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Bassa Selim: Mozart's Voice of Clemency in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*

Kristina Baron-Woods

The character of Bassa Selim, the Turkish Pasha in Mozart's Singspiel *Die Entführung aus dem Serail,* has inspired debate since the opera's premiere. Scholars have offered varied interpretations of the role's importance as a political tool, and as philosophical symbol of an enlightened late-eighteenth-century Vienna and, by association, the emperor Joseph II. Some historians consider that Mozart's contribution (including the changes he made) to the libretto he was originally offered is evidence that he sincerely wished to compose an opera that painted Joseph II as an enlightened leader. Others argue that the motivation behind the characterization is a blatant attempt to ingratiate himself with Joseph. Other scholars look to Joseph's choice of subject matter – one which depicts the power and danger of the Turks – as a key political move that would be noticed and appreciated by the Russian guests for whom it was originally intended to be performed. Further, since the opera's premiere, the merit of the Pasha's act of clemency has been debated, with scholars considering its artistic implication within the Singspiel genre, and its philosophical implication within the framework of the Enlightenment. Thomas Bauman sees the role as an important successor to the narrative lineage of "nobles savages" who inhabit the exotic "rescue" operas that were popular in Europe in the eighteenth century, while both Bauman and Daniel Heartz consider Selim as a glorification of Enlightenment

virtues.[1] Nicholas Till asserts that while Mozart may have wished to hold Joseph up as an idealized Enlightenment ruler through his depiction of the Pasha, Joseph's motivation for having the libretto set may not have been to espouse Enlightenment virtues at all, but rather as a political move to keep reminding the Viennese of their dangerous enemies – a sort of operatic call-to-arms.[2] Perhaps the most popular and comprehensive description of the Pasha, however, is given by Brigid Brophy, who writes that Selim represents "the Voltairean ideal: a noble, pagan, philosophical, exotic, benevolent despot who is amenable to education in the Enlightenment ideals."[3]

This paper will consider these various opinions, offering a close reading of the role of Bassa Selim in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and a survey of the major scholarship on the role. Three major areas of research on the character of Bassa Selim guide this study: the importance of narrative lineage to our understanding of Selim, the lack of music composed for the role in Mozart's version, and the debate over clemency as an Enlightenment virtue.[4]

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[1] Thomas Bauman, W. A. Mozart: *Die Entführung aus dem Serail,* Cambridge Opera Handbook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); also Bauman, *German Opera in the Age of Goethe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Bauman's chapter, "Coming of Age in Vienna," on *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in Daniel Heartz, *Mozart's Operas*, Thomas Bauman, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[2] Nicholas Till, Mozart and the Enlightenment (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 108.

[3] Brigid Brophy, *Mozart the Dramatist: The Value of His Operas to Him, to His Age and the Us* (New York: Da Capo, 1988), 223.

[4] This article comes partly from work done in a graduate seminar on Mozart and the Enlightenment led by Professor Edmund

When Mozart arrived in Vienna in March 1781, the National Singspiel Company had just finished its third season in the Theater nächst der kaiserlichen Burg, or the Burgtheater, as it was called. The presence of Mozart in Vienna at this time was propitious. He had been teamed with the librettist Stephanie der Jüngere, who was assigned the task of writing or adapting a libretto for a Singspiel for which Mozart would provide music. They settled on an existing libretto, *Belmonte und Constanze, oder Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, a work written by Christoph Bretzner that had already been set to music a few years earlier by Johann André, the resident composer of the Döbbelin Company in Berlin.[5] As Mozart set about his work, rumours abounded that Joseph II would ask him to prepare his work to be performed during a state visit to Vienna that winter by the Grand Duke Paul Petrovich, heir to the Russian throne, and his wife the Duchess Sophia Dorothea.[6]

Four months earlier, Emperor Joseph II had been advised to impress the grand duke and duchess with "the power of this monarchy" and "to present the court and the city with as much brilliance as

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Goehring at the University of Western Ontario. Thank you to Professor Goehring and the seminar participants for their insights. Other aspects of this article (regarding vocality and the role of Konstanze) were taken from my master's thesis; my sincere thanks to Professor Michelle Fillion of the University of Victoria for her guidance on this work.

[5] Bauman, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Cambridge Opera Handbook, 8.

