

Goethe's Magic Flute: Working with a Mystery

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If in a large mixed company, one wants to speak about something secret with just a few people...one must speak in a special language. This special language can be a foreign language in either sound or images. The latter kind will be a language of tropes and riddles.

...Every true secret must, of itself, exclude the profane.

Mystical expression is one more stimulus to thought. All truth is ancient. The stimulus of novelty lies only in variety of expression. The more contrast in its forms, the greater the pleasure of recognition.

-- Novalis, "Faith and Love, or the King and Queen"¹

Of Authors and Stories

In 1791, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote the music for the opera entitled *Die Zauberflöte*, *The Magic Flute*, in Vienna. This has become a very famous opera, of course, which is performed every year in many countries. In 1795, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote, as part of a group of alchemical tales, an opera fragment, which continued the story of *The Magic Flute* from where the original libretto ended the tale². In the original, the daughter of a wicked fairy queen is taken from her by a good magician, Sarastro, for the child's benefit. The wicked fairy queen sends a portrait of her daughter to the hero, Tamino the prince, who rescues the maiden with the help of a magic flute. The daughter, Pamina, then marries the prince who is crowned by the magician and they ascend their thrones, and become King and Queen.

¹ Novalis. (Tr. and Ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar). 1997. *Philosophical Writings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

² Goethe, J.W. von. 1987. *Tales for Transformation* (Tr. Scott Thompson). San Francisco: City Lights Books.

Goethe's piece, which is very little known, is entitled "*The Magic Flute: A Comic Opera Fragment*". Goethe's sequel takes its inspiration from a moment in the original story when the evil Monostatos, unable to win Pamina's love, has joined forces with the evil fairy queen, the Queen of the Night. Monostatos vows "To the Queen!". In Goethe's opera Monostatos returns, having stolen Pamina's and Tamino's child and imprisoned him in a golden sarcophagus, which, however, proves too heavy to lift. Monostatos then seals it shut with the Queen's seal. To this is added the Queen's curse: should Pamina and Tamino look at each other, they would go mad; and should they see their child, he would die. The story culminates with the reunification of the King and Queen, and the liberation of Genius, their child, after the King and Queen have succeeded in trials by fire and water. In Goethe's fragment, the story stops, but does not end. Goethe's friend Karl Ludwig Knebel, said of this opera in admiration "Goethe has painted delicate and penetrating hieroglyphics in his second part of the Magic Flute"³.

Before describing work with Goethe's *The Magic Flute II* pedagogically as a play for Grade Eight, including music, I will delve into the relationship of Goethe to Mozart, and to contemplate the relation of the two parts of the Magic Flute story. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in 1756; in August of 1763, when he was 7 years old, he and his sister performed in Frankfurt. Goethe, then a boy of fourteen, heard the child Mozart. Goethe had a distinct memory of this event thirty-seven years later.⁴ Goethe is often quoted as saying that the higher sense of Mozart's Magic Flute would not elude the initiated. As theatre director in Weimar Goethe directed nearly 100 performances of the Mozart's Magic Flute⁵.

³ Thompson, S. 1987. *Tales for Transformation*. Introduction, p. v. San Francisco: City Lights Books.

⁴ Newman, E. 1930. *Stories of the Great Operas and their Composers, Vol.II*. Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing. p. 10.

⁵ Osten, M. Two kindred spirits: Goethe and Mozart. *UNESCO Courier*, July, 1991.

Much has been written on the “symbolism” of the Magic Flute and whether the story expresses aspects of Freemasonry. Sources for the Magic Flute story include *Lulu oder die Zauberflöte (Lulu or the Magic Flute)* by Liebeskind (1789) and Pater Terrasson’s *French nove., Sethos, histoire ou vie tiree des monumens anecdotes de l’ancienne Egypte; traduit d’un manuscript Grec, of 1731, (The Life of Sethos, taken from private Memoirs of the Ancient Egyptian; translated from a Greek Manuscript into French* and now done into English by M. Lediard). “The novel details the trials and initiations of a young Egyptian prince into the mysteries of Isis, Osiris, and Horus, and its mystical content provide Schikaneder and Mozart (both of them Freemasons) with the opportunity of bringing Masonic pageantry to the Viennese stage.”⁶ Freemasonry in the eighteenth century attracted many great men whose ideal was the moral regeneration of society. Emperor Franz I was a member of a Viennese lodge, and his successors Joseph II and Leopold II were lenient toward Freemasonry.⁷ Goethe was also a Freemason, having joined the Weimar lodge in 1780. By 1782 he was a Master Mason, and joined the order-within-the-order, the Illuminists, in 1783.⁸

