Amadeus

PETER SHAFFER

1979

When Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* opened at the National Theatre of Great Britain in November 1979, it was received enthusiastically by audiences and critics alike. One year after its premiere, London audiences began to line up at ticket offices at six in the morning on the day of performance. Shaffer revised the play extensively before its American debut in Washington, D.C., in November 1980. Soon after, the play opened on Broadway, where it won five Tonys, including a Tony for best drama of the 1980 season The popularity of the play ensured the success of the 1984 film version, directed by Milos Forman, which received nominations for eleven Oscars and won eight, including best picture, best director, and best actor *Amadeus* has also gained appreciative audiences internationally.

The play explores the rivalry between Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Antonio Salieri, the court composer for the Emperor of Austria in the late eighteenth century. Shaffer became interested in the relationship between the two composers after learning about Mozart's mysterious death. Although failing to find evidence that Salieri murdered Mozart, Shaffer admits, in an interview with Roland Gelatt, that "by then the cold eyes of Salieri were staring at me. . . . The conflict between virtuous mediocrity and feckless genius took hold of my imagination, and it would not leave me alone." Critics have praised the play's craftsmanship and its penetrating psychological study of the effects of success and failure and the search for spirituality.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Peter Shaffer and his twin brother, Anthony, were born in Liverpool, England, on May 15, 1926, to Jack (a real estate agent) and Reka (Fredman) Shaffer. When Shaffer was ten, the family moved to London, where Shaffer attended St. Paul's School. There he developed an interest in music, which would be a catalyst for his later treatment of the story of Mozart and Salieri in *Amadeus.*

After earning a degree from Cambridge in 1950, Shaffer moved to New York City and found employment at a book shop in the New York Public Library. When he relocated to London in 1954, he began writing scripts for radio and television. His first stage play, *Five Finger Exercise,* produced in 1958, won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best foreign play in 1960. *Royal Hunt of the Sun,* which opened in 1964, solidified his literary reputation. This play, which dramatizes the Spanish conquest of the Inca empire, focuses on explorations of success, humiliation, and faith—themes that Shaffer would return to in his later plays.

He gained more accolades for *Equus* (1973), which won the Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, and *Amadeus,* which won five Tony Awards in 1981 and was named best play of the year by *Plays and Players.* The film version of *Amadeus* won several Academy Awards in 1984, including best picture and best screenplay adaptation for Shaffer's script. In 1994, Shaffer was appointed Cameron Mackintosh Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Oxford University.

Shaffer has been heralded for his successful work in a variety of dramatic genres, including comedy and domestic and historical drama, and for his compelling exploration of psychological themes.

PLOT SUMMARY

Act 1

Amadeus opens with "savage whispers" that fill the theater. The citizens of Vienna in 1823 hiss the name "Salieri" and "assassin." Antonio Salieri, an old man, appears in a wheelchair, with his back to the audience. Two *venticelli,* "purveyors of fact, rumor and gossip throughout the play," hurry in, speaking rapidly about "the whole city . . . talking day and night." Salieri cries out, "Mozart! Pardon your assassin . . . have mercy." The *venticelli* explain that when Mozart died thirty-two years ago, there was some talk about him being poisoned by Salieri. They wonder why Salieri would do such a thing and why he would confess it now

Salieri asks the audience to be his confessors. He admits his lifelong desire for fame, "yet only in one especial way. Music! Absolute music . . . music is God's art." He longed "to join all the composers who had celebrated His glory through the long Italian past." As a result, he implored God, "let me be a composer . . . in return, I will live with virtue . . . and I will honor You with much music all the days of my life." When God responded to him, "Go forth, Antonio. Serve Me and mankind, and you will be blessed," Salieri thanked him and promised, "I am Your servant for life."

The very next day, a family friend suddenly appeared and took him to Vienna, where he studied music and soon became the court composer. Salieri decided, "Clearly my bargain had been accepted." The same year the young prodigy Mozart was touring Europe. Salieri tells the audience, "I present to you—for one performance only—my last composition, entitled *The Death of Mozart, or, Did I Do It?* dedicated to posterity on this, the last night of my life." He then takes off his dressing gown and becomes a young man wearing the elegant clothes of a successful composer in the 1780s.

The scene shifts to 1781 and Emperor Joseph II and his court in Vienna. Salieri is thirty-one, "a prolific" composer to the Hapsburg court, and married to "a respectable" wife, Teresa. The *venticelli,* Salieri's "Little Winds," announce that Mozart will be giving a concert for the court. While Salieri sits in a chair eating sweets in the library at the Palace of Schoönbrunn, Constanze Weber, daughter of Mozart's landlady, runs into the room squeaking like a mouse. Mozart follows her meowing like a cat. Mozart teases Constanze (Stanzi) with sexual innuendoes and bathroom humor and frequently emits "an unforgettable giggle—piercing and infantile." His demeanor appalls Salieri. Later, when Mozart begins playing one of his compositions, Salieri responds with such delight that it makes him tremble. He runs out into the street, "gasping for life" Addressing the audience, he explains, "it seemed to me that I had heard a voice of God . . . and it was the voice of an obscene child!" After the concert, Salieri buries his fear in work and prays to God, asking Him, "let Your voice enter me!"

When his "Little Winds" report that audiences seem unimpressed by Mozart's performances, Salieri begins to think that the serenade he heard was an exception, "an accident."

Salieri composes an "extremely banal" march in Mozart's honor. When Mozart quickly transforms it into an exceptional piece of music, Salieri admits, "was it then—so early—that I began to have thoughts of murder?" Mozart clashes with the emperor's advisors over his choice of subject and music for his commissioned operas. He also has difficulty finding pupils. Against the wishes of his father, he and Constanze marry and the two live well beyond their means. When Constanze asks Salieri to help her husband get work, the composer sees this as an opportunity to take his revenge. He invites her to his apartment, where he plans to seduce her. After Salieri makes it clear that he will help Mozart if she grants him sexual favors, she at first resists, but soon starts to tease him. Salieri then throws her out, offended by her "commonness" and angry at his own considered descent into adultery and blackmail.