[6] John A. Rice, *Antonio Salieri and Viennese Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1998), 307.

possible."[7] The writer of this advisement, Prince Kaunitz, suggested that Joseph hire magnificent singers from Italy to perform opera seria, and to engage the best possible ballet troupe. Joseph, however, intended to display his German Singspiel and theatrical companies, and ordered Count Rosenberg to supervise the production of Mozart and Stephanie's new opera, as well operas by Ignaz Umlauf, the resident Kapellmeister for the Singspiel.[8] These intentions never came to fruition, as Joseph ultimately ordered new productions of three operas by Gluck, *Iphigénie en Tauride*, *Alceste*, and *Orfeo ed Euridice* – the first performed in German translation, and the latter two in the original Italian.[9] Joseph had apparently not forgotten the effectiveness of Gluck opera as a symbol of the power, wealth, and good taste of the Habsburg court. Musicologist John Rice suggests that despite Joseph's assertions to the contrary, he was still affected by a lack of confidence in German opera and its ability to impress aristocratic company.[10]

For Mozart, the honour of having his opera performed in such company would have presented an opportunity to have his work heard in the Viennese court, an important event that, if successful, could potentially ensure royal patronage for years to come;

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[7] Kaunitz to Joseph, 22 July 1781, in *Joseph II, Leopold II, und Kaunitz: Ihr Briefwechsel*, Adolf Beer, ed. (Vienna, 1873), 92. Trans. John Rice in Rice, *Antonio Salieri and Viennese Opera,* 307.
[8] Bauman, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Cambridge Opera Handbook, 4-5.
[9] Alfred Einstein, *Mozart: His Character, His Work*, Arthur Mendel and Nathan Broder, trans. (London, Oxford University Press, 1945), 123.
[10] Rice, *Antonio Salieri and Viennese Opera*, 308.

therefore, it is understandable that he wished to edify Joseph before his guests. To achieve this end, Mozart and Stephanie created in the role of Bassa Selim, the Turkish Pasha, a character of great nobility, who displays the ultimate show of power, that of mercy towards his worst enemies. As it happened, however, the opera was not performed before the Russian guests. Still, the depiction of the Pasha has long been understood to represent Joseph, or at least to personify some of the ideals of clemency that Joseph held dear. While Mozart's disappointment at not having his opera performed before the royal guests must have been palpable, the additional time he had to compose it and make changes to Stephanie's libretto ultimately allowed him to create a more enlightened character of the Pasha than the original production schedule would have allowed.

Narrative lineage plays an important role in our understanding of Mozart and Stephanie's depiction of the character of Selim. The major literary and theatrical predecessors to *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* opera show markedly different depictions of the main "Eastern" male character from source to source. Turkish and other "Oriental" themed operas and plays were extremely popular in Vienna, London, Paris, and other centres in Europe during the eighteenth century.[11] Typical scenarios for these Oriental operas included a set of westerners transported, often by shipwreck, to some part of the eastern world. There they were immediately kidnapped into a harem if female, or sold into slavery if male. The locale was often Turkey, India, or Egypt,

[11] Rice, *Antonio Salieri and Viennese Opera*, 310-15.

or simply some vague composite of all three, the only requirement for the setting being a distant, exotic, and reputedly decadent land. Other standard elements to these dramas and operas included a harem – a titillating garden of earthly delights, escape as the only hope for the western beauty who sought to retain her virtue, threats of death or torture, and a complete inability on the part of the Muslims to understand European values and manners. Michael Evenden finds the various plot devices popular in these operas so pervasive in eighteenth-century comic opera that he classifies such works into the sub-genres of "rescue opera" and "exotic opera."[12] *Die Entführung* and Bretzner and Andre's *Belmonte und Constanze*, the opera on which *Die Entführung* is directly based, fit both categories.[13]

The two features of Mohammed's life for which he was traditionally reviled in the west –

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[12] Michael Evenden, *Silence and Selfhood: The Desire of Order in Mozart's* Magic Flute (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 54.

