

Adaptation, Enactment, and Ingmar Bergman's *Magic Flute*

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For all of its manifold musical glories, *The Magic Flute* was and is a theatrical work, meant for production and performance, and that repeatedly. As such, I will be concentrating on the opera's theatrical and cinematic elements. This article treats Ingmar Bergman's felicitous 1975 film adaptation of the opera. Those inclined can find much to complain about in Bergman's cinematic version of Mozart's opera, but I would like to suggest that, with sympathy and openness, this complaining could give way to approval and great gratitude. In this *Magic Flute*, we have an interpretation worthy of its source, which is saying a great deal.

Despite its popularity, film remains suspect for some critics, especially when it goes poaching in the preserves of "legitimate" art. There are reasons for this guardedness. Since watching appears to be easier than reading, and since film preserves performances that in the theater remain only in memory, cinema has in many ways become the default medium, the final destination to which texts from all media tend. One unfortunate result, inextricably linked to the mega corporate nature of contemporary media production, is that, instead of a healthy conversation between multiple versions of a work, there is a search for the definitive take. Disney's excellent 1940 version of *Pinocchio*, for example, leaves the electrifying original unread and leaves the contradictory and fascinating Benigni adaptation (2002) unseen and even unconsidered; and the whole disheartening situation leaves us prescriptive, proscriptive, and grumpy about the stories and enactments that should make us happy.

Of course, any production, theatrical or cinematic, that tries to incorporate every nuance and possibility found in the source or uncovered by a

comprehensive reading would almost certainly be unbearably busy, unfocused, and endless. A production must select out of an abundance of possibilities a certain few actualities. The regretting of roads not taken, especially when the actual choice is proven to be a good one, is profitless.

All productions are adaptations, and adaptations are often discussed, as Seymour Chatman has suggested, by using a lover's vocabulary: one is faithful; another betrays.¹ These may be inflated terms, as this is no marriage; the stakes are not as high—and, in the realm of story, dalliance may actually be helpful and healthy. It may be more accurate to say that in adaptation there is a range of possibility, a spectrum from attempted congruence to indulged liberality. As for hierarchy or value, I would posit that any kind of adaptation, in the abstract, is neutral. The good and ill are in the work, the understanding, and the application.

In the same way, the page, the stage, and the screen are all completely valid media for sharing stories. They are also markedly and necessarily distinct from one another. When adaptations occur, there may be continuities from the source, but there must also be changes. These changes must take into account the properties specific to the medium being utilized. Bergman's adaptation partly succeeds through a playful self-consciousness about crossing the boundaries between media. He makes of this a game with which we as audience become complicit participants. Paradoxically, through a dogged artificiality, by continually unveiling the mechanisms of representation, Bergman earns our interest and honors his source. This dynamic carries throughout the film but is apparent from the first act, where I will concentrate my remarks.

Ingmar Bergman's *Magic Flute* starts with an image of a sunset reflected on water, with sylvan scenes following and birdsong placed underneath on the soundtrack. A facsimile of Mozart's signature and then of the Swedish title (*Trollflöjten*) in period calligraphy are juxtaposed on the screen. The westering light strikes the walls of a great hall, harmoniously ensconced in this natural setting. There is applause and then the overture's opening clarion call.

In these first swift strokes, Bergman has intimated a great deal. On a practical level, he is summoning the film audience out of natural tranquility and into operatic serenity. He has created a relaxed and reflective atmosphere for the enjoyment of his presentation. He is identifying Mozart as the author and the prevailing sensibility in his film. But in addition to disarming us with a host's courtesy and an adaptor's modesty, Bergman is also making a powerful conceptual assertion about the status and significance of the *Magic Flute* text, an assertion on which he will continue to expand. This performance, scrupulously based on the conventions informing

the 1791 premiere and its actual appearance, will call to mind a particular historical moment as well as an ahistorical ideal. The opening establishes the terms and their significance: here are nature and culture and, as the production will soon demonstrate, woman and man, all joined in balance and harmony.

As the overture proceeds, Bergman continues to reinforce this opening idyll, cutting between natural scenes and the classical statues arranged within them. The neo-Greek and Roman coincide with Mozart's music, all classical examples of balance, beauty, and harmony. From there we go inside the hall and encounter for the first time a visual and narrative motif that will serve as a structuring metaphor for the duration of the film.

This motif begins when we are introduced to a young spectator, a red-headed girl of about ten years of age. She is looking and listening with careful and happy attention. Bergman holds on her, and he will come back to her repeatedly throughout the film. When the opera proper begins, this child will become the site of suture, the standard technique through which the film spectator is brought into the film space and brought under the rules and assumptions that inform and structure it. This suturing is accomplished through what is known as the shot–reverse shot: we see a person looking, we cut to what she is looking at, then we finally see her response to the thing she has just seen. In this construction, we are introduced to the character with whom we will identify, we come to share her space and perspective as we see through her eyes, and finally by seeing her again we see what kind of response that is expected of us.²

The significance of this first suturing in *The Magic Flute* is that Bergman is telling us exactly who he is talking to as well as giving an indication of the spectating position and sensibility that he expects or perhaps invites us to assume. In its present telling, this is a story for children, for the guileless and hopeful sensibility of the idealized child. As with the opera's protagonists, a number of lessons await this youthful spectator, suggesting a shared passage from innocence and ignorance to knowledge.

