Monostatos's Longing

Staging Blackness in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*[1]

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German-language theater from the turn of the nineteenth century plays a central role regarding representation of Blackness on stage. At the same time that national theaters, including opera houses, were established, an intense debate about *race* took place in all of Europe. The political motivation for this discourse was the abolitionist movement, which advocated for the elimination of slavery, particularly in England. The abolitionist drama (a genre that dramatizes the condition of slavery and harkens back to the bourgeois tragedy) was popular in German-language theater at this time and can be regarded as belonging to the wider context of this discourse. The Enlightenment-era desire for classification and systematization, with its penchant for racism, added to the intensity of this debate. Thus, on the one hand it is correct to say that at this time "the relativity of a Eurocentric . . . viewpoint became obvious,"[2] as Iwan Michelangelo D'Aprile and Winfried Siebers write, but describing the eighteenth century as "the epoch of acceptance of cultural diversity and the discovery of the human right to cultural identity,"[3] as D'Aprile and Siebers go on to say, does not fully capture the discourse. A more complete picture emerges when we factor in the problematic flip side of Enlightenment, namely the foundational systemic racism, coded as scientific, that has survived through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries up until the present.

1. This essay was translated from German by Tatjana Zimbelius-Klem. All translations of quotations from German to English were also done by Tatjana Zimbelius-Klem.

2. Iwan Michelangelo D'Aprile and Winfried Siebers, *Das 18. Jahrhundert: Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2008), 115.

3. D'Aprile and Siebers, *Das 18. Jahrhundert*, 115.

Samuel Thomas Sömmering with his essay *Über die körperliche Verschiedenheit des N****s vom Europäer* (*On the Physical Differences Differentiating N****s from Europeans*) can be counted among the founders of this influential tradition with fatal consequences. In his treatise, Sömmering initially decries the cruel treatment of slaves "similar to a commodity or animal."[4] He does so only to immediately pose the question whether this treatment might not be justified: "Practical prejudices, which are so generally spread, usually have some truth to support them."[5] To illustrate the topic in question, Sömmering uses gender relations as an analogy: "A boy will always reign over girls according to his nature, without knowing that he prevails due to his firmer, stronger body, even if he is provided with the exact same nutrition, exercise, and clothing."[6] The treatise amounts to a justification of alleged European superiority based on a "natural law," which Sömmering tries to infer from the "build and . . . the constitution"[7] of the respective bodies. Sömmering makes no attempt to hide the economic interests undergirding this racist construction of theory: his goal is to justify the exploitation of enslaved Africans. Thus, not only was slavery undergirded by racist ideas, it also produced them: "Anti-black prejudice sprang up with slavery and capitalists' need for labor."[8] Europeans had not always held so negative a view of Africa: "Before then [before slavery], educated Europeans held a generally positive attitude towards Africans, recognizing that African civilizations were highly advanced with vast libraries and centers of learning. Indeed, North Africans pioneered mathematics, medicine, and astronomy long before Europeans had much knowledge of these disciplines."[9]

It is not known whether Mozart and Emmanuel Schikaneder, the author of the libretto for *The Magic Flute*, knew Sömmering's treatise; they were familiar, though, with the work of Christoph Meiners, someone who influenced Sömmering's own thinking about race. Sömmering quotes Meiners's allegation that the "black man" has been equipped by God himself with a particular "insensitivity" and thus "created to be a slave to

4. Samuel Thomas von Sömmering, *Über die körperliche Verschiedenheit des N****s vom Europäer* (Frankfurt am Main: Varrentrapp und Wenner, 1785), viii.

5. Sömmering, *Über die körperliche Verschiedenheit*, ix.

6. Sömmering, *Über die körperliche Verschiedenheit*, ix.

7. Sömmering, *Über die körperliche Verschiedenheit*, ix.

8. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 21.

9. Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 21.

others."[10] However, Meiners did not follow this line of argument only in *Vermischte philosophische Schriften* (*Miscellaneous Philosophical Writings*), from which Sömmering is quoting.[11] Meiners is also the author of the treatise *Ueber die Mysterien der Alten, besonders die eleusinischen Geheimnisse* (*On the Mysteries of the Ancients, in Particular the Eleusinian Secrets*),[12] not only considered the trigger for eighteenth-century fascination with the mysteries, but also seen by Jan Assmann as the most important catalyst for references to Egypt in the opera.[13] Mozart and Schikaneder were familiar with Meiners's writings and they participated—at meetings of the Masonic Lodge to which they belonged—in discourses of their time. Therefore, they must have come across early racist claims shared by Sömmering and Meiners. Another indication that Mozart was familiar with discourses around slavery is his correspondence with Wolfgang Heribert von Dalberg, who at the time was artistic director at Mannheim national theater. Mozart had offered to write a monodrama for him, hoping to find a reason to extend his stay in Mannheim.[14] In this context, Dalberg is primarily of interest as the author of the tragedy *Oronooko*,[15] which vehemently advocated for the abolition of slavery and represents the most radical of abolitionist plays, which generally supported a "humane" form of slavery.[16]

This represents a rough sketch of the history of discourse within which *The Magic Flute* and the character of Monostatos can be located, a discourse dominated by debates around slavery and racism, both demands for the abolition of slavery and racist justifications for it. The founding

10. Sömmering, *Über die körperliche Verschiedenheit*, xiii.

11. Christoph Meiners, *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Weygand, 1775–76).

12. Meiners, *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, 3:164–342.

13. Jan Assmann, *Die Zauberflöte: Oper und Mysterium* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2005).

14. Michael Freyhan, "Studies and Reports: Toward the Original Text of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 39, no. 2 (1986): 371.

15. Dalberg adapts the drama by Thomas Southerne with a similar name, which in turn takes up the substance of a story by Aphra Behn (both Southerne and Behn use the spelling "Oroonoko," while Dalberg uses "Oronooko"). For the history of the subject matter, see Barbara Riesche, *Schöne M***innen, edle Sklaven, schwarze Rächer* (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2010), 300.

16. The slaves in August von Kotzebue's *Die N****sklaven*, for instance, do not entirely want to overcome slavery but merely have the violent slaveholder John replaced by his brother William. See my essay "Vom bürgerlichen Trauerspiel zum Abolitionsdrama: Kotzebues 'Die N****sklaven,'" in *"Die deutsche Freiheit erdolcht": Neue Studien zu Leben, Werk und Rezeption August von Kotzebues*, ed. Julia Bohnengel and Thomas Wortmann (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2023), 51–65.

years of national theater and German-speaking opera were a period in which cultural phantasms about Blackness were negotiated with particular intensity and from controversial positions, and it is important to consider *The Magic Flute* within this context. The slave Monostatos was not created in a vacuum, and Mozart and Schikaneder can be reproached for being fully aware of the various possible implications of such a character. Monostatos, who has so far been neglected by scholars, can be read as an, at the very least, implicit contribution to the debates around abolition. While the opera's affinity to the fairy tale has often been emphasized—Uta Sadji, for instance, presupposes the "pure fairy-tale character of *The Magic Flute*"[17]—such a reading underplays the political aspects of the drama. Based on this insight, this essay rereads the character of Monostatos in order to connect him to the political discourses of the day.[18]

The Enigma of *The Magic Flute*

The Magic Flute is as popular as it is seemingly accessible, and productions for children abound. Its ostensible harmlessness starkly contrasts with thoroughly controversial scholarship about the liberetto.[19] Debates and interpretive challenges often hinge on the so-called break between the first and second acts: while the spectator mourns with the Queen of the Night over her daughter's abduction and considers Sarastro a cruel villain in the first act, the second act demands a different perspective. Now the Queen of the Night appears to be a power-hungry hysteric and Sarastro a wise and gracious sovereign whose celebration of Isis and Osiris within his "hallowed halls" Tamino and Pamina gladly join. This break between first and second act continues to present an interpretive challenge. Among the

17. Uta Sadji, *Der M*** auf der deutschen Bühne des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Salzburg: Anif, 1992), 227.

18. A close examination of *The Magic Flute* and particularly Monostatos can be found in my article "'Alles wird so piano gesungen und gespielt, als wenn die Musik in weiter Entfernung wäre': Das Pianissimo der Monostatos-Arie in Mozarts Zauberflöte," in *Lauschen und Überhören: Literarische und mediale Aspekte auditiver Offenheit*, ed. Stefan Börnchen and Claudia Liebrand (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2020), 177–91. It primarily deals with the implications of the following direction for musical interpretation of the Monostatos aria: "To be played and sung piano, as if the music came from a far distance." Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte* (Stuttgart: Reclam, [1791] 2014), 45.

