own admission to the Order is an option; if she does undergo the Trials by Earth and Air, they are never announced as such. Even the audience is kept in the dark.

It is possible to dismiss this as poor editing on Schikaneder's part – it wouldn't be the only internal contradiction in his libretto. But the words which announce Pamina's admission – "A woman who is not afraid of night and death, is worthy, and will be initiated" – could be interpreted as a belated realisation on the Priests' part. They might be tainted with paternalism, and seem to treat Pamina as an exception; but they still represent considerable progress when compared to the Order's previous statements on women. Pamina has challenged the Order's conception of what women

are like: before witnessing her actions, they did not consider the idea that a woman might indeed be fearless enough to join them. Perhaps they are willing to accept her previous ordeals, in retrospect, as the completion of the Trials by Air and Earth, and she is formally allowed to undergo the final two Trials, with Tamino following her lead.

Whether by accident or design, then, there are several reversals in this opera – beyond the much-discussed transformation of the Queen of the Night from heroine to villain. Stereotypes are presented openly in the text – yet challenged in the drama. Tamino's courage and nobility are consistent with the standard portrayal of male characters – yet his gullibility and lack of independent thinking can be regarded as almost effeminate (in stereotypic terms). In these respects, Pamina seems to embody ostensibly “male” virtues more clearly than he does. The Priests repeatedly claim that women should be subjected to men – yet in the end they accept, without comment, a woman’s declaration that she will guide a man through the Order’s Trials.

Mozart leaves the audience in no doubt that Pamina is indeed worthy of the honour. She equals the men in courage, resolution and virtue, and excels them in independent thinking and in emotional depth and sensitivity; indeed, one of her greatest triumphs is in surviving the insensitivity and callousness of several other characters, including the virtuous Sarastro and Tamino. Her virtues are already apparent in the text; but they are further intensified, and brought to life, in Mozart’s music.

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