Now the overture proceeds in tandem with a lengthy montage sequence. Montage, the joining of discrete film pieces, is not only a way of clearly constructing narrative sequences but also a way of constructing and enacting concepts.³ Montage can be used to show that meaning in film is not inherent but comes from the juxtaposition of separate images. As the spectator sees ideas forming before his eyes, he may also infer that the seeming social truths that are offered to or imposed upon him may also be constructed and, as such, are open to change or resistance. Though it has more or less become the exclusive property of advertisers and propagandists,

montage began with and maintained the possibility of active, engaged spectatorship. It was to make us aware and to help us think.

Bergman's opening montage presents a message for us to think about. The sequence is made up almost exclusively of faces in closeup, all listening and looking, juxtaposed and multiplying, presenting a variety of bone structures and expressions and ages and ethnic groups. This striking legion of representative types is bound together by what often brings disparate and even disharmonious images together in film—music. Most conventional film music is hidden, subordinated to narrative as well as to the other ideological and commercial functions that motion pictures perform.⁴ Here the standard hierarchy is actually reversed. There being no explicit story for the music to support or reinforce, the images here actually accompany the music.

The music carries a particular meaning or tells a particular story, one that the film has already proposed to us and to which it will return. Mozart's overture and even Mozart himself embody musical and cultural ideals that embrace and unite every spectator we have seen in this film. Since we have seen nearly every kind of person that we might imagine—since we almost certainly have seen someone who looks like us—then we too are invited to become part of this communion.

We have had three conceptual assertions then, even though there has been as yet no dialogue, no narrative enactment as such. The first idea is of a world in balance; the second relates to the child as being an ideal spectator and a model for our participation. Finally, there is the concept of the brotherhood of man, represented by but not limited to Mozart's universal appeal shown in the many faces. These notions are all lovely, but they seem unusually direct and even naïve for an ironic archsophisticate like Bergman.

Bergman is not being sarcastic, nor is he taking a conscious break from his own convictions about the ways of the world. As he has suggested in his autobiography *The Magic Lantern*, Bergman is drawn to the powerful tonality and harmony of *The Magic Flute*, to the way its music coincides with its view of the world, the possibilities it presents for human relations.⁵ There are many momentary, shimmering exceptions in Bergman's oeuvre, but his work overwhelmingly expresses the compromise, ambiguity, and disappointment he has found in his own life. Notwithstanding these conclusions, he is open to countering testimony. So powerful and pretty is the view presented by this opera that the international cinema's great narrative stylist subordinates his own style and the messages it usually renders to Mozart and librettist Emanuel Schikaneder's clearer and cleaner vision. It is as if Bergman were saying, "Yea, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Subordination yes, but self-abnegation, no. The three concepts just mentioned may seem disarmingly and impossibly simple now, but as is generally the case, say, with musical material presented in an overture or with the theme-stating first sections of the sonata form, developments and deepening will follow. In fact, deepening, and problematizing, too, begin in the opening sequence. The film's idealized romantic child exists within striking distance of actual childhood—a spirited and sometimes contradictory part of a process of development, and not a static abstraction. Each simple idea will be enriched as Bergman explores its contrary elements.

For instance, as suggested, the film does suture the spectator into both its narrative and conceptual space. But it does so with a difference: rather than following the conventional course of bringing us in to identify with a fictional character and potentially disappearing ourselves, Bergman has simply accomplished something that allows for all sorts of helpful complicating. He has sutured us to this girl as a spectator, and thus he has made us conscious of our outside and observing status. As he cuts repeatedly throughout the opera to this little girl, he establishes in our minds that we are to watch and think, absorb and process and react.

In other words, there are no fourth-wall illusions here: this is clearly a theatrical presentation, constructed and artificial. Against the kind of commercial theater and films that we overwhelmingly attend, Bergman gives us interaction, the process revealed and opened to interrogation, and with acknowledged exchange and communication between performers and audience. He says:

In my imagination I have always seen *The Magic Flute* living inside (an) old theater, in (its) keenly acoustical wooden box, with its slanted stage floor, its backdrops and wings. Here lies the noble, magical illusion of theater. Nothing *is*; everything *represents*. The moment the curtain is raised, an agreement between stage and audience manifests itself. And now, together, we'll create!⁶

A main modernist device for initiating this kind of conversation is to introduce elements that do not easily or immediately integrate into the whole. The disturbing detail, alienation effects, and intertextual references are some means by which questions are encouraged, alternatives considered, and awareness fostered.⁷