Further connections between Goethe and Mozart surface when one reaches the topic of the authorship of the original libretto.

“The mystery in connection with the treatment of the subject of *The Magic Flute* extends also to its authorship. For more than half a century the libretto was supposed to be the work of Schikaneder [the producer], whose name appeared on the title page. But in 1849 one Julius Cornet,...published a book in which

⁶ Thompson, S. *Tales of Transformation*, Introduction. p. iv.

⁷ Newman, E. *Stories of the Great Operas*, The Magic Flute. p. 93-94.

⁸ Boyle, N. *Goethe: The Poet and the Age, Vol. 1.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. p. 173.

he told how, in Vienna in 1819, he met a venerable gentleman named Giesecke, who informed him and the other diners at the restaurant table that *he* was the real author of the libretto of *The Magic Flute*, Schikaneder having contributed only the figures of Papageno and Papagena.

This Giesecke, whose real name was Johann Georg Metzler, had a very extraordinary career. Born in 1761, he first studied law and then went on the stage. He became the friend of Goethe, Schiller, and other leading literary Germans of the day, translated *Hamlet*, studied mineralogy, dabbled in musical composition, and is said to have been the original of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*.

...It has been held that the more serious portions of the libretto could not have been written by Schikaneder, and must therefore have been written by Giesecke. The argument is hardly conclusive, especially when it is remembered that the greater part of the text of the opera is miserable hack work that would be within the powers of anyone who could handle a pen.

No doubt Giesecke, who...was a member of Schikaneder's troupe ... had something to do with the putting together of the book, along with Schikaneder and Mozart and, quite possible, others; but the precise contribution of each of them it is now quite impossible to determine."⁹

⁹Newman, E. *op cit.*, pp. 94-96

Perhaps Mozart and Goethe both belonged to a group of people who were working to provide images of human transformation. These images were presented to a broad range of society, not just the aristocracy: The Magic Flute story, both I and II, was a *Singspiel*, related to peasant plays, not an *Oper*, and The Magic Flute II is subtitled “A Comic Opera Fragment”.

What of the Egyptian imagery in the two operas; what are the pictures that were brought to life for audiences in Vienna and Weimar? Egyptian spiritual knowledge had been a focus of Renaissance philosophy and medicine, based on documents describing one who inspired knowledge of spiritual secrets named Hermes Trismegistus, or Hermes the Thrice Great. Frances Yates ends her book on Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic tradition with the moment when humanist methods were brought to bear on the Hermetic text, and it was dated as from the late Medieval period. She describes this change in approach to the text as freeing people from “magic”, a kind of superstition and dulled consciousness, and as the beginning of clear thinking which has grown since that time to be what is now modern scientific thought.¹⁰ Yates describes the Rosicrucians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a reactionary group who wanted to maintain the outmoded Renaissance way of working. Such a group may have existed; but this does not mean that other groups could not have been, at the same time, looking toward the future. Those providing something new could have been bringing pictures, not only in diagrams and meditative drawings, but in living pictures of drama that could help guide people into a new consciousness and could show changes in consciousness. This work in the theatre was public, not secret – or, more exactly, it was an “open secret” available to those who were ready to perceive its meaning.