When Salieri studies the manuscripts Constanze left behind, he hears the music in his head, acknowledging that they are the same sounds he had heard at the palace, "the same crushed harmonies—glancing collisions—agonizing delights." The piece he had heard "had been no accident." He admits, "I was staring through the cage of those meticulous ink strokes at—an Absolute Beauty." As a result, he feels betrayed by God:

> I know my fate. Now for the first time I feel my emptiness as Adam felt his nakedness. . . . You gave me the desire to serve You . . . then saw to it the service was shameful in the ears of the server. . . . You gave me the desire to praise You . . . then made me mute. . . . You put into me perception of the Incomparable . . . then ensured that I would know myself forever mediocre. . . . MOZART! . . . spiteful, sniggering, conceited, infantine Mozart . . . him You have chosen to be Your sole conduct.

A bitter Salieri warns God, "From this time we are enemies, You and I. I'll not accept it from You—do you hear? . . . you are the Enemy. I name Thee now . . . and this I swear: to my last breath I shall block You on earth, as far as I am able."

The scene shifts to the present, with the older Salieri promising to reveal to the audience the details of "the war [he] fought with God through His preferred Creature—Mozart . . . in the waging of which, of course, the Creature had to be destroyed."

Peter Shaffer

Act 2

Back in the past, audiences are still not appreciating Mozart's work. His resulting desperation is compounded when his father dies. In an effort to earn money, he writes *The Magic Flute,* "something for ordinary German people." Salieri suggests he include in his composition a focus on the Masons, the fraternal order of which both are members. While he composes *The Magic Flute,* Constanze leaves with the children and his health deteriorates. He is continually taunted by dreams of a figure in gray, who compels him to write a requiem Mass.

When a member of the emperor's court discovers that Mozart has exposed Masonic rituals in *The Magic Flute,* he is outraged. As a result, Mozart's reputation and career are ruined. Soon after, when Mozart dies, Salieri admits to feeling a mixture of relief and pity. In the present, Salieri explains,

> Slowly I understood the nature of God's punishment. . . . This was my sentence: I must endure thirty years of being called "distinguished" by people incapable of distinguishing . . . and finally . . . when my nose had been rubbed in fame to vomiting—it would be taken away from me. . . . Mozart's music sounded louder and louder through the world. And mine faded completely, till no one played it at all.

Salieri admits he has attempted to convince the world that he poisoned Mozart, so that he will be

remembered, "if not in fame, then infamy," and so win his battle with God. He then cuts his throat. The *venticelli* tell the audience that Salieri's efforts failed: he survived his attempted suicide and the public refused to believe he had murdered Mozart. The play ends with Salieri, in a gesture of benediction, telling the audience, "mediocrities everywhere—now and to come—I absolve you all. Amen." He then folds his arms "high across his own breast in a gesture of self-sanctification"

CHARACTERS

Audience

Salieri often addresses the audience to gain their support and understanding as the scenes shift back to the play's present. At the beginning of the play, when Salieri asks the members of the audience to be visible to him, the house lights go up so he can see them. He then tells them he is at their service and that he wants them to be his confessors. At the play's end, he warns the audience that they also will feel "the dreadful bite" of their failures, and when they do, Salieri as Patron Saint of Mediocrities will absolve them.

Katherina Cavalieri

Katherina is Salieri's pupil, a "beautiful girl of twenty" who has affairs with Salieri and Mozart. Her part is mute like that of Teresa, Salieri's wife. Salieri is in love with Katherina—"or at least in lust"—but he remains faithful to his wife until he determines that God has betrayed him. She then becomes his mistress By the end of the play, Katherina appears "fat and feathered like the great song-bird she'd become."

Emperor of Austria

See Joseph II

Ghosts of the Future

See Audience

God

Salieri presents the audience with his subjective vision of God as "an old candle-smoked God in a mulberry robe, staring at the world with dealer's eyes. . . Those eyes made bargains, real and irreversible." God becomes Salieri's "cunning Enemy," whom he continually tries to block. Salieri's God is unjust, as when he notes

> You gave me the desire to serve You—which most men do not have—then saw to it the service was shameful in the ears of the server You gave me the desire to praise You—which most men do not feel—then made me mute. You put into me perception of the Incomparable—which most men never know!—then ensured that I would know myself forever mediocre

Joseph II

Joseph, the brother of Marie Antoinette, is an "adorer of music—provided that it made no demands upon the royal brain" Unfortunately, Mozart's music often demands too much of him, and, as a result, he is easily influenced by Salieri and others at court to hold Mozart in check.

Little Winds

See Venticelli

Constanze Mozart

See Constanze Weber

Leopold Mozart

Salieri describes Wolfgang's father as "a bad-tempered Salzburg musician who dragged the boy endlessly round Europe, making him play the keyboard blindfolded, with one finger." The audience never meets Leopold, but he makes his presence felt through his son, who is afraid of him. Mozart claims his father is a bitter man who is jealous of his success. He continually tries to control Mozart's actions but for the most part fails. Mozart marries Constanze Weber against his father's wishes and stays in Vienna, living well above his means. Yet psychologically, Leopold has a great influence over his son. When he dies, Mozart falls apart, exclaiming, "How will I go now? In the world. There's no one else. No one who understands the wickedness around. I can't see it . . He watched for me all my life—and I betrayed him." Leopold becomes the solemn ghost in *Don Giovanni,* "a father more accusing than any in opera." Mozart creates a more benevolent version of his father, however, in *The Magic Flute,* where he appears as a high priest, "his hand extended to the world in love." As he dies, Mozart mistakes Salieri for his father and cries out for him as he regresses back to his childhood.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

We see Mozart through Salieri's memory. Salieri does provide some background information on the famous prodigy He wrote his first symphony at five, his first concerto at four, a full opera at

fourteen, and is twenty-five when Salieri meets him. The stage directions introduce him as "a small, pallid, large-eyed man in a showy wig and a showy set of clothes." Mozart is "an extremely restless man, his hands and feet in almost continuous motion, his voice is light and high, and he is possessed of an unforgettable giggle—piercing and infantile." He enjoys ribald jokes and bathroom humor, a quality which disgusts and angers Salieri, who insists his own virtuous nature deserves to be blessed by God.