At this point, Bergman starts introducing such modernist techniques into his period presentation. First there is a fleeting intertextual reference. The overture's brief incursion into the minor coincides with a number of red fades (the hall from the outside, the painted curtain, the spectator). Bergman is quoting himself, borrowing a device he used in the film *Cries and Whispers* (1973). In this account of alienation, darkness, and the

shining moments that dispel them, he used red fades and a red-dominated design to suggest the color of the soul, of our interiors, of our bloodied, painful thoughts. This notion also informed the film that followed and that immediately preceded the production of *The Magic Flute*. In *Scenes from a Marriage* (1974), Bergman gives us his own version of the institution that is figuratively and hopefully portrayed in the opera. In the 1974 film, marriage fails as the hopeful real-life couple is unable to manage the trials of faith and perseverance that we will see successfully completed in *The Magic Flute*. (The actor playing the husband in *Scenes from a Marriage*, Erland Josephson, can be seen briefly in *The Magic Flute's* opening assembly of attentive faces.)

Reference to Bergman's earlier work is a device that occurs, glancingly and intermittently, throughout the film. Bergman is peeking out from behind the curtain, briefly problematizing the optimistic spirit of the presentation to which he has subordinated himself. Now he will return to his place. A shot of the boy Mozart's portrait signals our coming out of the minor into a resounding major. The overture and the faces continue, and then the sequence ends, the child looks, and the curtain rises. As spectators within the hall, we begin to watch the presentation proper.

The opening image of act 1 resumes the patent artificiality toward which Bergman continuously takes us spectators. Behind the curtain, we see a lovely forest set, the scenery diminishing slightly into the distance, suggesting a vanishing perspective at the same time that it eschews the illusion of painterly verisimilitude. Lightning flashes by means of some superb but not remotely realistic lighting effects. The trees are painted on wooden flats called legs. These reach in from the wings and are manipulated by means of what is known as a chariot and pole system, which operates with ropes and cables that allow technicians to revolve the set pieces. This type of system prevailed in the theater of Mozart's period and would have been used in the opera's initial production. Intermittently throughout the film we will see this system in operation. Its changes will not be hidden but will take place visibly and audibly before us.⁸ The use of these effects is an indication of another one of the major strategies in *The Magic Flute*, one of its main sources of delight and another evidence of Bergman's surprising, seemingly uncharacteristic subordination and fidelity to his source. This is partly—enthusiastically—a conservation performance, a demonstration of how things used to be done.

The story proper starts with a crisis, which Bergman immediately undercuts. Prince Tamino enters upstage, stage right, fleeing in terror. The source of that terror follows immediately, in the form of one of the least frightening monsters in screen history, a charmingly mincing and goggle-eyed

dragon. Tamino and dragon exit stage left, re-enter from our right, mid-stage, then run across again. (Western European theater practice in the late eighteenth century favored this kind of lateral movement, with longitudinal crossing—up and down, before our eyes—being comparatively infrequent.) Tamino, directly addressing the audience, begs for relief. Even in the midst of his appeal, he is overcome by the dragon, which brings with him absolutely no suggestion of real jeopardy.

Suddenly three resolute women appear and dispatch the dragon with amusing ease. Sparks, then smoke pour out of the dragon's nostrils as its eyes roll most unalarmingly, and then it expires. In all of this, in the setting and the enactment, we have the opposite of verisimilitude.

If the sets and the acting are not realistic, then what is? The answer is there, strikingly, right from the beginning, and the prevailing artificiality actually gives us a clearer and more direct understanding of that answer. What is real is beauty, the beauty of the music, the skill and enthusiasm with which it is performed, and the freshness with which it is rendered for our instruction and delight.

Now the three ladies, actually attendants of the Queen of the Night, warmly perform a long and stunning trio. In it they rejoice in their victory over the monster, express admiration for the beautiful (and unconscious) prince, and then begin to fight about which among them will stay to guard him. Here are the opera's first articulated ideas, with values suggested beneath: love, wonder, and romance with a gentle hint of eroticism. These values are central to secular theater as well as a source of interesting contrast and, eventually, of reconciliation in this story.

A subtle deception is being enacted here. The workings of protagonism are such that we tend to favor and identify with those to whom we are introduced first and from whom we first hear. The complication here lies in the fact that these favored ladies, who have, after all, just saved the man who looks likely to become the hero of our story, turn out to be working for the antagonist of the piece. Many critics have suggested that the Queen of the Night's uncertain status—intervening savior figure at first, aggrieved and affronted mother later, intolerable threat to the patriarchal order finally—may be evidence of a hastily assembled, partly incoherent libretto. It is difficult at this late date to be certain about causes and intended meanings, but Bergman's treatment of the inconsistency is instructive.

Bergman approaches each scene and presents each shift and paradox with unapologetic directness; he refuses from the start to hide the preposterous or problematic. This is an opera lover's methodology. This text and that of other operas are often taken to task for their implausibilities and other narrative shortcomings. By emphasizing implausibility rather than trying

to mask, avoid, or justify it, Bergman suggests that it might be a central part of the operatic form, the seat of some of its key ideas and pleasures. After all, opera's central conceit, the impossible artificiality of people going around singing all the time, is the most undeniable example of theater's noble illusion and is the fundamental artificiality that Bergman seeks to celebrate in this production.