19. Accordingly, an almost innumerable number of interpretive attempts abound; *The Magic Flute* may be "not only the most performed opera but also the most written about, at least in the German-speaking world." Assmann, *Die Zauberflöte*, 11.

continuously unanswered or at least not satisfactorily answered questions is the one posed by Peter von Matt in his essay "Papageno's Desire":

> Who is the Queen of the Night and who is Sarastro? What do they embody? How good and how evil are these two powerful creatures? The one singing the magnificent song of the hallowed halls, the hallowed walls where man loves man and revenge is unknown—how can he simultaneously be such a misogynist and women hater, such an unconditional spurner of the feminine in general? And is his antagonist, the vengeful mother goddess who flames and sparkles at night like a burning starry sky, really so wrong in her rejection of a dictatorial patriarchal state that negates her essence and has even abducted her beloved daughter? How good is the good that is victorious in *The Magic Flute*, and how bad the bad that ends up sinking—screaming—into the abyss?[20]

Gender studies affords the tools with which Matt's question—how Sarastro can sing of human kindness while being a misogynist—is easily answered: according to the history of philosophy and the history of ideas, the "man" implied in the libretto is a white man; therefore in order to really answer Matt's question as to how good the good and how bad the bad are in *The Magic Flute*, one must consider both gender *and* race simultaneously. It is not a coincidence that among those who, as von Matt writes, "end up sinking—screaming—into the abyss" is not only the Queen of the Night but also Monostatos, Sarastro's slave, who has defected to the star-blazing queen's side.

Monostatos's Longing

Monostatos is introduced in the first act by way of characterization through three other slaves who talk about his presumed imminent execution.

> THIRD SLAVE. Ha, ha, ha!
> FIRST SLAVE. Pst, Pst!

20. Peter von Matt, "Papagenos Sehnsucht," in *Mozarts Opernfiguren: Grosse Herren, rasende Weiber—gefährliche Liebschaften*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer (Bern: Paul Haupt, 1992), 153.

SECOND SLAVE. What's with the laughter?—
THIRD SLAVE. Ha, ha, ha! Our tormentor, the always eavesdropping blackam****, is bound to be hanged or skewered tomorrow.[21]

As we find out over the course of the conversation, Pamina has escaped her imprisonment, and although the slaves serve Sarastro, who is responsible for her kidnapping, they welcome this development. They hope with Pamina that she may "hasten to her tender mother's palace"[22] and wish the worst punishments on the odious Monostatos, whom they call a "corpulent paunch."[23] Thus Monostatos is introduced as a veritable monstrosity, a "merciless devil"[24] even. And this is exactly how he presents himself as he leads the recaptured Pamina into the palace: "My hatred," he announces, "shall ruin you!"[25] Monostatos seems to be all villain until the aria "Love Was Meant for Ev'ry Creature" complicates the picture. In this notable scene Monostatos watches—in accordance with the stage tradition of the harem guard[26]—as Sarastro's slave over the abducted Pamina. In an earlier scene she had already rejected Monostatos's advances. Now Pamina sleeps and Monostatos sings:

Ev'ry creature feels love's pleasures,
They can fondle, hug, and kiss,
But I'm told to shun all loving,
'Cause I'm black and hideous!
Have not I a heart inside me,
Am I not made of flesh and blood?
Never have a wife beside me,
Might as well be sent to hell!

So I'll chance it while I'm living,
Nuzzle, fondle, hug, and kiss.
Then, dear moon, please do forgive me,
I was captured by a white woman.
White is beautiful—I must

21. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 21.
22. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 21.
23. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 21. This relationship establishes a connection with the "corpulent villain," whom Tamino imagines in his conversation with the Three Ladies as Pamina's "tyrant." Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 16.
24. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 22.
25. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 23.
26. Sadji, *Der M****, 216.

Kiss her, moon. Do turn away
Should you find the sight distressing,
Turn your eyes away from me!
(*Slowly and quietly he sneaks closer*.)