Mozart has a love/hate relationship with his father, whom he fears but also respects. He desperately needs his father's approval and so reincarnates him in his compositions. The *venticelli* tell Salieri that Mozart is "wildly extravagant" and lives way beyond his means. His outbursts in public have become "embarrassing." He "makes scenes" and thus often "makes enemies." Yet, Salieri insists that God has chosen him as his voice, as evident in his exquisite music. Mozart comments on his role as artist and his goal to make

> a sound entirely new . I bet you that's how God hears the world Millions of sounds ascending at once and mixing in His ear to become an unending music, unimaginable to us. That's our job . we composers to combine the inner minds of him and him and her and her—the thoughts of chambermaids and court composers—and turn the audience into God.

By the end of the play, we see how circumstances broke Mozart and he soon dies.

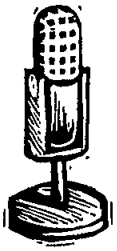
Count Franz Orsini-Rosenberg

Director of the Imperial Opera, Orsini-Rosenberg is "plump and supercilious." He clashes with Mozart about the appropriateness of his music and vows to take his revenge when Mozart gets the emperor's approval.

Antonio Salieri

Court composer to the Emperor of Austria, Salieri is "the most successful young musician in the city of musicians," yet he is also consumed with envy of Mozart's prodigious musical talents He finds himself mediocre by comparison. Providing a brief portrait of his background, he explains that his parents were

> . . provincial subjects of the Austrian Empire . . Their notion of God was a superior Habsburg emperor. . . . All they required of Him was to protect commerce, and keep them forever preserved in mediocrity. My own requirements were very different. I wanted 'Fame ' Yet only in one especial way



MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- An overwhelmingly popular film version was released in 1984 *Amadeus* was directed by Milos Forman and starred F. Murray Abraham as Salieri and Tom Hulce as Mozart. Shaffer wrote the screenplay. This film is available in VHS and DVD formats.
- A television version appeared in Romania, directed by Radu Cernescu and starring Razvan Vasilescu as Mozart and Radu Beligan as Salieri. The production used Shaffer's play for the script.

> Music! Absolute music Already when I was ten a spray of sounded notes would make me dizzy almost to falling By twelve, I was stumbling about under the poplar trees humming my arias and anthems to the Lord My one desire was to join all the composers who had celebrated His glory through the long Italian past.

When Mozart's talents clearly surpass his own, he feels as if God is mocking him. As a result, Salieri declares war against God "through His preferred Creature—Mozart . . . in the waging of which, of course, the Creature had to be destroyed." Salieri eventually contributes to Mozart's destruction, yet admits that he did not escape God's punishment. He had fame, but it was for what he knew to be "absolutely worthless."

Salieri, however, is tenacious. He decides, "I did not live on earth to be His joke for eternity. I will be remembered . . if not in fame, then infamy." When he falsely confesses to poisoning Mozart, he insists "for the rest of time whenever men say Mozart with love, they will say Salieri with loathing. . . . I am going to be immortal after all." Yet he is again thwarted. His suicide attempt fails, and no one believes his confession. At the end of the play, he is enveloped in his bitterness as he addresses the audience as the "Patron Saint of Mediocrities."

Stanzi

See Constanze Weber

Baron Gottfried Van Swieten

The emperor's prefect of the Imperial Library, Van Swieten is "cultivated and serious," and an ardent Freemason. He is known, because of his enthusiasm for old-fashioned music, as "Lord Fugue." Van Swieten defends "passionately" the traditional subjects of the opera because "they represent the eternal in us. Opera is here to ennoble us.... It is an aggrandizing art. It celebrates the eternal in man and ignores the ephemeral. The goddess in woman and not the laundress." He becomes outraged when he discovers that Mozart has put the Mason's rituals into what he deems "a vulgar show." As a result, he sees to it that Mozart gets no more work. After Mozart dies, Van Swieten pays only for a pauper's funeral and buries Mozart along with twenty other corpses in an unmarked grave.

Venticelli

The two *venticelli* are "purveyors of fact, rumor, and gossip throughout the play." They speak rapidly, especially in the opening scene, which "has the air of a fast and dreadful overture." They sometimes speak to Salieri, sometimes to each other, and sometimes directly to the audience. Salieri explains their usefulness to him when he notes, "the secret of successful living in a large city is always to know to the minute what is being done behind your back." The *venticelli* always speak "with the urgency of men who have ever been first with the news." They open the play with the information that "the whole city is talking day and night" about Salieri and his claim to have poisoned Mozart.

Count Johann Von Strack

Von Strack is the groom of the Imperial Chamber in the emperor's court. He is "stiff and proper" and "official to his collarbone." He, along with Van Swieten and Orsini-Rosenberg, advise the emperor in the play on musical matters that involve the court.

Constanze Weber

Mozart marries Constanze, his landlady's daughter, "a pretty girl with high spirits." She often quarrels with Mozart about his infidelities and his father, but she supports his work. She offers herself to Salieri in an effort to help her husband gain employment. After Mozart's death, Constanze marries and retires to Salzburg, Mozart's birthplace, "to become the pious Keeper of his Shrine." In her role as Mozart's widow, she presents herself as "a pillar of rectitude"

THEMES

Beauty

Salieri finds absolute beauty in music and so asks God to grant him the gift of artistic inspiration in his compositions He came to appreciate the beauty of music at a young age, noting, "when I was ten a spray of sounded notes would make me dizzy almost to falling." Unfortunately, he finds this absolute beauty only in Mozart's compositions. When Mozart plays, he confesses that he hears the "voice of God," and he responds with such delight that it makes him tremble.

God and Religion

Connected with Salieri's pursuit of absolute beauty is his search for spiritual meaning, for a supreme logic in the universe. Salieri makes an ironic Faustian bargain in the play. (Faust, a magician and alchemist in German legend, sells his soul to the devil in exchange for power and knowledge.) Instead of constructing a bargain with the devil to attain an ideal, he forms one with God. He longs "to join all the composers who had celebrated His glory through the long Italian past" and so implores God, "let me be a composer... in return, I will live with virtue... and I will honor You with much music all the days of my life." When he decides that God has accepted his bargain, Salieri promises to be His servant for life. Salieri explains, "I was born a pair of ears and nothing else. It is only through hearing music that I know God exists. Only through writing music that I could worship."