The ladies sing on, alternating humorously between contending and making pretty pronouncements about sisterhood and such. Mozart's comic operas are very good at demonstrating the fitfulness of human intercourse. Harmony is fleeting, with foible and fractiousness ever at the gates. But still a kind of grace operates here and eventually prevails. Something binds up the wounds of the conflict. Although this grace may seem Christian to us, for Bergman it is not Christian hope that heals, at least not straightforwardly.⁹ Nor does Christian hope appear very directly in the European farce of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Instead, wit and enlightened humanity are the cause for hope and gratitude in these farces. Still, in the ineffable, spiritual realm we have felicitous expression and, in Mozart, inexpressible musical beauty.

Visually, from the time of the dragon's demise, almost everything in this scene has been rendered in the style of the Great Performances series: close-ups, two shots, and small groupings. It is the grammar of convenience, pragmatic framing and quick coverage, completely adequate for preserving and celebrating a performance, though not remotely exploring or reflecting the cinema's expressive range and potential. As the scene ends, the last of the ladies' discussion and their departure is taken in a long shot, from the center of the stalls, as it were. Bergman returns us to a pointedly theatrical perspective, using the *film d'art* composition associated with film history's stodgiest, most stagy shooting strategy.

After the dragon scene there begins a more intimate artificiality and a demonstration of perpendicular cinema (a perpendicular, presentational style in which the camera establishes and maintains a 90 degree relationship to its subject). The introduction of Papageno's character does three things. His introduction partly emphasizes his charmingly scampish character, but it also introduces us to the off-stage space. Håken Hagegård, who plays Papageno, is asleep in the wings. He stirs, hears his cue approaching, and then scrambles to get ready. A costumed bat helps him on with his costume, while theater technicians (pretend to) play chess. We get a close-up of the candles that illumined the eighteenth-century stage. Bergman is exposing the artifice and uncovering the apparatus. It is a device both modern and immemorial, demonstrating the workings of theater, showing us not only the message but also how it is constructed and presented.¹⁰

Now comes the third element of Bergman's using Papageno's introduction: Although Papageno seems to have been standing off stage and preparing to go on, something unexpected happens when he actually does so. Bergman's cut actually takes Papageno, and the audience along with him, out of the wings of the theater and onto the stage of the film studio.¹¹ This is creative geography, an innovation and exercise of the Soviet avant garde-ists of the 1920s. V. I. Pudovkin's *Chess Fever* (1925) is shot exclusively with this device, in which you cut from one view to another that is in reality far away but is completely contiguous in the viewer's mind. As Papageno sings, we may become aware that we are in the (reconfigured) Drottningholm Palace no more, that the Great Performances style has given way to early perpendicularity, in which film production preserved the openly interactive, attractively artificial theatrical experience at the same time that it adapted it to cinematic circumstance and strength. Bergman uses his studio to help intensify that transition. The artificiality of the eighteenth-century style (that is, the dragon) will give way to distancing techniques that are more modernist. Bergman is setting up a dialogue between forms and periods. The film studio becomes a liminal space that houses and facilitates this dialogue. In this will be a major theme in the film. If artificial theater and realistic film are often considered to be irreconcilable binaries, Bergman will, by means of his strategy of uncovering the apparatus, by his mixture of styles, and by free alternation of playing spaces, bring them harmoniously together anyway. The audience in the theater has disappeared for a while. It is the individual in the film audience who is being addressed.¹²

The shift to the film studio once again signals Bergman's self-conscious artificiality, which Bergman continues to assert as an analog or continuity with the artificiality of opera, as is apparent in the ensuing dialogue between Papageno and Tamino. There, we are reminded that *The Magic Flute* is not an opera proper, but rather what is known as a *Singspiel*. Musical bits are intermingled with actual conversations, with the result that the high artificiality of operatic interaction is alternated with and grounded by plain vernacular conversation. This is something that may not play particularly well in a recording, especially for a non-German speaker. (Bergman's version, it should be pointed out, is actually in Swedish.) In a theater or on film, the technique registers wonderfully. It is yet another example of in-betweens, of a text that shares the musical and the theatrical, invites the cinematic, and profoundly evokes the life to which they all refer.

After the *Singspiel* dialogue between Papageno and Tamino, the ladies return, whispering to our male principals in compositions that evoke secrecy, darkness, psychological intensity, and jeopardy. In this setting,

Bergman's strategy is narratively appropriate, given that the Queen of the Night is coming, and she is fooling everyone.

Distant thunder and the sudden fall of night signal her arrival, and as if to signal the grand performative nature of this character and the film's treatment of her, we go back to the stage space, briefly resuming our role as the theatrical spectator. There is a chariot and pole scene change by which a group of billowing black clouds and a delightful background of painted constellations come into view. As before, these suggest linear perspective at the same time that they refuse its implied illusion.

