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## Performance on Paper: Illustrating and Adapting *The Magic Flute*

As an illustrator, my tendency is to make work that is derivative of works in other mediums, be they works of poetry, theater, or literature, music, or essays. No art is created from nothing, of course, but illustrated work cannot exist by itself without the work it is illustrating. My aim in illustration is to describe and to enrich; I always seek to enhance the work I'm illustrating, rather than merely restating it. Retelling the story from an opera seemed to me a natural extension of this tendency and concern. My current project, simply titled "The Magic Flute Project," is an illustrated adaptation of Mozart's last opera, *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*), into a book.

The artists that have influenced me formally have been illustrators for books themselves, or have otherwise worked with the idea of picturing fantasy. Henri Fuseli, for instance, would be called a history painter rather than an illustrator, though he frequently painted scenes from classic literature and from Shakespeare plays; he even occasionally invented scenes and gave them evocative titles to suggest a story for the viewer to construct. His way of painting appropriately enhanced his dramatic subject matter. He would, rather than describing forms with subtle shadow gradients, would set theatrically draped and posed figures against dark, void-like spaces, and would often outline limbs in black. His spaces and poses

were therefore just as fantastical as his subjects, which has influenced my way of conceiving of illustrated imagery.

The illustrators I look to the most worked at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the 20<sup>th</sup>. They include Edmund Dulac, who worked at the time that printing technology was just allowing for full-color photographic reproduction of illustrations for books, and Umberto Brunelleschi, who worked at a time when said technology was well-established, which allowed him to work on a variety of illustration jobs. Notably, both artists illustrated for print as well as produced scenic designs for theater. Perhaps more important than that, however, was their devotion to and influence by Asian art and by Orientalism.

Dulac was so taken with Oriental subject matter, that he not only was hired largely to illustrate exotic tales like the Arabian Nights, but also used Oriental imagery for Western tales he illustrated. Brunelleschi, too, borrowed Oriental imagery, not only stylistically in his use of flat planes of color with delicate outlines (a feature of Japanese prints), but in his hyper-fetishized depictions of Oriental subjects. Lurking in these works is the notion of the East as exotic or other; this is what made them suitable subjects for fantasy. While I still look to these artists for stylistic influence and their command over the illustration field, I avoided Asian subjects for stories of fantasy, as I didn't want to play into this idea of fetishizing the East.

Meanwhile, I remained influenced by a contemporary Japanese illustrator, Yoshitaka Amano. His work uniquely combines influences from Western art and the

art of his native Japan. In one illustration, there may be the sort of blocking out of space and threadbare depictions of the figure as in Japanese woodblock prints, as well as the decadence of Gustave Klimt or the heavy, melancholy gestures of Edward Munch. Researching his works have been instrumental in helping me to navigate that same mixture of influences, and I believe it ultimately nudged me toward my current project; Amano, after all, wrote and illustrated an adaptation of *The Magic Flute* called *Mateki*, though his ultimate goal is an animated piece rather than a book.

When I began illustration works in the fall semester, my concept of the role of the illustrator was different; I thought that my only purpose would be to create some sort of visual for the text, which I regarded then as whole, complete, and untouchable. I soon found, however, that I almost never interpreted a text literally when I illustrated it.

A discussion with Dr. Donna Richardson in the fall semester helped me to consider the role of the illustrator, particularly in regards to illustrating literature. We spoke about her book *Visual Paraphrasing of Poetry*, and particularly on the last chapter, in which Richardson concedes that there are some poems that cannot be literally drawn as a diagram, as the visual elements compete. We also discussed the ways that an illustrator has a lot of power in recontextualizing a written work with the imagery they choose, and how literally one interprets that imagery. Along this line of thought, Peter Brook's book *The Empty Space* argued that performances are best when they are allowed to evolve over time, and that a performance is dead and empty when a script is interpreted only literally. Brook's book invited me to apply a loose adaptation approach to the illustrations of works.

When I returned to the Magic Flute, I saw a story that I both loved, and that I took great issue with. While the story is delightful in its whimsy and fantasy, and the music gripping, Mozart made his own sympathy with the Freemasons irksomely apparent, and included such troubling values as a blatantly proclaimed ideal of men dominating women. I found myself desiring to change the story, and found that doing so felt natural. For one thing, the original libretto was all sung in German, and so the translation was slightly different between performances that I saw. Plus, there were several other adaptations of the opera that took liberties with the plot, either by removing elements or entirely changing characters' motivations in order to correct some of the same issues I was seeing with the opera.