Creativity and Imagination

Salieri searches for a supreme logic in the granting of the gifts of creativity and imagination. He is sure that artistic inspiration and talent are gifts given by God only to those who are worthy of them.

Duty and Responsibility

Salieri tries to prove his worthiness through a devotion to duty and responsibility. Although he has been tempted to commit adultery, especially with his pupil Katherina Cavalieri, he restrains himself and redoubles his commitment to the cele-

bration of God through music. Salieri also shows his devotion through his philanthropic activities, as in his support of young, impoverished composers.

However, he turns his back on his noble commitments when he feels that God has favored Mozart over him. In response, he determines that no longer will he deny himself his desires and so takes Katherina as his mistress. Seeing no tangible reward, he also drops his philanthropic activities. Finally, he determines to take revenge by destroying Mozart.

Betrayal

When Salieri decides that God has granted the gift of inspiration to Mozart, whom he deems unworthy, he feels betrayed, claiming that God has been actively toying with Salieri's devotion and desires. He concludes that God has been taunting him by giving him the desire to serve and to praise God, and the ability to recognize true art, only after ensuring his own mediocrity. Salieri's God cruelly flaunts the "spiteful, sniggering, conceited, infantine" Mozart in front of Salieri as one of His chosen to point out Salieri's inferiority and thus humiliate him. Salieri is convinced that Mozart has become God's incarnation. The final irony, one that Salieri uses to help him destroy Mozart, is that Salieri is the only person at that time who can recognize Mozart's greatness.

Justice and Injustice

As a result of what he considers to be God's injustice, Salieri decides to exact his own form of justice regarding Mozart, even though he risks damnation. A bitter Salieri warns God that he now considers Him an enemy, and so with his "last breath" he will try to block God's plan for Mozart's "worldly advancement." After reading Mozart's manuscripts and appreciating the exquisite beauty of his work, Salieri confesses that his life then acquired this "terrible and thrilling purpose." He hints at his plan to destroy Mozart when he insists that he will now engage in "a battle to the end" with God and that Mozart will be "the battleground."

Ironically though, according to Salieri, God exacted his own justice, perhaps in response to Salieri's treatment of Mozart. Salieri concludes that God constructed an intricate and cruel plan to punish him: first, He (God) ensured that Salieri would enjoy the recognition and appreciation of a public who was not capable of recognizing true art. Then, that recognition would be taken away from him and replaced with the public's growing appreciation for Mozart's music. Gradually, as "Mozart's music sounded louder and louder through the world," his would "fade completely, till no one played it at all."

TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Research the biographies of Mozart and Salieri. Was Shaffer's portrayal of the two composers and their relationship accurate?
- Define existentialism and discover how playwrights have incorporated this theme in their plays. What existential elements do you find in *Amadeus*?
- Read Shaffer's *Equus* and compare its themes to those of *Amadeus*. What differences do you find? What similarities do you find? Can you find a pattern in both plays?
- Listen to the pieces by Mozart that are mentioned in the play, especially the ones Salieri hears during a live performance or in his head. How does the music reinforce the play's themes?

STYLE

Narration

The play is structured like a deathbed confession, similar to Monticello's in Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Cask of Amontillado." The play opens after the main events have occurred and with one of the main characters, Antonio Salieri, speaking to the audience as an old man. Salieri frequently addresses the audience directly, sometimes in an aside, during the course of the play to gain support and understanding. This self-conscious, expressionistic device not only provides the audience with useful information; it also allows them a glimpse of Salieri's inner thoughts and emotions. When Salieri speaks to the audience, the other characters often "freeze" and the soundtrack stops. The *venticelli*, or the "Little Winds," sometimes speak directly to

the audience as they relate important information about the events surrounding Salieri's relationship with Mozart. The *venticelli* also provide Salieri with useful information about Mozart's activities and the public's response to both composers.

Salieri's narration frames the play, which opens and closes with a focus on Salieri as a bitter old man, lamenting the loss of his fame and the overwhelming appreciation of Mozart's work. The older Salieri also appears at the middle of the play to offer a commentary on the main plot details surrounding his relationship with Mozart

Point of View

Shaffer tells the story of the relationship between Mozart and Salieri from Salieri's subjective point of view. While other characters in the play often substantiate Salieri's opinion of Mozart's character, especially when he challenges the composer's petulance and immaturity, they do not validate his portrayal of God's motives and behavior. Salieri's God is "an old candle-smoked God in a mulberry robe, staring at the world with dealer's eyes"—a vision he takes from a painting he saw as a child. Salieri cannot admit to any responsibility for his artistic shortcomings and so must blame God for them. He insists that when he was young, God promised to grant him the gift of music. When He does not live up to this promise, He becomes Salieri's "cunning Enemy," whom Salieri continually tries to block. Salieri's God proves unjust to him after, he claims, God gave Salieri the desire to serve Him through music, but then "saw to it the service was shameful in the ears of the server" and gave him the ability to recognize greatness while acknowledging his own mediocrity

Salieri's God is also pitiless, insisting that He (God) does not need Salieri because He has Mozart. When Salieri decides God has also turned his back on Mozart, Salieri tells the artist that God will not help or love him, for "God does not love. He can only use. . . . He cares nothing for whom He uses; nothing for whom He denies."

Symbol

The title of the play, *Amadeus,* translates into "God's love" and thus becomes ironically symbolic in the play. Salieri continually tries to gain recognition of God's love for him, especially since his "one desire was to join all the composers who had celebrated His glory through the long Italian past." However, he sees an expression of God's love only in Mozart's music, which baffles him and drives him to the verge of madness. When he hears one of Mozart's compositions, Salieri confesses, "it seemed to me that I had heard a voice of God—and that it issued from a creature whose own voice I had also heard—and it was the voice of an obscene child!"