[13] It must be noted that while Evenden calls *Die Entführung* a rescue opera, as do Bauman and others, R. Morgan Longyear believes that the rescue opera is a specific genre that postdates *Die Entführung* by some years. Longyear contends that a true rescue opera contains few comic elements, that it has a strong political message with plots that indicate the social protests of the time, and that realism is the keynote of the genuine rescue opera. Also, rescue operas are Romantic in style, not Classical. According to his specifications, the most exemplary rescue opera is Beethoven's *Fidelio*, an opera which bears little resemblance to *Die Entführung*. However, numerous scholars do call *Die Entführung* a rescue opera, and find many examples of the genre in comic opera of the eighteenth century. See R. Morgan Longyear, "Notes on the Rescue Opera," *The Musical Quarterly* 45/1 (1959): 49-66.

sensuality and cruelty – were projected onto the Muslim characters in these works, especially the male characters.[14] One of the most important elements of these oriental operas is the main male role, a lascivious, bloodthirsty, dangerous character – the Sultan, or worse, his first underling, a character with an over-inflated sense of his own power. Many of the plays that could be considered predecessors to *Die Entführung*, however, had two eastern men in the cast of characters, portraying the two extremes that would be seen in the roles of Osmin and Bassa Selim, both in Bretzner's and in Mozart and Stephanie's librettos. The figure of the crude, lascivious, bloodthirsty man who threatens nearly everyone with tortures such as being boiled alive in oil is a clear antecedent to Osmin, Selim's caretaker. Osmin turns out to be a rather ineffectual, powerless creature in *Die Entführung*, as seems to be the case with many of the male servant characters in the predecessors to *Die Entführung*; however, not all the violent-tempered characters in these plays were servants. In the case of the English play, *The Captive* by Isaac Bickerstaffe from 1769, the powerful male character was extremely violent, and threatened all who crossed him with death by impaling.[15] The other end of the spectrum to these aggressive males are a number of noble, merciful easterners seen as enlightened

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[14] Timothy D. Taylor, "Peopling the Stage: Opera Otherness, and New Musical Representations in the Eighteenth Century," *Cultural Critique* 36 (1997): 55-6.

[15] Isaac Bickerstaffe, *The Captive, a comic opera; as it is perform'd at the Theatre-Royal in the Hay-Market 1769*, Music by Charles Dibdin (London: Printed by W. Griffin, 1769; Facsimile: Eighteenth Century Collections Online).

renegades, clear predecessors to the Pasha character. Few of the characters who turn out to be merciful exhibit such characteristics throughout the play or opera; it is the kindness, pathos, or appealing fidelity of the captive western woman that softens his heart and appeals to his higher nature. [16]

No single work has been isolated among the Oriental operas preceding Bretzner's *Belmonte and Constanze* as Bretzner's direct source or model, although various scholars have proposed a number of works among the English, German and Italian traditions. The libretto seems to draw on various elements and characters associated with a number of works. Bauman, who mentions numerous possibilities of inspiration for Bretzner, sees clear antecedents to *Belmonte and Constanze* in the English plays and operas of the earlier eighteenth century. Notable among the many English plays and operas with exotic settings and plots that involves rescue are two by English playwright Isaac Bickerstaffe. His two-act comic opera libretto *The Captive* (1769) is taken from the comic subplot of John Dryden's tragedy *Don Sebastian* (1689). In Dryden's play, a young Portuguese man, bought into slavery by an Algerian Mufti as a present to please his wife, escapes with the master's daughter and his jewels, the fruits of the Mufti's embezzling and extorting. [17]

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[16] See Gretchen Wheelock's discussion of the appeal of the faithful Konstanze in Wye Allanbrook, Mary Hunter and Gretchen Wheelock, "Staging Mozart's Women," *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera,* Mary Ann Smart, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 47-66.

[17] Bauman, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, 28.

Bickerstaffe altered several features in his comic opera libretto from Dryden's play: here, the hero becomes Spanish instead of Portuguese, and he loses his rather unsympathetic, opportunistic character (in Dryden, he tries to seduce the daughter rather forcibly, despite her wishes to marry him and become Christian). Bickerstaffe's Ferdinand is not a slave, but a presentable young man working in the master's garden – similar to Belmonte, whose good breeding and manners allows him a higher rank and more trust and freedom than is afforded a typical western slave. In *The Captive*, human defects and excesses lie solely in the Eastern characters. The Mufti's wife is portrayed as shockingly libidinous to the callow young European whom she tries to tempt into her bed, while both Bickerstaffe's and Dryden's Mufti is ready to flay and impale anyone who crosses him. The one favourable Eastern character is the Mufti's daughter, a character seen as gentle and virtuous. She falls in love with the Christian Ferdinand and wishes to marry him in church, a declaration that she feels cleanses her soul, allowing her to renounce her Muslim birth in order to become Christian. As the lovers attempt to escape and are caught by the Mufti, the Mufti's embezzling and extortion is discovered and he is forced to accept help from the Spaniard. In his gratitude, he allows Ferdinand to go free and gives his daughter to the young man with his blessing. [18]