¹⁰ Yates, F. 1964. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Whatever the connection of Mozart and Goethe, the two parts of the magic flute story *are* related in that the second work, Goethe's opera fragment, in its images, intensifies and metamorphoses the original story. *The Magic Flute* is about the prince and princess working to find each other, pass through trials and initiation, and become King and Queen, all in the context of higher beings, both good and evil. *The Magic Flute II* takes the story to the next step: the couple now bring forth something new, their child, the Genius, who undergoes as an infant a sort of initiation. The images of the parents striving to find their stolen child, facing trials to do so, and of the power of music to heal and to awaken faith and hope all lead to the moment when the child emerges, only to be immediately challenged by the forces of evil. There, Goethe's fragment stops. This moment resembles the first ending to the Matthew Gospel, which reads "And they told no one, for they were afraid".

The images of the child imprisoned in a gold sarcophagus, sealed with the sign of the Queen of the Night, are quite compelling. There are resonances to the coffin of Osiris, although that coffin was placed into water, rather than being buried in the earth. There are also resonances to the Sampo of the Finnish epic poem the *Kalevala*; the Sampo is gold and is chained in rock. Steiner describes that story as showing the forging of the human ether body.¹¹ More powerful, because of the immediacy, are the resemblances to the case of Kaspar Hauser. The latter resemblance warrants elaboration.

Monostatos in describing to the Queen of the Night how the Moors stole the child and shut him in a "casket of gold", but were foiled in removing it says:

With sapience and skill so bold,

I press your seal to the grave of gold

¹¹ Steiner, R. April 9, 1912, Helsinki. The Essence of National Epics, with special reference to the *Kalavela*.

and shut the lad forever in your care,
which no one can undo.
Then you'll have him in your snare
and the stiff little dear will belong to you.
His form lies there, dead, and frightens the day.
With anthems forbidding, we saunter away.¹²

These lines were written in 1795, seventeen years before the Grand Duchess of Baden bore a child who was said to die, but whom some think was imprisoned in a dark cell until he was released in 1828 at the age of 15 in Nuremberg, Germany; he became known as Kaspar Hauser. Confinement of the physical body which attempts to, at the same time, prevent the full incarnation of a human being and a complete death (and, thus, presence in the spiritual world) is shown in the picture of evil working in the *Magic Flute II*; it may have been actually carried out in the case of Kaspar Hauser. The *Magic Flute II* can be seen as a kind of instruction, or, possibly, a warning. The secret language of tropes and riddles comes alive when it is part of a drama to be acted in public and witnessed in its totality. In my own experience, it was only after rehearsing and performing the play that the possible significance of the curse became clear to me, not from simply reading the text.

Goethe's *The Magic Flute II* as a Grade Eight Play

Goethe did not find a composer for the music in his lifetime, and no score since then has come to light. Goethe asked Paul Wranitsky to compose music; however, he declined. Another

¹² Thompson, S. op cit., p. 105.

friend, Karl Aelter also declined. The opera fragment seems never to have been performed. To transform this fragment into a play for Grade Eight in the Waldorf curriculum, I worked on connecting it to Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, and on providing a musical context for the scenes. An ending also had to be provided -- a fragment that stops does not provide the closure that is necessary for children.

The initial setting for this new tale of the magic flute was presented by a narrator reading a prologue in the form of a poem written for the original Magic Flute by the well-known English poet W. H. Auden, which gives the general background to the story¹³.

Queen Astrafiammante, she
Long ruled the primal Night,
In realms of dream had reigned supreme,
Until there came the Light.

But she defied that civil guide,
Refused to share her throne,
With the High Gods became at odds
And fled to dwell alone,

Deep underground a refuge found,
Hating all love and joy,
And, plotting there in her despair
Sarastro to destroy,

That high priest good whose Brotherhood
Adored the rising Sun,
With female wile she did beguile
Among his Order one.

A daughter she bore to her paramour,
Pamina was her name,
Gentle and fair beyond compare
Despite her birth in shame.

Commanded by the Gods on high
This maiden to instruct,
Sarastro then from her mother's den

¹³ Auden, W.H., and Kallman, C. 1956. *The Magic Flute: English version after the Libretto of Schikaneder and Giesecke*. New York: Random House.

Pamina did abduct.

Predestined she, as you will see,
To Serve the High Gods' Plan,

That through this child might be reconciled

The Dark and Light in Man.