Shaffer also uses music symbolically in the play. His inclusion of Mozart's most lyrical and stirring passages illustrates "God's voice" in the music, especially when juxtaposed with Salieri's more pedestrian pieces. Shaffer also uses the music to allow the audience to glimpse Salieri's inner turmoil. For example, when Salieri reads the manuscripts Constanze brings him, he hears Mozart's swelling music and "staggers" forward "like a man caught in a tumbling and violent sea." When the drums "crash," Salieri echoes the emotion of the piece as he drops the manuscripts and "falls senseless to the ground." Shaffer directs, "At the same second the music explodes into a long, echoing, distorted boom, signifying some dreadful annihilation " At this climactic point, Salieri's dream of becoming God's chosen has been shattered.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Mozart

In the twentieth century, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's reputation grew considerably. His works, which include a variety of forms from chamber music to symphonies and operas, have been heralded for their classical grace, technical perfection, and melodic beauty.

Shaffer's play, *Amadeus,* records several details of Mozart's life. Mozart was a child prodigy who started composing before he was five. A year later, his father began taking him and his talented sister to play for the aristocracy in Europe. In 1781, he relocated to Vienna and married Constanze Weber against his father's wishes. The newlyweds had financial difficulties when Mozart could not find suitable employment. While his work was often applauded during his lifetime, audiences were sometimes critical of the demands his innovations placed on them He also clashed with the emperor's court over issues of artistic freedom Eventually, he was appointed chamber musician and court composer to Joseph II, but the paltry salary he earned did not ease his financial troubles. He gained public ac-

COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1781:** Joseph II is Emperor of Austria.

  1918: The Austrian monarchy is abolished as a result of the political turmoil of World War I.

  Today: Austria is a prosperous and independent country.

- **1781:** Music flourishes in eighteenth-century Austria, due in large part to the strong support and patronage of Joseph II.

  Today: Many American congressmen support massive cuts in subsidies for the arts.

claim for *The Magic Flute,* but the work's references to the secret rituals of the Freemasons lost him the support of one of his most ardent defenders, Baron von Swieten. Mozart worked on his final piece, the *Requiem Mass,* with the sense that it would be played at his own funeral. He died, however, before he could complete it and was buried, unceremoniously, in an unmarked, mass grave.

Mozart and Salieri

Other artists have created works based on the rumor that Salieri may have murdered Mozart. In 1830, Alexander Pushkin wrote a tragedy entitled *Envy,* which he later renamed *Mozart and Salieri.* In 1897, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov based his opera, *Mozart and Salieri,* on Pushkin's short dramatic sketch, which focuses on Salieri's envy and his subsequent poisoning of Mozart, who dies playing his *Requiem* on the piano.

Freemasons

The Order of the Freemasons is a secret fraternal order also known as the Free and Accepted Masons, or Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. The Freemasons has over six million members worldwide and is the largest secret society in the world. No central authority governs the Masons. Each national group, called a grand lodge, is a self-governing body.

The Masonic rituals and ceremonies are elaborate and symbolic. They often employ the tools of stonemasonry—the plumb, square, level, and compass—and use as an allegorical backdrop the events surrounding the building of King Solomon's Temple. Masons are expected to believe in a Supreme Being and to read a holy book designated by the lodge. All members are sworn to secrecy concerning the order's ceremonies and rituals.

Some scholars argue that the order emerged from the English and Scottish stonemason fraternities and cathedral workmen in the early Middle Ages. Traces of the order have been found in Great Britain in the fourteenth century. Other historians speculate that evidence of the order can be found in antiquity. The order flourished worldwide after the formation of the English Grand Lodge in London in 1717. Famous freemasons include Voltaire, Joseph Haydn, Johann von Goethe, and Benjamin Franklin.

CRITICAL OVERVIEW

The various productions of *Amadeus* have received mixed reviews from the critics but overwhelmingly enthusiastic support from audiences. Peter Shaffer notes in his introduction to the play that when it opened at the National Theatre of Great Britain in November 1979, "it constituted the single greatest success enjoyed by this celebrated institution since its founding." Since its initial performance, the play's popularity has spread to Broadway, with runs of more than one thousand performances each, and several European stages. Bernard Levin, in a review for the *Times* (London), comments on audience response: "those who go to [*Amadeus*] prepared to understand what it is about will have an experience

that far transcends even its considerable value as drama."

Those critics who find "considerable value" in *Amadeus* include Roland Gelatt, who writes in the *Saturday Review* that the play "gives heartening evidence that there is still room for the play of ideas." Werner Huber and Hubert Zapt, in their article for *Modern Drama,* praise the structure of the play, arguing that it

> can be seen as a highly sophisticated process of interpretive interaction between the stage and the audience, in which Salieri as the self-confessed murderer of Mozart is the central mediator . . There is a degree of thematic and structural complexity to *Amadeus,* which makes it, beyond its sensational popularity, a dramatic masterpiece in its own right The play is an artistic success not only for its technical refinement (i.e., the exploitation to the full of various theatrical forms) and dramatic richness, but for the intellectual brilliance with which the theme is handled, giving the play its specifically modern appeal

Some critics, however, find fault with Shaffer's characterization of Mozart. Robert Brustein, in the *New Republic,* insists that "at the same time that the central character—a second-rate *kapellmeister* named Antonio Salieri—is plotting against the life and reputation of a superior composer named Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, a secondary playwright named Peter Shaffer is reducing this genius, one of the greatest artists of all time, to the level of a simpering, braying ninny." In *Opera News,* C. J. Gianakaris refutes those who question the truthfulness of Mozart's characterization, commenting, "Shaffer takes almost no liberties with historical fact about Mozart and his times, except where Salieri the man is concerned." Daniel R. Jones, in *Comparative Drama,* explains, "Mozart's animal play-acting, his word-play, his financial difficulties, his marriage to a child-like wife, and his domineering father are well documented in the biographies, Mozart's three volumes of correspondence, and in the correspondence of relatives."

Others criticize Shaffer's characterization of Salieri. In his article for *Comparative Drama,* Michael Hinden, for example, condemns Salieri's overwhelming pessimism as he "abandons his quest for union with divinity and becomes the antagonist of God, setting himself against the Deity in personal confrontation and defiance." Benedict Nightingale, in his review for the *New Statesman,* complains of Salieri's "implausibility." He comments that Salieri

> is thought to have schemed to Mozart's disadvantage, and, in his senility, is said to have claimed to have poisoned him. From these hints and rumours Shaffer manufactures a blend of Iago and Faust, much at odds with the historical Salieri, whose conventional efforts were as triumphant as Mozart's musical adventures were neglected, and therefore had no motive for murder.