In 1775, Bickerstaffe wrote another comic opera on an exotic theme, titled *The Sultan, or a Peep*

[18] Bickerstaffe, *The Captive*.

into the Seraglio.[19] In this opera, the captive character is female; however, as a spirited Englishwoman, and not the typical Iberian captive, she appears to be more a forerunner to Bretzner's saucy Blonde, rather than the more earnest Constanze.[20] In *The Sultan*, as in *The Captive*, the music is a pastiche of melodies from popular opera buffa arias by such Italian composers as Galuppi and Anfossi, and songs specially composed by English composer Charles Dibdin.

In the mid-1970s, musicologist Rudolf Angemüller brought to light an obscure French play (author unknown) written in 1755, titled, *Les Époux esclaves ou Bastien et Bastienne à Alger* (*The Married Slaves or Bastien and Bastienne in Algiers*).[21] In this play, Osman, the commander of the Algerian Navy, endeavours to win the heart of Bastienne, a French slave captured and brought to his household, along with her husband Bastien. The character of Osman defies the stereotypes of bloodthirsty or lusty Muslim ruler as he struggles with more complex emotions of his desire for Bastienne and consequent hate for her husband, and his purer love for her, and pity for both of the enslaved pair. While Osman wrestles with these feelings, Bastien plots along with the other slaves to overthrow and assassinate Osman; Bastienne takes pity on the man who has tried to woo her, and

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[19] Isaac Bickerstaffe, *The Sultan, or a Peep into the Seraglio; as it is perform'd in Drury Lane 1790*; Music by Charles Dibdin (London: printed by D. Everthrow, 1790; Facsimile: Eighteenth Century Collections Online).

[20] Bretzner spelled the heroine's name with a C, while Stephanie used a K.

[21] Rudolph Angemüller, " 'Les Époux esclaves ou Bastien et Bastienne à Alger': Zur Stoffgeschichte der *Entführung aus dem Serail*" *Mozart-Jahrbuch* (1978/79): 70-88.

divulges, the plot, saving his life. In return for her kindness, he shows clemency towards Bastien, and releases the couple. [22]

While Bauman finds clear parallels between these librettos and Bretzner's, he questions whether Bretzner could have known of these English and French stage productions. The Bickerstaffe plays were popular in their own country, but it is not known whether they ever received translations and performances elsewhere. The French play currently survives in only a single manuscript in a Paris library, but Bauman has implied that the play may have received more performances than such sparse record would suggest. In addition to the French and English plays, numerous Italian and German plays and operas follow similar themes, although again, the direct influences on Bretzner cannot be determined unequivocally.[23] The parallels with *Belmonte and Constanze* indicate, nonetheless, how the elements of shipwrecked Iberian lovers, a powerful Muslim, and his underling, an escape plot and a generous deed to bring about the happy ending, came quickly to many writers contemplating a drama about westerners thrust into the eastern world. The French play in particular could be seen as an important inspiration for Bretzner's Bassa Selim character, who truly appears to have respect and affection for Constanze, and not just lust. If the play in some incarnation was known to Mozart or Stephanie, or inspired other similar (but not currently known) plays or opera libretti, then the clemency shown by Osman towards

[22] Bauman, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, 29.
[23] Ibid, 32.

the couple could have provided inspiration for the enlightened rendition of the Pasha character in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.