This stage view is short-lived, as we alternate modes immediately; the very next shot returns us to a film perspective. Characters no longer address us but rather look past us, giving us the illusion that we have not only penetrated the theatrical space but that we have become invisible in doing so. This is Hollywood: no fourth walls, the illusion of a freer, all-angled access not only to the cinematic space but into the lives of the characters. Bergman, always ideologically suspect among activist critics for his almost exclusive interest in the internal and the psychological, here utilizes a technique he knows very well. This is, in fact, another moment of suture, except that it is exposed to us and therefore jeopardized. There's no shot-reverse shot; we've already been sutured, and the mixture of modes means that no individual mode can work undisturbed. It is certainly also true that our joining the actors on stage, our alternating between purely frontal and more angled, indirect views not only brings the viewer closer to the action but also helps her feel the vulnerability and elation of performance. It is the stage-and-audience pact to which Bergman has consistently referred, a pact for the performer as much as for the part performed.

The filming of the Queen's aria "O zittre nicht, mein lieber Sohn" is typical of Sven Nykvist, Bergman's superb cinematographer. We have sorrowful expression in continuous close-up—the camera exploring, caressing the contours of the face, its infinite expressiveness, its infinite sadness. Again this is Bergman briefly registering in this Mozartian world, where prettiness prevails but the ugliness must be acknowledged.

From this moment of psychological concentration, we come back to theatrical high spirits. "Hm! Hm! Hm! Hm!" is the beginning of the shimmering quintet that features the Queen's three attendants along with Tamino and Papageno. In the film, Bergman makes of this quintet a didactic presentation, one that usually raises a laugh in the audiences that see it. Papageno is lectured about his lying and vows never to do it again, saying that he fears being punished again.

Now the principals turn to the audience, and, standing in a carefully composed arrangement, they deliver a sermon. Another didactic element,

which pushes this presentation into comic range, is the use of a series of placards on which these moral sentiments are carefully lettered. The out-of-nowhere, mysteriously ascending and descending signs are amusing in part because the actors are so unfazed by their inexplicable appearance. They are also comically effective because the actors and filmmakers alike are so unapologetic. Of course, this is more theatrical artificiality, but the lack of apology and the guilelessness that provides the courage for it are unexpectedly affecting.

At this point, Tamino receives the magic flute, a gift to cheer the sorrow-laden, to lift up the hanging hands of administrator and recipient alike.¹³ The message here is clear and goes beyond pretty platitudes. It is a humanist's faith, perhaps, and a good one, too: Music, specifically—as well as the arts allied with narrative and the theater, generally—heals and saves.

In this film, the lessons (and more lessons will follow, some ironically) work because of the music and because of the expertise and enjoyment of the participants—just as lessons can work in one's home because of all the loving interaction and all the fun activities that leaven and inform that instruction. This is theater, too: sometimes lessons do not need to be hidden in a convincing and contradictory narrative; they do not need realism, verisimilitude, or rounded characters.

The Magic Flute is effectively didactic in that it contains edifying messages and it communicates them kindly. Bergman's affectionately ironic use of direct address and placards bearing platitudes is a reference to the simplicity (and, potentially, to the oversimplicity) of these messages. However, that potential for simplemindedness is not fulfilled because the opera also contains plenty of nuance and lifelike ambiguity as well as troubling contradiction and inconsistency. Bergman is attuned to these ambiguities, and he renders them clearly and beautifully. Bergman does not attempt to deny or eliminate the problems in the text. Rather, he reveals gaps and requires that we consider them.

Like the art to which Bergman subscribes (but cannot often feel to produce), the extraordinary power of Tamino's flute is found in the way it fills darkness with sweetness. After he has played it, the flute floats into the air, but not quite magically: the wires that lift it are clearly visible. At this point, the film viewer may have become so attuned to Bergman's theatrical artificiality and medium comparisons that she is delighted and not affronted by the conceit.

Now Bergman describes a strategic shift and explores a different kind of stylization. The quintet splits into two groups, dividing men and women. As these groups address us, we might be briefly reminded of film's roots in portraiture and painting.

Next our subjects turn from us and toward one another. Perpendicularity gives way to profiles and a beguiling echo. This is not only painterly but pertains to some degree across the spectrum of the arts. The Mozartian narrative (as found for instance in Beaumarchais, Da Ponte, de Musset) has sometimes been troubling to realists because of its impossible symmetry, its convenient complications, and its implausible reconciliations. As narrative we may find this unconvincing, but resistance may give way if we consider certain formal and figurative possibilities. The way Bergman composes and cuts between his profiled figures suggests an evoking, even an invocation of, the dance as well as standard sonata form. Characters come together, describe patterned actions, and enliven those actions with their own individuality. Statements are made and themes presented, then varied, inverted, problematized, and, finally, beautifully resolved.

Like Tamino, Papageno too receives a gift, if not *of* then *for* the spirit. Momentarily (keep in mind the various villains), it seems, there is something for everyone. The singers address us with another moral written on signs, then turn again from the camera to each other, again to the dance, and to the suggestion of that which lies at the end of all dance and the root of all comedy. Bergman also makes use of musical rhythm to evoke romantic roundelays, the great chase, the blessed continuation of the race (note the two sequential paintings on Papageno's music box).