Amadeus won five Tonys for its New York performances, including a Tony for best drama of the 1980 season. The popularity of the play ensured the success of the 1984 film version, which received nominations for eleven Oscars, winning eight including best picture, best director, and best actor.

CRITICISM

Wendy Perkins

Perkins is an associate professor of English at Prince George's Community College in Maryland and has published several articles on British and American authors. In the following essay, she examines how Shaffer's play explores the complex relationship between fathers and sons.

Shaffer's *Amadeus* gained appreciative audiences due to its compelling depiction of the rivalry between Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his contemporary, Antonio Salieri In this fictionalized version of the two composers' relationship, Shaffer explores the mystery of creative inspiration, the search for spirituality, and the consequences of success and failure. Shaffer intertwines these themes in the play with its most absorbing one—an exploration of the problematic relations that can develop between fathers and sons.

The first father/son relationship Shaffer introduces to the audience is the one between Salieri and God. Finding his relationship with his biological father lacking, Salieri began a spiritual quest that would result in his determination to glorify God through music. He exhibits an obvious lack of respect for his father who did not share his passion for music or his quest for fame. Salieri admits that his parents' goals were to call on God for assurance of their economic security and to "keep them forever preserved in mediocrity." Their son's requirements, however, were very different. From an early age, he wanted to gain fame as a composer and so strikes a bargain with his spiritual father, whom he feels has the power to grant him his wish. Longing "to join all the composers who had celebrated His glory through the long Italian past," he begs God,

Michael Sheen as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Lucy Whybrow as Constanze Weber in a scene from the 1998 production of Amadeus

> . . . let me be a composer . . . in return, I will live with virtue . . . and I will honor You with much music all the days of my life.'' When God responded to him, ''Go forth, Antonio. Serve Me and mankind, and you will be blessed,'' Salieri thanked him and promised, ''I am Your servant for life.

Salieri seems assured of the blessings and support of his spiritual father when at thirty-one, he becomes a prolific composer to the Hapsburg court of Emperor Joseph II. Soon, however, when he hears the ''voice of God'' in Mozart's exquisite and superior compositions, he feels betrayed and questions why God has rejected him and has chosen instead to glorify ''an obscene child.'' The first time he hears Mozart, Salieri confesses, ''tonight at an inn somewhere in this city stands a giggling child who can put on paper, without actually setting down his billiard cue, casual notes which turn my most considered ones into lifeless scratches.'' Noting his affinity with Adam, God's first child, Salieri expresses a sense of emptiness resulting from feelings of abandonment.

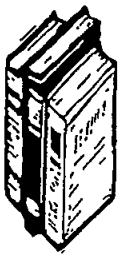
Engaging in a bout of intense sibling rivalry with God's new favorite composer, Salieri complains:

> You have chosen [Mozart] to be Your sole conduct. And my only reward—my sublime privilege—is to be the sole man alive in this time who shall clearly recognize Your Incarnation. . . . Everyday I sat to work I prayed . . . make this one good in my ears. Just this one . . . but would He, ever? I heard my music calmed in convention, not one breath of spirit to lift it off the shallows. And I heard his—month after month . . . the spirit singing through it, unstoppable, to my ears alone.

Salieri vows to destroy God's creature in an effort to take revenge on his spiritual parent. In an ironic reversal, he rebels against his father figure and usurps his role. He threatens God, ''you are the Enemy I name Thee now . . . and this I swear: to my last breath I shall block You on earth, as far as I am able. . . . What use, after all, is man, if not to teach God His lessons.'' He now declares his intention to destroy Mozart so he can block God ''in one of His purest manifestations,'' which excites him. Salieri insists, ''I had the power. God needed me to get him worldly advancement. So it would be a battle to the end—and Mozart was the battleground.'' He admits that his quarrel was not with Mozart; it was through him to God, ''who loved him so.''

Salieri, as the rebellious and rejected son, decides to renounce his devotion to duty and responsibility. When he has sexual relations with Katherina Cavalieri and subsequently takes her as his mistress, he notes, ''so much for my vow of sexual virtue.''

WHAT DO I READ NEXT?



- *Classical Music: The Era of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven: Norton Introduction to Music History*, by Philip G. Downs (1992), presents a useful study of Mozart and his contemporaries.
- Shaffer's play *Equus*, produced in 1973, presents another exploration of two men of widely differing personalities linked by a common spiritual bond.
- In *Mozart in Revolt: Strategies of Resistance, Mischief and Deception* (1999), David P. Schroeder examines the letters Mozart and his father wrote to each other. He discovers important information about the personality of each man as well as their relationship to each other.
- *1791: Mozart's Last Year*, written by H. C. Robbins Landon and M. C. Landon (1999), explores the controversial last year of Mozart's life and the rumors of Salieri's involvement in his death.
- Jean-Paul Sartre's play *Nausea* (1938) deals with existential themes as *Amadeus* does. In Sartre's play, the main characters must cope with a God-abandoned universe and turn to art in an effort to alleviate their sense of meaninglessness.

When he resigns from his committees that offer aid to impoverished musicians, he admits, "so much for my vow of social virtue."

Shaffer creates another compelling father/son relationship in the play in his depiction of the interaction between Mozart and his father, Leopold. Salieri describes Leopold as "a bad-tempered Salzburg musician who dragged the boy endlessly round Europe, making him play the keyboard blindfolded, with one finger." The audience never meets Leopold, but he makes his presence felt through his son, who is afraid of him. Mozart claims his father is a bitter man who is jealous of his success. Leopold continually tries to control Mozart's actions, but for the most part, fails. Mozart marries Stanzi against his father's wishes and stays in Vienna, living well above his means.

Psychologically, though, Leopold has a great influence over his son. Werner Huber and Hubert Zapf in their article "On the Structure of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*," in *Modern Drama*, conclude that in the play Mozart has the "capacity for the elemental, passionate, natural life which Salieri lacks." Yet, they continue, his personality is "in a constant struggle with an equally powerful superego, the figure of his authoritarian father. As soon as he is mentioned, the sense of fun deserts Mozart."