A major feature of the two late-eighteenth-century operatic versions of the story that differs from the earlier French and English plays and operas is the issue of vocality for the Pasha. One of the most remarkable features of the character Bassa Selim in *Die Entführung* is the omission of a musical voice for him, in the midst of some of Mozart's most performative and excessive vocal compositions in his comic operas. One might question why Mozart did not choose to allow him a singing voice, particularly in response to Konstanze's two virtuosic arias that she delivers to him. After all, if the Pasha were a musical role rather than just a speaking role, the aria "Martern aller Arten," sung by Konstanze, that requires the Pasha to stand and listen to her for almost ten minutes, would demand a musical response. It would be an opportune time for a ruler's "rage aria," a chance to answer back to the indignity with which Konstanze has just subjected him with her unleashing of vocal fireworks; however, this lack of a musical voice does not weaken the Pasha. Rather, his response, a well-measured monologue in the tradition of fine German spoken drama, lends further gravitas to an already-dignified character. There is a stillness created by the lack of music, especially in response and in contrast to Konstanze's extreme vocalizing. Because Konstanze is a formidable creature at this point, the Pasha must exhibit an equal, but opposite, strength, in order to not seem overpowered by her.[24]

[24] Wheelock in Allanbrook, Hunter and Wheelock, "Staging Mozart's Women," 50.

Mozart and Stephanie knew that they would need both a strong actor playing the role, and added strength to the character in order to provide a worthy adversary for their Konstanze. She needs a foil – a balance and justification for her vocal outburst.

In his monologue following Konstanze's aria and exit from the stage (Act 2, Scene 4), he appears stunned at first by her dramatic outburst of coloratura:

> Ist das ein Traum? Wo hat sie
> auf einmal den Mut her, sich so
> gegen mich zu betragen? Hat sie
> vielleicht Hoffnung mir zu
> entkommen? Ha! Das will ich
> verwehren! Doch das ist's nicht,
> dann würde sie eher verstellen,
> Mich einzuschläfern versuchen –
> Ja! Es ist Verzweiflung! Mit Härte
> richt' ich nichts aus -- mit Bitten auch
> nicht -- also, was Drohen und Bitten
> nicht vermögen, soll die List zuwege
> bringen.
>
> (Is this a dream? Where does she get
> the courage to go against me with
> this behaviour? Does she have
> hope, perhaps, to get away from me?
> No, that's not it, she would have
> disguised herself earlier, and attempted to trick me.
> Yes, it is desperation! With
> harshness I cannot make it right; not
> with begging either. Therefore,
> what threats and pleas do not
> accomplish, cunning should bring quite well.)[25]

[25] English adaptation and translation by Morton Siegel and Waldo Lyman. Mozart, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. Original German text by C. F. Bretzner, adapted by Johann Gottlieb

This is an important scene for the Pasha, because prior to this, he has played both the role of the patient lover and the angry tyrant, to no avail. Realizing that Konstanze's resolve is strong, he concludes that he must resort to using cunning and intelligence, since neither force nor pleading have worked. This portrayal of a conflicted ruler foreshadows the final scene in which we see the Pasha wrestling between the bloodthirsty vengeance of a despot and the clemency of an enlightened, magnanimous ruler.

Mozart's depiction of Selim as a nonmusical role is not entirely without precedence, however; in the German opera from the previous year, Selim is also musically silent. His parts are all spoken, an acceptable and not-unheard-of feature of the Singspiel genre. (Numerous Singspiels from this time, including Mozart's one-act Singspiel *Der Schauspieldirektor*, feature roles that are spoken only.) Such musically silent roles were, according to Ivan Nagel, normally reserved for the most powerful character in the Singspiel.[26] Nagel writes, "the Singspiel reserves all its sympathy for the common man. Because of such partisanship, [the opera] has no music for the noble Pasha Selim."[27] (This is also the

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Stephanie der Jünger. New York: International, n.d. This translation reflects an amalgam of this source and my own translations. All examples of dialogue in this article are taken from this source.

[26] Ivan Nagel, *Autonomy and Mercy: Reflections on Mozart's Operas*, Marion Faber and Ivan Nagel, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 14.