With the artificial, impossible descent of a trio of angelic boys in a balloon, we finally hear from the other side, from the Queen's enemies. They balance and counter the Queen's women, though there is little question, even at this early point, of who will enlist our sympathy. With the exception of his little girl in the audience, Bergman's suturing in the film has been of a deconstructive sort, suggesting by its incompleteness the function of the device rather than leaving it to work conventionally. Here he changes his strategy, giving us a bona fide shot–reverse shot (a view from above of Tamino and Papageno, another of cinema's nontheatrical perspectives), again drawing us in to identify with the perspective of childhood. These boys are the counterpoint of the idealized and actual child in the audience.

As if to renew the agreement between stage and stalls and to complete the connection between children in the various narrative spaces, Bergman cuts back to the girl in the audience, with whom we now go to visit Pamina. As we do so, Bergman continues to explore his partly theatrical space with the camera's (and thus the spectator's) unique mobility and power of concentration. We go up and down and around corners, playing with composition, depth of field, and foreground and background relationships. The approach is simultaneously cinematic and intimately theatrical.

Christian Metz proposed in the mid 1960s that, contrary to conventional assumption, it is not the protagonists of a piece that we ultimately identify with but the camera itself.¹⁴ We assume its mobility, its universal access, its privileged perspective. Metz problematizes this illusion, since of course we are seeing only what we are supposed to see, and our presumed power may not lead us to interrogate our position. In his evocation of Metz's theory, however, Bergman does not leave us ideologically stranded. His interruptions and range of viewing positions make it difficult for us to simply submit to these illusions.

Before long we find Tamino in another ambiguous location, another liminal space. At first the set is clearly constructed to suggest the theatrical element in the film, but now we come to a transition. As the camera enters the previously theatrical space and explores it, as it shoots and varies shot size, we suddenly find ourselves in a similar set but now contained in a film



Scene from *The Magic Flute* by Ingmar Bergman. Sarastro and the other priests guide Tamino, monitor his spiritual progress, and pray that he will be given strength to overcome the trials. The priests eventually defeat the Queen of the Night, her ladies, and Monostatos, who make a final attempt to overthrow the temple order.



Scene from *The Magic Flute* by Ingmar Bergman. This scene shows Sarastro's triumphal entry at the end of act 1. It is the first time that the audience and Tamino meet him. The audience, like Tamino, have only heard terrible rumors about him and the temple order from the Queen and her ladies.

studio. Having established his narrative location in both performative settings, Bergman has Tamino ask one of the libretto's most searching questions: "Could this be a godly site?"

Tamino is in Sarastro's temple, a constructed, separate space designed for figurative, presentational rituals that relate directly and profoundly to life issues. From his two ritual spaces, reflecting the locations of Bergman's own searching and devotion, an actor asks the same question, "Could this be a godly site?" Here is another lovely, disarmingly sincere moment. For all of the disaffection and doubt in his own work and in modernism generally, Bergman is here affirming art's holiness, its potential and often realized ability to embody and grant wisdom, beauty, and happiness.

Tamino is about to be introduced into Sarastro's brotherhood, about to assume the burdens and privileges of Sarastro's order, about to win his love and his life—for it is in the temple precinct that he will meet Pamina. And on this brink we find him at lowest ebb. Has the Queen lied to him? He is discouraged by deceit and fraud, by all the gaps between appearance and reality, between aspiring and accomplishment. In the midst of this difficulty, Tamino comes to what for Bergman is the center of the opera, the key to its significance and to his own interest in it. Everywhere there are hints and intimations in the darkness: the intermingled hope and doubt that something beyond us exists and that something between us can abide.

In his life, Bergman came at least twice to despairing disbelief. For him both God (*The Silence*) and love (*Shame*) died (though some hope, however muted, seems always to have returned to him). It can be critically dubious to rely excessively on biographical detail, but when we consider the number of marriages and romantic interludes in Bergman's life, we can infer that one reason for the silence was that he was never able to join that brotherhood, to achieve the fidelity that might bring the answer to his questions,¹⁵ is there anybody out there, can any lasting thing be between us? In his autobiography, Bergman describes this central scene, the one that moves him most profoundly:

Tamino is left alone. . . . He cries: "Oh, dark night! When will you vanish? When shall I find light in the darkness?" The chorus answers *pianissimo* from within the temple: "Soon, soon or never more!" Tamino: "Soon? Soon? Or never more. Hidden creatures, give me your answer. Does Pamina still live?" The chorus answers in the distance: "Pamina, Pamina still lives."

These twelve bars involve two questions at life's outer limits—but also two answers. When Mozart wrote his opera, he was already ill, the specter of death touching him. In a moment of impatient despair, he cries: "Oh, dark night! When will you vanish? When shall I find light in the darkness?" The chorus responds ambiguously. "Soon, soon or never more."