When Leopold dies, Mozart falls apart, exclaiming, "how will I go now? In the world. There's no one else. No one who understands the wickedness around I can't see it. . . . He watched for me all my life—and I betrayed him." Leopold reappears as the solemn ghost in *Don Giovanni*, as a projection of Mozart's feelings of guilt. Later, in a reflection of his desire to regain his father's love and direction, Mozart reincarnates him in *The Magic Flute*, where he appears as a high priest, "his hand extended to the world in love."

Salieri plays on Mozart's desperate need for the approval of a father figure and so appears to adopt this role. Huber and Zapf conclude that

> Salieri not only seems to see all, hear all, know all about Mozart's private life, and systematically [tries] to destroy his material existence, [he] actually reduces Mozart to the mental state of a child at the end, appearing in the mask of the nightmarish father-figure of Mozart's dreams, who takes his revenge on the rebellious son

When Salieri reveals his true identity to Mozart at the end of the play, he reduces Mozart to a whimpering child. In response, Salieri characterizes their spiritual father as one who has abandoned both of them. He concludes, "We are both poisoned, Amadeus. I with you: you with me. . . . Ten years of my hate have poisoned you to death." When Mozart

falls to his knees and cries out to God, Salieri responds,

> God?. God does not help. He can only use. He cares nothing for whom He uses, nothing for whom He denies . . . You are no use to Him anymore You're too weak—too sick He has finished with you All you can do now is die Die, Amadeus." And so Amadeus dies, without a father's love and support

At the end of *Amadeus,* a broken Salieri again assumes the role of his spiritual father, whom he feels has rejected him. He implores the audience to pray to him as the Patron Saint of Mediocrities for forgiveness when they feel "the dreadful bite" of their failures, "and hear the taunting of unachievable, uncaring God." As Salieri concludes his final gesture of benediction with the declaration, "mediocrities everywhere—now and to come—I absolve you all," he makes the final statement of Shaffer's absorbing view of the psychological intricacy of the father/son relationship.

Source: Wendy Perkins, Critical Essay on *Amadeus,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001

Carole Hamilton

Hamilton is an English teacher at Cary Academy, an innovative private school in Cary, North Carolina. In this essay, she examines the conflict between genius and mediocrity and their relationship to the observing and judging audience in Shaffer's play.

Shaffer spent five years writing *Amadeus,* and of that, "a whole year attempting a different opening scene every week." As anyone knows who has written and rewritten a work, trying to get it right, the writer's internal "judge" watching and criticizing, often prevents the natural flow of ideas. One imagines a future audience, at one moment approving, the next moment condemning. Anticipation of criticism can stifle the creative process or lead an author to try to perfect the work to ward off an unpleasant rejection. Shaffer's play puts this tension in the creative process at center stage His rival characters, Salieri and Mozart, are rivals of talent—one a genius and one a "mediocrity," whose products are judged by mediocre audiences. Shaffer foregrounds the role of the audience in this transaction by the opening scene (of the play version) and the closing lines to "mediocrities everywhere." This interaction with the audience, which Shaffer labored a full year to produce, suggests that the heart of *Amadeus* has to do with the observer's appraisal of genius.

> "SALIERI VOWS TO DESTROY GOD'S CREATURE IN AN EFFORT TO TAKE REVENGE ON HIS SPIRITUAL PARENT IN AN IRONIC REVERSAL, HE REBELS AGAINST HIS FATHER FIGURE AND USURPS HIS ROLE."

In the beginning of *Amadeus,* just after the "prelude" of *Venticelli* ("Little Winds") spreading gossip, a dying Salieri startles the audience by shining the house lights on them as he calls them forth as "Ghosts of the Future." He then invites the audience to sit back and observe his confession, framed as a detective mystery, *"The Death of Mozart; or, Did I Do It?"* As Salieri transforms into his youthful self, his older self also watches and guides the audience's interpretation through his comments upon his own history in the making. The older Salieri observes the younger, who, in his turn, obsessively observes his rival Mozart, while the audience looks on. Sometimes the theme of observing is especially in the foreground, as when Salieri sits unobserved in his armchair, eavesdropping on Mozart and Constanze as they play childish games in Baroness Waldstadten's library Here, as elsewhere, Salieri judges Mozart as socially inferior and artistically brilliant, and it is through his consciousness that the audience sees and judges Mozart and Salieri as well.

Pairing Salieri with Mozart constitutes, by Shaffer's own admission, the classical Apollonian/Dionysian contest, a tension that has fascinated him for years. He said early in his career, "There is in me a continuous tension between what I suppose I could call the Apollonian and the Dionysiac sides of interpreting life" These contrasting sensibilities find expression in several Shaffer pairings—Dysart and Alan Strang; Atahuallpa and Pizzaro, Salieri and Mozart—who inevitably contend with each other. In this last pair, Salieri composes repetitive, safe, baroque music and envies Mozart for his ease in producing imaginative counterpoints and bold new harmonies. Salieri cannot leave Mozart alone because his very existence denies his own achievements and his theology. Shaffer has constructed the match with great care, setting them up as polar

SUFFERING FROM FEELINGS OF HIS OWN INFERIORITY, SALIERI MALICIOUSLY PROJECTS HIS SELF-HATRED TOWARD MOZART AND TAKES ADVANTAGE OF THE YOUNGER COMPOSER'S FAULTS TO DESTROY HIM. FOR, IN SPITE OF HIS TREMENDOUS GENIUS, MOZART . . . LACKS THE SIMPLEST SKILLS OF CIVILIZED LIFE."

opposites in many respects. Salieri, upholding the edifice of the court composer, stands for artifice, Mozart for art Salieri labors to produce banal stories set to mediocre scores; Mozart effortlessly transforms primitive emotion into absolute beauty. As Werner Huber and Hubert Zapf describe, "Salieri and Mozart come to personify two different modes . . . Italian versus German, the heroic (mythological matter) versus the everyday, tragedy versus comedy, grand opera versus *Singspiel.*"

Even after the play's successful opening in London, Shaffer revised the script numerous times, trying to get it right. He says in the preface to the play script, "I have never before altered material in a play so extensively. I was led on to do this by what became a nearly obsessive pursuit of clarity, structural order, and drama." Shaffer sought to craft a classic "well-made play," one of logical construction, a tightly designed and balanced plot that leads inevitably to a pivotal disclosure scene. Of course, by the 1970s, the era of *Hair,* the well-made play was quite out of style. But Shaffer had never concerned himself with being stylish, having said in 1963, "As the man said, there are many tunes yet to be written in C major. And there are many plays yet to be written in a living room. Keeping up with fashion is a terrible race." Instead of the self-reflexive style of the new theater, Shaffer employs the conventional plot structure of the well-made play, taking pains to strike a neat balance between his protagonists and fashioning a significant angle from which to view their squaring-off, all to be played out in the most dramatic format possible. The angle he chooses in *Amadeus* is the view through the malice-filled eyes of Salieri.