[27] Ibid, 14.

case in *Der Schauspieldirektor*, in which the role of the opera company's impresario or artistic director, surely the most powerful person in the company, is given the spoken role.) Stephanie's libretto indicated that the Pasha should be a speaking role and specifically discusses the lack of need for Mozart to compose music for him; in fact, both Stephanie and Mozart had in mind for the role Dominik Jautz, a fine actor who was popular on the Viennese dramatic stage, and who was on salary with both the Singspiel and the National Theatre.[28]

While Nagel sees the Pasha as being above the other characters in the opera in terms of social status, such status being the reason for him not engaging musically with others, or even having a musical voice, Timothy Taylor gives as a reason for the Pasha's lack of music his Otherness, or his existence outside the social sphere of the European characters in the opera. Taylor looks to anthropologist Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*, a classic monograph in the field of anthropology, in which the author describes society as potent in its own right to control or stir men to action to support his argument. Douglas writes, "This image [of society] has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power to reward conformity and repulse attack. There is energy in its margins and unstructured areas."[29] Taylor considers the Turk, banished from the centre of the social sphere, as posing a threat to it from his

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[28] Bauman, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, 16.

[29] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 137. See Taylor, "Peopling the Stage," 82.

marginal position.[30] Thus, within the music of the opera, the Pasha has no place. Even at the end, when he is shown as sympathetic to the Westerners, he has not achieved a social accordance with them. He is still in power, as is evidenced by his lack of joining in the singing which celebrates him. He allows those he rules to sing a song of praise to his magnanimity while he watches over both his household and the distant departing ship carrying the Europeans back to their homeland. Throughout the opera, he remains an Other, even within his own household.

Mozart agreed that the Pasha should remain musically mute, as he was in the Bretzner libretto; however, he felt that Stephanie, who had planned to follow Bretzner's model closely, should change the ending. He wished to elevate the libretto beyond Bretzner's rather sentimental narrative by changing the Pasha's motivation for releasing Belmonte and Konstanze, rather than using the then-common plot contrivance of reunited family members, a narrative feature that appears in numerous comic operas. In Bretzner's libretto, the Pasha discovers that Belmonte, Constanze's lover and rescuer, is actually his own long-lost son. In Mozart and Stephanie's opera, however, the Pasha discovers that Belmonte is the son of his worst enemy, the man who forced his banishment from Spain. He tells Belmonte (Act III, scene 5):

[30] Taylor, "Peopling the Stage," 83.

Dein Vater entriss mir eine Geliebte,
die ich höher als mein Leben
schätzte. Er brachte mich um Ehrenstellen,
Vermögen, um alles. Er zernichtete mein
ganzes Glück."

(Your father tore from me a beloved
whom I treasured above life itself.
He robbed me of honours,
property, everything. He destroyed my
whole happiness.)

As Belmonte prepares for expected death, the Pasha reveals his true nature:

Ich habe deinen Vater viel zu sehr
verabscheut, als dass ich je in seine
Fuss stapfen treten könnte.
Nimm deine Freiheit. . . Berichte deinem
Vater, dass du in meiner Gewalt warst,
dass ich freigelassen, um ihm sagen
zu können, es wäre ein weit grösser
Vergnügen, eine erlittene Ungerechtigkeit
durch Wohltaten zu vergelten,
als Laster mit Laster tilgen.

(I hold your father in too much contempt
to ever be able to tread in his footsteps.
Take your freedom. . . And tell your
father that you were in my power
and I set you free so that you could tell him
it is a far greater pleasure
to repay an injustice
with a favour
than an evil with an evil.)

With the little-known 1755 French play *Les Époux esclaves ou Bastien et Bastienne à Alger* depicting the only known precedence of a show of mercy on the part of the powerful Pasha, Mozart and Stephanie's ending is a remarkable departure from its antecedents. Other than the decision to end the opera with the act of forgiveness, the "*clemenza* ending" (to borrow Ivan Nagel's phrase), their version of *Die Entführung* is faithfully borrowed (Nagel would say plagiarized) from Bretzner and Andre's.[31] Some scholars feel that the ending is not in character with the opera's genre, while others write that this ending, in fact, elevates the genre. In changing the ending from that of a domestic drama in which families are reunited to that of high drama with an almost *opera seria* theme, Mozart and Stephanie, Nagel writes, alter the entire aesthetic of the Singspiel, a move "which would allow for such 'high seriousness' in the future as Beethoven's *Fidelio*."[32] Critics in Mozart's time, however, questioned the seriousness of the clemency theme, with one writing: "Instead of a picture of life, we are given here adventure novels, whose only use is to teach us to admire false greatness."[33] Schink, the author of this review of *Die Entführung*, criticizes the high-mindedness of the revised ending, claiming that it was inconsistent with the Singspiel genre's aesthetic.