Reading the text in the context of its historical discourse leaves one irritated. It is unclear whether the connection to racist discourses of the time is deliberate, or whether we are called to feel with Monostatos, empathize and acknowledge his desires. Schikaneder's Monostatos aria is indeed—as is contemporaneous abolitionist drama—compatible with both of these intentions. This makes analysis a proper tightrope walk. The fact that Monostatos is himself processing the very devaluation of skin color from which he suffers is probably most unsettling. His words "'Cause I'm black and hideous" may initially be read as a critical paraphrase of a societal consensus that we are meant to understand as wrong, in the sense of "because people say (unfortunately, wrongly) a black man is hideous," "because a black man is regarded as ugly." "White is beautiful" seems to be an opinion unreservedly shared by Monostatos. Papageno, too, has already made similar remarks in reference to Pamina: "Young maiden, fair and fine, whiter even than chalk."[27] Her beauty not only makes Monostatos want to kiss her, it even forces him to do so ("I must kiss her"). Does Monostatos indeed say himself that black is ugly and white beautiful? Is this intended to lay bare the deep tragedy of a character who—not unlike Shakespeare's Othello—has finally been driven mad by evil insinuations (Shakespeare showed in Iago how this works)? Today we might call this internalized racism, as has been described by Karen Pyke.[28] Or does the aesthetic assessment of skin color suggest that this presents an objective evaluation of beauty? The aforementioned Christoph Meiners, who belonged to the wider circle around Mozart, clearly connected black with ugliness and white with beauty, after all, when he wrote of "ugly blackam****s" and the "deformity of African heads."[29] And Meiners is not an outlier: George L. Mosse showed in his *History of Racism in Europe* that racism is also based on aesthetic judgments.[30] Building on Mosse, Sigrid Köhler has shown that aesthetic judgments of such almost obscene sim-

27. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 23.

28. Karen D. Pyke, "What Is Internalized Racial Oppression and Why Don't We Study It? Acknowledging Racism's Hidden Injuries," *Sociological Perspectives* 53, no. 4 (2010): 551–72.

29. Christoph Meiners, *Über die Natur der afrikanischen N**** (Hannover: Wehrhahn, [1790] 2000), 20.

30. George L. Mosse, *Die Geschichte des Rassismus in Europa* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2006), 9.

plicity in their binary opposition of ugly/beautiful, as they are presented here, are just as formative for racism as they are for anthropological discourse. The latter is based in large part on aesthetic judgments, leading to a "fatal amalgamation of anthropology and aesthetics"[31] within racist discourse. Thus, we are not dealing with marginalia here but with a constituting aspect at the core of racist discourse as it has been combated by the "Black is beautiful" movement since the twentieth century.

Reading the aria as not only presenting such racism critically but also activating it—perfidiously, by having Monostatos, the figure implicated in the discourse, confirming and certifying it—is disturbing but necessary. It is worth pondering whether asking the moon, a stand-in for the audience, to close its eyes can be interpreted as a rejection of visual logic, which is the basis for this problematic aesthetic evaluation.

Monostatos's aria can thus be located within the context of contemporary imaginations of Blackness. Yet what is examined is not Monostatos's status as a slave, but his alleged inadequacy as a subject of love. The suggestive questions "Have not I a heart inside me? Am I not of flesh and blood?" bring Monostatos's humanity to the fore. Framing Monostatos's longing as a matter of love assigns him an undebatable, biologically justified status of personhood—and this is where the libretto departs from Sömmering's arguments. Simply put: whereas an early racist like Meiners looked for alleged "differences,"[32] Monostatos emphasizes physical likeness and indistinguishability. With his reference to blood, Monostatos takes up a central aspect of racist ideology and reevaluates it. Up until the twentieth century, blood was considered a determining factor in matters of race, as Cheryl I. Harris stresses in her essay "Whiteness as Property," which is seminal to critical race theory:

> Although the courts applied varying fractional formulas in different jurisdictions to define "black" . . . , the law uniformly accepted the rule of hypodescent—racial identity was governed by blood, and white was preferred. This legal assumption of race as blood-borne was predicated on the pseudo-sciences of eugenics and craniology, which saw their major development during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[33]

31. Sigrid Köhler, "Beautiful Black Soul? The Racial Matrix of White Aesthetics (Reading Kotzebue against Kleist)," *Image & Narrative* 14, no. 3 (2013): 35.

32. Meiners, *Über die Natur*, 20.

33. Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (New York: New Press, 1996), 283.