Ingmar Bergman, for instance, wrote Sarastro as Pamina's father in his film adaptation in order to explain why he was not wrong to kidnap her from her mother. Lotte Reiniger created a short story focusing only on the bird-catcher in her animated film *Papageno*. P. Craig Russel's Queen of the Night was marked evil not by virtue of representing femininity, but was rather given specific crimes in his comic adaptation. Amano condensed the story to three characters, with only an evil, ungendered force called Yasha as the villain. Thus the story was already quite fluid in my mind by the time I set about writing my own take.

My version of the story is began with a problem I had with designing a likable protagonist in the character Tamino. I found him difficult to sympathize with, as his role in the story was largely to benefit from the advantages of being a prince and male. Mozart's ideal male hero didn't appeal to me, and so the first change I made was to change the Prince Tamino into a Princess Tamina. With just that change,

many of the other flawed assertions of Mozart's opera seemed to fall apart; the conviction that women like Pamina needed the care of men, for instance, could not hold when her lover was also a woman. From there I subverted the gender basis for other characters as well, not by changing their gender as with Tamina, but by foregrounding a fantastical creature element to them, or making them more supernatural-ambiguous rather than human-gendered (my exact changes are detailed in "The Plot of Mozart's Opera," below).

The project at this point is progressing toward a series of illustrated books: first Act I will be published, and then Act II. My attention these last months was given to establishing a sound foundation from which to continue the project, which involved writing the story and developing its visual design. The book will feature, in reproduction, illustrations painted in watercolor, a medium which best evokes the fluidity and physical transparency of music, lending a visual sound to a medium that is otherwise silent. The book will also contain a complete prose text of *The Magic Flute*, which I have re-written and altered from the original opera.

Significant to the project is the act of rewriting and retelling a story that I do not agree with. This taps into my core beliefs on the role of telling stories, and of happy endings: Stories are never pure fantasy, nor pure entertainment. Stories allow us to design worlds in which wrongs are corrected and virtues are revered and rewarded. As a storyteller, my responsibility is to establish concepts of normal, of good, and of evil that serve our contemporary, real world. That is because stories not only teach us a model of right and wrong, but also teach us that we have the power to decide right and wrong.

My goal for this book, then, is not just to delight my viewer as the opera delights me, but also to remind them that anyone has the power to change the course of a story: whether it is an old story, or a new one, whether the story is long past or still in progress, or whether it is a complete fantasy or a true story. I demonstrate this by bringing my own story forward, complete with illustrations that further bring my story into a physical fruition.

Leah Moreno

The Story of the Magic Flute  
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### **The Plot of Mozart's Opera, and my Modifications:**

Several of the artists who have interpreted the Magic Flute before me have left out, added, or completely changed elements of the story to suit their needs. I too felt compelled to change the story, in slight but impactful ways. Much of this is due to a degree of misogyny the original holds, which I felt I needed to change before I could engage with the more fantastical aspects of the tale; thus, most of the changes involve gender, whether by changing or minimizing its presence in some areas.

The original tale is basically as follows:

Act I:

Tamino, a prince<sup>1</sup> from a foreign land, flees from a pursuing snake, calling for help. As he falls into a faint, Three Ladies<sup>2</sup>, maidens serving the Queen of the Night, appear and slay the beast. They fawn over the handsome appearance<sup>3</sup> of the young prince, and, after fighting over who should be left alone with him to stand watch, they all leave to tell their Queen of him.

As Tamino wakes, Papageno, a bird catcher<sup>4</sup>, appears, singing to himself; most of the song is in longing for a wife. Tamino mistakes Papageno as the one who rescued him, which Papageno readily plays along with, happy to take the credit. This earns him the scorn of the Three Ladies when they return, and they padlock his mouth shut to keep him from lying further. The Ladies then appeal to Tamino<sup>5</sup> to rescue the Queen of the Night's daughter<sup>6</sup>, Pamina, who was kidnapped by Sarastro. To this end, they present Tamino a portrait of Pamina, and Tamino falls instantly in love with her image. The Queen of the Night then appears herself, reasserting this appeal and offering Tamino Pamina's hand<sup>7</sup> should he rescue her.