The issue of clemency and its potential implication as a virtue of the Enlightened ruler, is much debated in the literature of *Die Entführung*. Many scholars, including such musicologists as Neal Zaslaw and Thomas Bauman, have asserted that Mozart

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[31] Nagel, *Autonomy and Mercy*, 15.
[32] Ibid, 17.
[33] Johann Friedrich Schink, qtd. in Nagel, *Autonomy and Mercy*, 15.

intended the Pasha to represent Joseph II, and to flatter him in the depiction that showed the Pasha to be an enlightened ruler, citing his kindness and clemency as major evidence of his enlightenment.[34] They also argue that Mozart's insistence that Stephanie change the ending of Bretzner's libretto as evidence that Mozart felt that clemency is an Enlightened virtue. Daniel Heartz (although in this instance discussing *La Clemenza di Tito* and not *Die Entführung*) writes: "Clemency was a virtue ardently espoused by the Enlightenment, an age during which Montesquieu, Beccaria, and Voltaire led the fight against penal torture."[35] Other scholars, however, equally vocal, disagree that displays of clemency define a character as enlightened. Derek Beales, for example, writes that clemency cannot be considered an enlightenment virtue. Tolerance, yes, he writes, but not clemency. In fact, Beales believes that clemency in individual cases is a virtue of Christian rulers and non-Christian rulers throughout the ages, and has nothing to do with the Enlightenment. He questions Heartz's citing of Beccaria as a proponent of clemency, believing that Heartz has misinterpreted Beccaria. According to Beales, Beccaria disapproved of rulers showing clemency on an individual basis, believing that consistency was important, and that a ruler should punish as needed to deter a criminal

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[34] Neal Zaslaw, ed., *The Compleat Mozart: A Guide to the Musical Works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* (New York: Norton, 1990), 79; also Bauman, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, 25.
[35] Heartz, *Mozart's Operas*, 272.

from committing future crimes:

> Beccaria . . . thought that the punishment appropriate to a certain crime could and should be determined by calculating precisely how much pain had to be inflicted on the criminal to deter him and others from committing the same offense in the future. The ruler has no business to disturb the arithmetic by merciful caprice.[36]

While Beales makes a convincing argument with this point, his assertion that Enlightened rulers must be *shown* proposing reforms in order to be truly enlightened, is certainly less convincing. In the case of *Die Entführung*, we cannot know what the Pasha does with his time, when not attempting to woo Konstanze. Additionally, one must admit that watching a ruler propose political reform would not make for a very exciting opera libretto. Beales also seems to ignore the fact that Joseph was considered to be an ardent believer in Enlightenment teachings during his lifetime, and that he abolished the death penalty in Habsburg territories in his reign. Nicholas Till writes that Joseph was very pleased to be granted a meeting with Voltaire in 1769; the philosopher was assured by Grimm that the young emperor was "one of us", and was sympathetic to his beliefs. Further evidence of Joseph's belief in the teachings of

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[36] Derek Beales, "Mozart and the Habsburgs," online article drawn from first drafts of Beales's book, *Enlightenment and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 7; JSTOR, accessed 10/30/06.

Enlightenment philosophers is seen in Pompeo Batoni's double portrait of the young Joseph II and his brother Leopold, in which a copy of Montesquieu's *L'esprit des lois* rests on a table beside them.[37]

The main tenet of Enlightenment philosophy – that personal merit supersedes birth or social stature – is clearly upheld in this opera. Characters are not rewarded for gifts not of their earning, such as their social status, but are rewarded for intelligence, fidelity, accomplishments, and inner nobility. Likewise, in the Enlightenment spirit, the characters are not punished for the family into which they are born. The Pasha sees the fine character and intelligence of Belmonte and the noble fidelity of Konstanze, and frees them. He does not punish Belmonte for his birth, choosing to not let Belmonte's father's shortcomings, sins, or misdeeds become Belmonte's, thereby allowing the young man to succeed in spite of his birthright. In upholding this philosophy, even more so than carrying out the actual act of clemency, Till considers *Die Entführung* Mozart's "most deliberately Josephinian opera, written in the full flush of the new ideals of the rationalist Austrian enlightenment.[38]

However, as Till offers this assessment of the opera, he acknowledges that the intention for *Die Entführung* to reflect Enlightenment ideals may have come from the librettist and composer, and not Joseph at all. He writes that the use of Turkish music may have been an intentional way for Joseph to keep the Turks in the public eye – a necessary reminder to

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[37] Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment*, 86-87.
[38] Ibid, 101.