This had massive consequences in matters of jurisdiction, as Harris goes on the elaborate:

> In adjudicating who was "white," courts sometimes noted that, by physical characteristics, the individual whose racial identity was at issue appeared to be white and, in fact, had been regarded as white in the community. Yet if an individual's blood was tainted, she could not claim to be "white" as the law understood, regardless of the fact that phenotypically she may have been completely indistinguishable from a white person, may have lived as a white person, and may have descended from a family that lived as whites. Although socially accepted as white, she could not legally be white. Blood as "objective fact" predominated over appearance and social acceptance, which were socially fluid and subjective measures.[34]

Monostatos turns blood from the allegedly objective guarantor of supposed difference between whites and Blacks into evidence for the similarity of all people. A direct line can be drawn from Monostatos's aria in the eighteenth to critical race thinking in the twenty-first century, from the opera stage to Harris's critical race theory. The reference to the heart ("Have not I a heart inside me") now connects physical with emotional similarities. Monostatos's emotional economy is indeed central to his evaluation within the historical discourse. Monostatos is asked to refute two accusations. First he must answer for his alleged "innate insensibility,"[35] a phrase used by Meiners in an attempt to justify slavery by associating race with differing emotional capacities. The Monostatos aria takes up this racist stereotype, which Sömmering had quoted as well, and rejects it. Monostatos's emotions match those of the other characters in love; he is no less sensitive than other characters in the opera. The idea that love is commonly desired among all people is a topos we also encounter in Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. There it is the Spanish servant Pedrillo who initially is considered to be unlovable by his master Belmonte.

> BELMONTE. Oh, Pedrillo, if only you knew love!
> PEDRILLO. Hm! As if our kind knew none of it. I have as many tender hours as other folk.[36]

34. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 284.

35. Meiners, *Über die Natur*, 46.

36. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Stuttgart: Reclam, [1782] 2005), 19.

Within *The Magic Flute* itself Monostatos's aria corresponds to Papageno's famous "wish aria":[37] "A sweetheart or a missis / is Papageno's wish / O such a gentle dove / would be heaven here for me!" And later: "Oh can't I appeal to but one / of all these charming girls? / If one of them saves me from despair / I shall not die from grief." And: "If none will love me / The flame will consume me / But if female lips were to kiss me / I should be safe and sound."[38]

Readers who know the opera well will almost certainly hear the playful and light music playing in their head when they read these lines. Yet the longing for love[39] expressed by Papageno must, as Peter von Matt rightfully advocates, be taken seriously, including the fatal consequence if it is left unfulfilled. Before Papagena finally appears, Papageno will be as close to suicide as Pamina when Tamino refuses to speak with her because of an oath of silence and she believes that his love is extinguished. Consequently, the attestation that the desire for love is an existential need is independent of the characters it befalls; where Peter von Matt speaks of "Papageno's longing," it is appropriate to take Monostatos's longing seriously. Jan Assmann's reading appears one-sided, in contrast, when he refers to Monostatos's aria as a "love aria" only in quotation marks and states that in Monostatos "love appears as lustfulness."[40] That may be true, but it is just as true for Papageno, yet only Monostatos is scolded for his "immoral intention,"[41] as Assmann formulates it. Whereas the character of Monostatos is forced to strongly object to the insinuated unfeelingness, he is simultaneously confronted with reproach for being all too excitable.

One can also locate this criticism in eighteenth-century racist discourse; namely, it can be related to the so-called climate theory. Ever since antiquity, people have imagined that climate conditions have an effect on particular ethnicities, assuming that Europeans have the most self-control

37. "Papageno always clearly states what he wants, and he wants a lot. Wishes move and drive him as the booming wind drives the sail boat. Already in his introductory song he defines himself as one who is driven by wishes, and each of his arias, each of his duets is inspired by a wish. As soon as he opens his mouth, he speaks in optative. The introductory song in which he, in accordance with opera tradition, explains his profession already in the second verse connects the birds, which he professionally catches, to the girls, whom he wants to capture. And he is not talking about the one and only woman, as Tamino does, but he is talking in plural." Von Matt, "Papagenos Sehnsucht," 156.

38. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 61.

39. Von Matt insists that in Papageno's case we need to indeed talk of longing, and not of drive or desire. See von Matt, "Papagenos Sehnsucht," 156.

40. Assmann, *Die Zauberflöte*, 186.

41. Assmann, *Die Zauberflöte*, 187.

because they live in mild parts of the world. The libretto appears to appeal to this understanding. Monostatos explicitly addresses the idea that inhabitants of regions with temperate climates are more tempered in their passions at the sight of Pamina, only to then repudiate it: "And who could remain cold and insensitive at such a sight, even if he were to hail from a milder region?"[42] When Tamino sings in the picture aria of his love to Pamina, which arose from the sight of her image alone, the opera offers clear proof of the unfoundedness of the climate theory and confirms Monostatos's assessment. His longing thus confronts contemporary talk of "innate insensibility" as well as a climate theory that presumes a disproportionate penchant for affect.