The Queen of the Night departs, but the Ladies remain to present the gift of a Magic Flute to Tamino to protect him. They also remove the padlock from Papageno's mouth, only to send him to protect the prince. Papageno protests, fearing the danger of such a journey, but he finally complies when given a set of magical bells for protection. The Ladies direct the pair to follow three flying child-spirits<sup>8</sup>, who lead the way to Sarastro's domain.

Later, within Sarastro's palace, Pamina is tied up by Sarastro's servant, the moor Monostatos<sup>9</sup>. Papageno appears, having separated from Tamino to find Pamina. At the sight of each other, both Monostatos and Papageno flee<sup>10</sup> the stage in fear. Papageno reappears to untie Pamina, telling her of a prince coming to rescue her. The both of them sing an ode to love before escaping the palace.

In the forest, still following the spirits, Tamino comes upon Temple doors, two of which he cannot enter, before entering the third door. An old priest within informs him that Tamino has allowed himself to be misled by women<sup>11</sup>, and that the truth is

that Sarastro is good. Tamino, confused and downhearted, leaves the temple, and begins to play his flute in hopes of somehow summoning Pamina. The animals of the forest become tamed by the sound, but Pamina does not appear. Trying the flute one last time, he hears Papageno's whistle in return. He runs off-stage excitedly, presumably in the direction of Papageno's call.

As Papageno and Pamina enter the stage, it is revealed that Papageno did indeed whistle in reply to Tamino's flute. Immediately the pursuing Monostatos and his servants immediately capture the pair. Desperate, Papageno tried his bells; their captors, entranced by the sound, are compelled to dance, exiting the scene.

Papageno and Pamina are relieved only for a moment, when the sound of Sarastro and his retinue are heard approaching. When Sarastro appears<sup>12</sup>, Pamina kneels before him and admits that she did indeed try to run away, but that it was because Monostatos was trying to force himself on her. Sarastro forgives her, but expresses that he cannot let her free to return to her mother, because she needs a man to guide her<sup>13</sup>.

Monostatos enters, with Tamino captive. Tamino and Pamina immediately embrace at the sight of each other, already in love. Monostatos separates them, trying to place the blame on Tamino, but it is Monostatos that is punished by Sarastro, for advancing on Pamina. The First Act ends with Tamino and Papageno receiving blindfolds before they are sent to the Temple of Ordeal to be tested.

## Act II:

A council of priests of the Temple of Wisdom, led by Sarastro, determine that Tamino and Pamina will be married, and that Tamino will join their order, if he passes the trials. Sarastro explains that the Queen of the Night aims to bewilder and frighten people with superstition.

Tamino and Papageno are briefed that the completion of the trials will lead to wisdom. Tamino readily accepts the challenge, while Papageno is dismissive, due to the suggestion of danger, until a priest informs him that Sarastro has a wife for him<sup>14</sup> too, should he complete the trials. The first trial is to remain silent as women tempt and threaten them. Papageno has difficulty remaining silent, while Tamino remains steadfast and says nothing, except to hush Papageno.

Meanwhile, while Pamina sleeps, Monostatos attempts another advance on her, but is frightened away when the Queen of the Night enters. She gives a dagger to Pamina, ordering her to kill Sarastro, or be disowned. After she departs, Monostatos attempts one more advance, threatening to reveal the murder plot, but Sarastro enters, sending Monostatos away, and choosing to forgive Pamina and her mother, the Queen of the Night, rather than exact punishment.

Back in the Temple of Ordeals, Tamino and Papageno undergo another test of silence, which Papageno fails by engaging an old woman in conversation<sup>15</sup>. Joking, he asks if she has a sweetheart, and she answers, "yes," and that it is him, and disappears. As Papageno rushes out in confusion, Tamino plays his flute, accidentally summoning Pamina. In keeping with his vow to silence, he refuses to speak with her, which she takes for a disinterest in her. The priests then

congratulate Tamino on his success so far, but Pamina is not told what his tests were.