Austrians who would be called to service in the event that he and Catherine the Great of Russia managed to seize some of the Ottoman territory.[39] Taylor also argues *Die Entführung* and the role of the powerful Pasha had political ramifications for Joseph II. During the composition of the opera, and for nearly a decade after, Joseph was reforming the Habsburg Empire at every level. The power of state was increased, mainly at the expense of the church, and conscription was introduced in 1771, primarily to allow Joseph to increase troops in the event of war against Turkey. The Emperor was also attempting to expand his domain by trying to acquire Bavaria and the Balkans, where he tangled with the Ottoman Empire. Joseph also conducted covert negotiations with Catherine about quietly annexing parts of the Ottoman Empire. *Die Entführung* was scheduled to have its premiere while her emissary, Grand Duke Paul Petrovich, was in Vienna, presumably to discuss such matters.[40] Further, Volkmar Braunbehrens writes that by the time Mozart had begun work on the opera, preparations had begun in Vienna to celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the Austrian victory over the Turks in 1683 – the siege of Vienna.[41] While Joseph wrote simply that he wished to present a Singspiel to his esteemed guests to show off the talents of his composers and authors, and prove the worthiness of German theatrical art, the topic of the

[39] Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment*, 108. Also in Taylor, "Peopling the Stage," 65.
[40] Taylor, "Peopling the Stage," 65.
[41] Volkmar Braunbehrens, *Mozart in Vienna, 1781-1791*, Timothy Bell, trans. (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), 74.

Singspiel was fraught with more meaning and greater motivation.

While the motivations for the composition of the opera and the portrayal of an enlightened, magnanimous ruler may appear conflicting, the role of the Pasha undoubtedly offers a study of extreme power. There are numerous possibilities in how one might interpret this final scene in which the Pasha displays the grand gesture of pardoning the Europeans. Perhaps he is showing off the ultimate sign of power – the ability to be above all laws or social norms, and to release the prisoners who are all too-aware of the fact that their lives were in his hands. Perhaps one could interpret the act as the final victory over Belmonte's father in a competition of one-upmanship. When the Pasha asks that Belmonte remember this show of mercy, does he merely want Belmonte to report to his father, or does he want Belmonte to be beholden to him? Or should we see this as a truly altruistic act of mercy, perhaps one that the Pasha hopes will serve as an example to Belmonte and Konstanze, inspiring the couple to follow his enlightened path. Perhaps the important issue to consider is not whether clemency was an ideal of Enlightenment philosophers, but whether Mozart believed it to be so. In choosing to portray a powerful, magnanimous ruler in an opera that was to be performed before Joseph's guests, it appears that Mozart felt that clemency was a virtue of humanity at its most ideal and noble.

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Abstract

Initially requested by Emperor Joseph II as entertainment for visiting Russian royalty, Mozart's Singspiel *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* represents the first comic opera of the composer's mature career in Vienna. For Mozart, the honour of having his opera performed in such company would have presented an opportunity to present his work to the Viennese court, an important event that, if successful, could potentially ensure royal patronage for years to come; therefore, it is understandable that he wished to edify Joseph before his guests. To achieve this end, Mozart and Stephanie created in the role of the Turkish Pasha an "Enlightened renegade," a character of great nobility who displays the ultimate show of power, that of mercy toward his worst enemies. By insisting on changes to Stephanie's libretto – including a new scene for the Pasha that shows him wrestling with himself over how forceful to be with his captive Konstanze, and the final scene which depicts his noble act of clemency – Mozart can be seen as attempting to curry favour with Joseph II and espouse ideals of the Enlightenment. However, since the opera's premiere in 1782, scholars have debated the merit of the Pasha's act of clemency, and have considered its artistic implication within the Singspiel genre, and its philosophical implication within the framework of the Enlightenment. While the motivations for the composition of the opera and the portrayal of an enlightened, magnanimous ruler may appear conflicting, the role of the Pasha undoubtedly offers a study of extreme power.