What remains problematic is that Monostatos, in accordance with the stereotype of the hypersexual Black man, is trying to defy Pamina's expressed will. This, however, should not be evaluated without considering the context of *The Magic Flute* in its entirety. Papageno, specifically, plays a key role as a mirror character to Monostatos. Papageno and Monostatos are corresponding characters, which is already suggested in their first encounter when each is startled at the sight of the other. The mirror function of the two characters offers a new perspective on Monostatos's announced transgression. Papageno, too, tends to take by force that which he desires. Even in his first appearance, Papageno introduces himself with the famous bird catcher's aria as phantasmagorical abductor. In the second verse he sings, "The bird catcher is who I am / Forever cheerful, tra-la-la / I'm known all over, near and far / for being great at what I do. / A net for girls is what I want / I'd catch a dozen of them for me. / I'd lock them all up in my cage / And all the girls would be mine."[43]

If one takes the lyrics seriously, this is an undisguised programmatic "raptus." There is a clear double standard—not so much in the libretto itself, but in the reception of the opera. Papageno wants to catch *all* girls, and yet he remains a sympathetic, harmless character and "everybody's darling." Monostatos, on the other hand, wants to kiss a single one, asking for forgiveness, yet scholarship calls him a "horny and brutal m***"[44] and a "sinister character through and through."[45] This is not just about the assault on Pamina. Beneath the surface such assessments are cultural

42. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 38.

43. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 9.

44. Assmann, *Die Zauberflöte*, 74. Joachim Kaiser, too, speaks of the "lewd blackam***," in *Mein Name ist Sarastro: Die Gestalten in Mozarts Meisteropern von Alfonso bis Zerlina* (Munich: Piper, 1984), 223.

45. Assmann, *Die Zauberflöte*, 74.

phantasms about the encounter between "the man of color and the white woman," which Frantz Fanon describes in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly white. I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white. Now . . . who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. . . . I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine.[46]

Monostatos's sexual transgression is also a transgression of the color line. And this is where the answer to Monostatos's question "But what has been my crime?" lies.[47] This "crime" alone explains the aggressive reactions toward him, given that "historically, . . . the Negro guilty of lying with a white woman is castrated,"[48] as Frantz Fanon noted.

Is Monostatos, then, right with his assumption that Pamina rejects him because of his skin color? On the face of it, the allegation seems absurd. Pamina references her affection for Tamino as a reason for rejecting Monostatos. Yet a pairing of Monostatos and Pamina would be impossible in the world of *The Magic Flute*, as a look at the model couple of the *Singspiel* makes clear. Not Pamina and Tamino but Papageno and Papagena are the couple at the heart of *The Magic Flute*; the scene in which the two come together with the duet "Pa-Pa-Pa-Pa-Pa-Pa-Papagena! Pa-Pa-Pa-Pa-Pa-Pa-Papageno!" is the paradigmatic love scene. The two protagonists are obviously made for each other, just as the priest had promised earlier, after Papageno had proclaimed he was ready to remain a bachelor for life, given all the hurdles: "What if Sarastro had kept a girl for you, your exact likeness in color and dress?"[49] Papageno is persuaded not to renounce love just yet, and perhaps that is what moves audiences. With this, the implicit rules for love have been established: "exact likeness in color and dress" is desirable in partners. This not only implies that Papageno and Papageno are the perfect couple, it also points to the impossibility of Monostatos and Pamina as lovers—due to their

46. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, [1952] 1967), 63.

47. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 45.

48. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 72.

49. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 40.

difference in "color." What follows is that while Pamina may be right in rejecting him because she had "sacrificed her heart to the youth,"[50] Monostatos still is not wrong in suspecting her rejection to be motivated by the fact that he has, as he phrases it, "the color of a black ghost."[51] At the end of the day, Pamina's reasons only distract from the fact that the underlying structural arguments are much more relevant. The power structure between Pamina and Monostatos is substantially more complicated than would be suggested by the sexual assault, which defines Pamina as a victim. "I was captured by a white woman," Monostatos sings in a striking passive construction, which must seem like a complete reversal of perpetrator and victim from Pamina's perspective. Yet Monostatos is indeed a white person's property; he is Sarastro's slave, after all, and evidently this is the fundamental experience that provides the foil for his assault on Pamina. Here, too, connections with critical race theory open up. "The hyperexploitation of black labor was accomplished by treating black people themselves as objects of property," Harris writes. "Race and property were thus conflated by establishing a form of property contingent on race: only blacks were subjugated as slaves and treated as property."[52] This difference between whites and Blacks in regard to social and judicial status, which is so fundamental for the system of slavery—"'black' racial identity marked who was subject to enslavement, whereas 'white' racial identity marked who was 'free' or, at minimum, not a slave"[53]—is still valid in Pamina's prison, at least from Monostatos's perspective. The curious wording "A white woman captured me" points this out.

The conglomeration invoked by the aria is as intricate as it is complex; an emancipatory reading is suggested as much as a racist one. Monostatos longs not only for love, but also for recognition from other characters as an equal and thereby *white* subject. The opera grants this desire its right, at least to a degree. Specifically, it presents Monostatos's emotional range as indistinguishable from that of other characters, thereby canceling out central prejudices with which Mozart's contemporaries and companions, such as Christoph Meiners, sought to justify slavery.

By establishing the symbolism implied in the distinction of black versus white, the opera also aims for a certain level of abstraction. A symbolism based on the opposition of light and dark, black and white is impor-

50. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 49.
51. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 49.
52. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 278.
53. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 278.

tant for *The Magic Flute* as a whole. The main antagonists, Sarastro and the Queen of the Night, are marked by the contrasting identifiers of day, sun, and enlightenment on the one hand, and night, darkness, and pre-enlightenment on the other. At the very end of the opera, Sarastro proclaims his final victory: "The rays of the sun cast out the night."[54] This can be read as a programmatic rejection of all blackness. The implications for an analysis of the character Monostatos are, then, that his dark skin is decidedly overdetermined.[55] This is already evident in the comparison of Monostatos with the devil. The libretto neatly fits into established theater tradition, as Sadji stresses: "This comparison of the m**** and the devil has been prevalent on the theater stage since medieval times and is still being drawn in every slave play or bourgeois tragedy with Black protagonists, though it would generally be asserted that the poor slave's soul was not nearly as dark as his skin."[56]

Here, Sarastro formulates his insight into Monostatos as follows: "Indeed I know too much—I know your soul is as black as your face."[57] The black soul is a metaphor, an image for the evil soul, and the ease with which we comprehend all this reveals how deep-seated this association of the color black with evil is in Western culture. A "Manichean space," as Harris writes, is "rigidly bifurcated into light/dark, good/bad, white/black."[58] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic argue along the same lines:

> In the semantics of popular culture, whiteness is often associated with innocence and goodness. Brides wear white on their wedding day to signify purity. "Snow White" is a universal fairy tale of virtue receiving its just reward. In talk of near-death experiences, many patients report a blinding white light, perhaps a projection of a hoped-for union with a positive and benign spiritual force. In contrast, darkness and blackness often carry connotations of evil and menace. One need only read *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad to see how strongly imagery of darkness conveys evil and terror. We speak of a black gloom. Persons deemed unacceptable to a group

54. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 72.

55. Similarly, Pamina's *white* skin is overdetermined. Fanon's formulation can well be applied to Pamina as well as *The Magic Flute* as a whole, which stages a fight between the two realms of day and night: "I am white: that is to say that I possess beauty and virtue, which have never been black. I am the color of the daylight." Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 45.

56. Sadji, *Der M****, 227.

57. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 50.

58. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 276.

> are said to be blackballed or blacklisted. Villains are often depicted as swarthy or wearing black clothing.[59]

It is along these lines that Sarastro refers to the Queen of the Night's plan for murder as a "black enterprise."[60] The Christian imagination of the devil as a black figure is shown to be an archaic stepping stone of an "enlightened" racism.

Many productions and scholars of *The Magic Flute* refuse, sometimes to a scandalous degree, to engage with these aspects of race, which the opera negotiates. Such a refusal to acknowledge race increases the most problematic aspects of the opera, particularly as it pertains to the devaluation of Monostatos. Yet this is not merely racist, it fails to properly interpret Monostatos's longing and, with it, *The Magic Flute* as a whole.

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59. Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 85f.

60. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 50.

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