The mortally sick Mozart cries out a question into the darkness. Out of this darkness, he answers his own question—*or does he receive an answer?*

Then the other question: “Does Pamina still live?” The music translates the text’s simple question into the greatest of all questions. “Does Love live? Is Love real?” The answer comes, quivering but hopeful in a strange division of Pamina’s name: “Pa-*mi*-na still lives!” It is no longer a matter of the name of an attractive young woman, but a code word for love: “Pa-*mi*-na still lives.” Love exists. Love is real in the world of human beings.¹⁶

Bergman’s testimony is moving, the more so for its author’s Dostoevskian doubt. This phenomenon of an unbeliever giving superior, efficacious witness happens frequently (compare Pier Paolo Pasolini’s 1964 film *The Gospel According to Matthew*). How can Tamino gather sufficient courage, how can Bergman do this contradictory thing? The answer is everywhere in the opera: Tamino starts to play his flute; it is the consolation of creation, especially collaborative creation.

Mozart’s simple melody brings Tamino out of the shadow and out of that ambiguous in-between space back onto the bright, artificial theatrical space. Out from the wings come the pacified animals, delightful fauves, as fake as that dragon. This is another charming moment for children and a moving one for adults, who may take Tamino’s dilemma more to heart than children do. In this and in the forthcoming conclusion, there is a wonderful payoff.

Tamino is still alone, still without his Pamina. Notwithstanding his own incompleteness and anxiety, the savage beasts are still charmed; the artist, out of his own terminal doubt and unconnection, provides certainty and communion to his audience. It is often thus with secular art, especially as received in a community of faith. There are sacrificial, atoning parallels here. By the sinner’s and doubter’s stripes we are not necessarily healed, as he has not the power of salvation. But the service rendered is nevertheless considerable and even holy; whereas before we were blind, now we can see.

Papageno’s bells answer Tamino’s flute from offstage; Bergman continues to explore, cross between, and bring together the different dramatic settings as well as the dramatic modes and conventions that typify them. By repetition as well as by variation, he continues to illustrate and celebrate the permeability of the division between performer and spectator, the theatrical and the cinematic, the enacted and the lived.

Now it is time for a narrative complication, not convincing or even necessary, but wholeheartedly presented out of love of story and opera convention. Pamina and Papageno run on what is obviously a treadmill as the pretty stage scenery goes obviously by behind them. Tamino still sits

offstage, amidst the stage machinery and all of the production helpers. The meeting of the lovers is almost accomplished. Then a swarthy man, the Moor Monostatos, appears. He works for Sarastro and guards Pamina from harm (although, as we shall see later, there is something more to it). He captures the fleeing pair and then looks threateningly at us, saying, "You will smart for this, believe me." Here is what in Britain is called the Panto(mime) tradition. In the Pantos, which now usually take place around Christmas and which are continued staples for the youngsters and their families, good guys are cheered and bad guys booed. There is no hint of theatrical verisimilitude. Interaction and participation are all.

Such gentle play between audience and actor, including Bergman's own winking at his film audience, permeates the intermission—another highly artificial spectacle on par with the overture—and softens the conflicts through the second act as trials and temptations lead toward climax. At his nadir, when Papageno feels terminally alone and even suicidal, he is struck by an idea. He looks at the camera—now the theater space has given way again to that theatrical/cinematic in-between—and invites a maiden from the (film) audience to join him. Here is a variation of what we have already seen, a theatrical device and a didactic confrontation straight out of a morality tale, when audiences felt directly addressed. Of course, the point of our being confronted from on stage is not exactly morality-tale material, but *The Magic Flute*, along with its current makers, has clearly demonstrated devoted interest not only in aspiring to virtue, but also in plain romantic love.

Back on stage, we witness another charming transformation. Papageno's bells summon the springtime, and the theatrical greenery drops into place right before our eyes. Artifice invites our appreciation of the world to give way, at least temporarily, to an appreciation of its representation or of its artistic transformation. It is difficult for us to resist that invitation.

Papageno and Papagena finally meet. This is one of the opera's climactic scenes, the resolution of one of its main character's objectives, the fulfillment and justification of one of its philosophical alternatives. This a lovely meeting in which wooing, wedding, and children are envisioned. The treatment echoes that earlier quintet. Actors facing the camera turn to face each other with more implications of the dance, though this time of a different and more primal nature.

After we return to Pamina and Tamino and to their third and most difficult trial, Bergman enacts his last and greatest explosion of the theatrical space. These are superb, completely stylized film stage settings. The



Scene from *The Magic Flute* by Ingmar Bergman. Papageno rejoices in the fulfillment of his dream, a wife and children.

flute (representing art, artifice, harmony) will protect Tamino and Pamina on their way, providing insight and comfort through all the buffetings. They pass and play through a landscape of flames that leap and lick in the foreground and on the frame's margins, past the cavortings of leotarded men and women, inflamed and damned by their passion. They pass through water, through more artificiality and stylization in the film-studio space, through a waving sea of languid human limbs. Tamino closes his eyes to the scene, plays the flute, and provides steadiness, while Pamina surveys and guides him through. Of course, they succeed.