Requiring too a bridegroom who
Their purpose shall affect,
A noble youth in love with truth,
Tamino, they select.

Beginning now, our play shows how
What the high Gods intend
Through peril and doubt is brought about
That all things well may end.

Then we presented in tableau, with the narrator reading the lines, the final scene of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. From there, we began *The Magic Flute: A Comic Opera Fragment*. We performed the work as a play, not an opera, but new music has been composed by Channa Seidenberg as a Prelude and Postlude. Setting pieces were played before each scene that are arrangements of Colin Tanser's melodies for the planets Sun, Moon, Mars and Mercury¹⁴. I arranged them according to the rhythms that fit with these planets as researched by Christof-Andreas Lindenberg¹⁵. Tanser's melodies were composed out of the planetary scales first developed by Annie von Lange¹⁶. Lange based her experiential work with music on Goethe's phenomenological approach to music and Rudolf Steiner's description of the relation of the cosmos and the human being based on mathematical and musical correspondences¹⁷.

¹⁴ Tanser, C. *Songs of the Seven Planets*. Available from the Lyre Association of North America, 141 Davis Road, Vienna, Maine 04360.

¹⁵ Lindenberg, C-A. 1995. *The Child's Praise of the Seasons*. Chatham, NY: Windrose Publications.

¹⁶ Lange, A. von. 1992. *Man, Music, and Cosmos*. Sussex, UK: Rudolf Steiner Press.

¹⁷ For example: Steiner, R. 1994. *The Inner Nature of Music*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press.
Steiner, R. 1961. *Human and Cosmic Thought*. London: Rudolf Steiner Press.

The trials by fire and water which the King and Queen have to undergo in order to reach their imprisoned infant were a challenge to present in a way that evoked the reality of the trial for the audience. Fire and water as elements are related to the ethers of warmth and tone, respectively¹⁸. There are eurythmic movements for these ethers which are particular variations on lemniscates, as developed by Marjorie Spock¹⁹. Two students of these exercises performed them while the King and Queen moved through the space where they were being moved, warmth first, and then tone.

The final challenge was to provide an ending for the opera. In Goethe's fragment, the child, Genius, flies off when threatened by the Queen of the Night's guards. The child is freed from the confines imposed by evil, but immediately flees. One can sense the presence of this child, but at a distance, not yet attained. Therefore, I added that the child reappears in the distance holding a candle, and the King and Queen sense it, and begin to move toward it. The lines I wrote for them are based on the following verse, which Rudolf Steiner gave as a Whitsun verse.

There first
Where sense can know no more,
Stands the portal, which discloses
Life-reality
To Soul-being;
This portal's key the Soul may fashion
If she herself grow strong within the strife
By World-Powers waged on their own ground
With human forces;
If of her own accord she puts to flight
The sleep, which at the frontier of her senses
Cloaks the forces of knowledge
In spirit-night.²⁰

Wo Sinneswissen endet,
Da stehet erst die Pforte,
Die Lebenswirklichkeiten
Dem Seelensein eröffnet,
Den Schlüssel schafft die Seele,
Wenn sie in sich erstarkt
Im Kampft, den Weltenmächte
Auf ihrem eignen Grunde
Mit Menschenkräften führen,
Wenn sie durch sich vertreibt
Den Schlaf, der Wissenskräfte

¹⁸ Steiner, R. 1997. *An Outline of Esoteric Science*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press.

Marti, E. 1984. *The Four Ethers*. Schaumburg Publications.

¹⁹ Spock, M. no date. *Stillness and Movement: The Role Played by the Four Ethers in Eurythmic Art*. Paper available from Rudolf Steiner Library, Ghent, NY. Revised pamphlet available from the author.

²⁰ Steiner, R. 1958. *Ascension and Pentecost*. London: Anthroposophic Publishing Company. Verse Tr. Owen Barfield. p. 86

An ihren Sinnesgrenzen
Mit Geistesnacht umhüllet.²¹

²¹ Steiner, R. 1979. *From Wahrspruchworte*. p. 38. Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press.