Papageno enters after they have all<sup>16</sup> left, and sings a song, while playing the magic bells, about his wishes for a wife. The old woman enters again, and presses Papageno to swear engagement to her, or else to remain lonely forever. Reluctantly he does, and immediately the old woman transforms into the young and beautiful Papagena. Before he can embrace her, the priests drive her out of their temple. Elsewhere, the child-spirits spy Pamina<sup>16</sup> with the dagger, about to take her own life<sup>17</sup>, as she believes that Tamino no longer loves her. The spirits stop her, insisting that Tamino still loves her, and that they will meet again soon.

In the presence of two armored guards, Tamino approaches the doors to the last two trials- one of water, and one of fire. Tamino steps forward, ready, but Pamina calls for him to wait for her. As the guards inform him that his trial of silence is over, he excitedly greets her, and they proceed together through the trial through fire, and then through water, all while he plays the magic flute for protection. As they emerge unscathed, the priests hail their triumph.

Elsewhere, Papageno prepares to hang himself<sup>18</sup>, fearing that he has forever lost Papagena, but at the last minute, the child-spirits appear and remind him to try calling her with his magic bells. He does, and Pamina appears again, leading to a duet proclaiming their happiness together.

Meanwhile, Monostatos leads the Queen of the Night and her Three Ladies to the Temple of Wisdom, indulging her desire to destroy it on the promise that the Queen of the Night will give Pamina to him. Before they can attack, however, they are magically cast out into the night forever. Sarastro then welcomes the united couple into the Temple, as their endurance of the trials are praised by the priests around them.

The changes I've made:

1. Tamino the prince is Tamina the princess in my retelling. This is to help remove some of the favoritism toward males in the original. Because Tamina's lover interest, Pamina, remains female in my version, this means that the central romance is homosexual in this version.
2. They are referred to as "Warriors" in my version, as that is their primary function; "Ladies" foregrounds their gender and offers little other information.
3. The Warriors are depicted less as being excited to meet Tamina, as she is a newcomer, rather than fawning over her beauty; starting the book on such a homoerotic note seemed too risky.
4. Contemporary retellings of the opera tend to depict Papageno as merely a human, and he was a sort of man-bird hybrid creature in the original. I have decided to depict him as a large bird. As a character, he features more attributes of instinct than of "manliness," or of what we value in humans. Functionally, this serves to introduce the reader to the concept of talking animals early on.
5. Rather than the Ladies making the appeal, they wait for Tamina to offer her help.

6. The Queen of the Night in my version has the head of a lioness; I want her supernatural status to stand out more than her gender.
7. The Queen of the Night makes no such offer in my version; this helps with continuity when she later dislikes the idea of Tamina and Pamina becoming a couple, and sets her up in opposition to homosexual partnership.
8. The three spirits have been condensed into one, who I refer to as “the Cherub.”
9. Monostatos is not a moor. In the original, his race is conflated with his status as an undesirable (in which he is depicted as ugly, lustful, and comparatively simple-minded).
10. To simplify the scene, I’ve written it such that Papageno purposefully scared Monostatos off, and stayed with Pamina to free her; the comedy of both characters fleeing the stage doesn’t translate outside of a performance.
11. Rather than emphasizing a feminine deceitfulness, I refer to it more as a lack of critical thinking on Tamina’s part.
12. Sarastro, rather than a man, is instead a large lion with a man’s face. This is, again, to downplay gender while emphasizing a supernatural nature.
13. The recurring conviction that a woman requires a male handler is absent from my retelling.
14. Rather than explicitly offering a wife, the Priest offers Papageno a chance to meet another bird like him.
15. The meetings with the old woman disguise confuse what is already a bit of a jumpy plot at this point; instead, Papageno meets the bird Papagena at this point. She disappears, however, as a punishment for failing the trial of silence, and Papageno aborts the trial to find her. He does not return to the Temple after Tamina and Pamina’s silent meeting.
16. Papageno is sulking in the Palace gardens at this point, forlorn that he has forever lost the only bird like him. The Cherub approaches him, telling him to snap out of it, and help stop Pamina, who is leaving the Palace with a dagger. Papageno and the Cherub together persuade her to give up her mission.
17. Pamina will instead be setting out to rescue Tamina, believing Tamina to be in danger of some bewitchment, hence the aloof behavior earlier.
18. Papageno’s scene is the final scene in my retelling. He is not attempting to kill himself, but is still expressing despair before the Cherub meets him again. The story ends with Papageno and Papagena flying off together as a pair.