Now there is final exploration of that stylized liminal space as the Queen of the Night and Monostatos approach the sanctuary for a last attack. Using lateral tracking and portraits in profile (again, typically Nykvist), malice and darkness are feelingly presented.

The final confrontation is brief to the point of being perfunctory. Is it Bergman choosing not to linger on conflict when concord is at the core of his presentation? Beyond the Queen's last hauntingly defiant smile at Sarastro as she disappears, perhaps Bergman is finally, at least in this film, letting go of the antagonism in which he believes for the harmony for which he yearns. In the end, we return to the eighteenth-century stage place, to a shot of the entire audience watching approvingly. Tamino and Pamina rise to their seat of power and preeminence while Sarastro makes a departure that is also quick, but poignant and not at all perfunctory. Sarastro gets his own flute, which is to say that the spectator, encouraged by a last bit of suturing, might well pass from viewing this successful consummation to the pursuit of his or her own saving union.

The Magic Flute is a vast and satisfying creation, especially when we allow that it is not complete as long as people are producing and listening to and writing about it. Bergman seems to acknowledge this by good-naturedly showing us the scaffolding and costumes, as though to acknowledge that any form, including his own, will and will not fit the subject. Production and adaptation in the narrative arts, as well as the critical readings that respond to them, are not often likely to be perfect or to perfectly please those looking on. This is as it should be.

We have discussed a lover's vocabulary as it has been applied to adaptation and how terms like *fidelity* and *betrayal* may overshoot the mark. There is another lover's concept, though, a marital analogy that can relate to adaptation and especially to a reader's experience with it or to any textual experience at all. As one considers, in the abstract, prospective marriage partners, one can think of any number of traits and qualities, merits and proportions that promise to please. When the person in question comes on the scene, however, it is prudent, yet still pleasing, to change



Scene from *The Magic Flute* by Ingmar Bergman. Prince Tamino and Princess Pamina face the greatest trials of temple initiation together and rely on each other, as well as on the magic flute.

one's mode of thinking. As with any comprehensive reading of the text when compared to someone's focused staging or filming, the actual person requires that all possibility becomes one particularity. No man or woman can be all things, in disposition or intellect, emotionally or physically. He or she will have strengths and limitations, which, contrary to dream-come-true myths, turn out to be inextricably linked.

Romance is threatened within *The Magic Flute*, as is the romantic ideal of Mozart's canonicity through Bergman's cinematic rendering. Divine unions, as the opera teaches, are as readily endangered as they are idealized. The greater danger to Mozart's work, however, may be its canonical status, preventing audiences from appreciating it by its exalted, untouchable

nature. Bergman's translation of *The Magic Flute* succeeds because it allows us to court Mozart's story again, or it us. Whenever canonical works are taken down from the shelf, as Mozart's was by Bergman, we converse and commit and make decisions. As in marriage, the sacred starts to intermingle uncomfortably with the everyday. It might be argued, though, that this is precisely the right place for religion.

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1. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford, 2004), 445–59. See also Louis D. Giannetti, *Understanding Movies* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002), which talks about adaptations that are faithful or loose or literal.

2. Braudy and Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism*, 106–17.

3. For more on montage, see Richard Taylor, ed. and trans., *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 41–46, 66–67, 72–75.

4. See Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987).

5. Ingmar Bergman, *The Magic Lantern: An Autobiography*, trans. Joan Tate (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988).

6. Ingmar Bergman, *Images: My Life in Film*, trans. Marianne Ruuth (London: Bloomsbury, 1994), 353.

7. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) on the detail; and on alienation see Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theatre Is Epic Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willet (London: Methuen, 1964), 33–42.

8. For a reenacted demonstration of the chariot and pole, see the early sections of Terry Gilliam's 1988 film *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*.

9. Although Bergman does not portray Christian hope, hints (such as the actor's vision in *The Seventh Seal*, the terrible, magisterial *Winter Light*, the charity in *Cries and Whispers*, the Christmas sequence of *Fanny and Alexander*) suggest that the light of hope, or at least of edifying mythology, has not quite gone out.

10. The closest cinematic analogy, perhaps insufficiently acknowledged, is Laurence Olivier's 1944 film version of Shakespeare's *Henry V*.

11. See Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V* (1989).

12. See André Gregory and Louis Malle's exquisite *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994).

13. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 2000), s.v. Zauberooper, says that magical elements were common devices in the *Zauberoper*s (magic operas) that abounded during

this period. The magical flute, which today seems so sweet because of its stark contrast from most of the other communication we overhear, worked then because it was a superlative example of a familiar form.

14. Braudy and Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism*, 106–17.

15. See Peter Cowie's chronology in Bergman, *Magic Lantern*, 291–301. For a most moving use of biographical detail, see Bergman on Bach in Bergman, *Magic Lantern*, 43.

16. See Bergman, *Magic Lantern*, 216–17.