Salieri narrates as an observing interpreter who judges Mozart and himself and blames God for the painful difference he sees. He presides over his own hearing, with himself and God on the stand. Salieri's garrulousness, or rambling talk, is striking. Only the emotional intensity of his monologues makes his many long harangues tolerable. He talks too much, from the standpoint of verbosity as well as that of revealing his own malicious nature. Salieri plays both patient and analyst, criminal and policeman, as he unfolds the mystery of whether he indeed murdered Mozart, which he claims to have done in revenge against God. But Madeleine MacMurraugh-Kavanagh points out that Salieri also hates Mozart for traits he has himself, "unconsciously [he] views Mozart as a projection of repressed impulses within himself, impulses he cannot and will not acknowledge." Mozart represents the artist's self-indulgence, the desire to lose oneself in art. Salieri fears letting his own passion gain control, so he placates it with an indulgence in sweets and then hates Mozart for succeeding where he fails. He fantasizes that Mozart writes effortlessly, recording whole works straight from his head to the page, without correction. As he tells God, "somewhere in this city stands a giggling child who can put on paper, without actually setting down his billiard cue, casual notes which turn my most considered ones into lifeless scratches."

Suffering from feelings of his own inferiority, Salieri maliciously projects his self-hatred toward Mozart and takes advantage of the younger composer's faults to destroy him. For, in spite of his tremendous genius, Mozart—the "'Natural Man,' passionate and elemental," as Christopher Innes has described him—lacks the simplest skills of civilized life. Mozart, like other geniuses who focus on art rather than on getting through life, is burdened with impracticality, his childlike innocence leads to errors of judgment. The genius is all too vulnerable to hatred and intrigue, to the treacherous devices of the urbane Salieri. However, Salieri's hatred of Mozart is so extreme and his own culpability so obvious that the viewer does not join with him in resenting Mozart's insufficiencies, but instead condemns Salieri for capitalizing on those failings to destroy an innocent. The culpable narrator turns his victim into a Christ-like figure and himself into Judas. Nevertheless, Salieri seems to revel in the condemning judgment he has called up from

remembered, "if not in fame, then infamy," and so win his battle with God. He then cuts his throat. The *venticelli* tell the audience that Salieri's efforts failed: he survived his attempted suicide and the public refused to believe he had murdered Mozart. The play ends with Salieri, in a gesture of benediction, telling the audience, "mediocrities everywhere—now and to come—I absolve you all. Amen." He then folds his arms "high across his own breast in a gesture of self-sanctification"

CHARACTERS

Audience

Salieri often addresses the audience to gain their support and understanding as the scenes shift back to the play's present. At the beginning of the play, when Salieri asks the members of the audience to be visible to him, the house lights go up so he can see them. He then tells them he is at their service and that he wants them to be his confessors. At the play's end, he warns the audience that they also will feel "the dreadful bite" of their failures, and when they do, Salieri as Patron Saint of Mediocrities will absolve them.

Katherina Cavalieri

Katherina is Salieri's pupil, a "beautiful girl of twenty" who has affairs with Salieri and Mozart. Her part is mute like that of Teresa, Salieri's wife. Salieri is in love with Katherina—"or at least in lust"—but he remains faithful to his wife until he determines that God has betrayed him. She then becomes his mistress By the end of the play, Katherina appears "fat and feathered like the great song-bird she'd become."

Emperor of Austria

See Joseph II

Ghosts of the Future

See Audience

God

Salieri presents the audience with his subjective vision of God as "an old candle-smoked God in a mulberry robe, staring at the world with dealer's eyes. . . Those eyes made bargains, real and irreversible." God becomes Salieri's "cunning Enemy," whom he continually tries to block. Salieri's God is unjust, as when he notes

> You gave me the desire to serve You—which most men do not have—then saw to it the service was shameful in the ears of the server You gave me the desire to praise You—which most men do not feel—then made me mute. You put into me perception of the Incomparable—which most men never know!—then ensured that I would know myself forever mediocre

Joseph II

Joseph, the brother of Marie Antoinette, is an "adorer of music—provided that it made no demands upon the royal brain" Unfortunately, Mozart's music often demands too much of him, and, as a result, he is easily influenced by Salieri and others at court to hold Mozart in check.

Little Winds

See Venticelli

Constanze Mozart

See Constanze Weber

Leopold Mozart

Salieri describes Wolfgang's father as "a bad-tempered Salzburg musician who dragged the boy endlessly round Europe, making him play the keyboard blindfolded, with one finger." The audience never meets Leopold, but he makes his presence felt through his son, who is afraid of him. Mozart claims his father is a bitter man who is jealous of his success. He continually tries to control Mozart's actions but for the most part fails. Mozart marries Constanze Weber against his father's wishes and stays in Vienna, living well above his means. Yet psychologically, Leopold has a great influence over his son. When he dies, Mozart falls apart, exclaiming, "How will I go now? In the world. There's no one else. No one who understands the wickedness around. I can't see it . . He watched for me all my life—and I betrayed him." Leopold becomes the solemn ghost in *Don Giovanni,* "a father more accusing than any in opera." Mozart creates a more benevolent version of his father, however, in *The Magic Flute,* where he appears as a high priest, "his hand extended to the world in love." As he dies, Mozart mistakes Salieri for his father and cries out for him as he regresses back to his childhood.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

We see Mozart through Salieri's memory. Salieri does provide some background information on the famous prodigy He wrote his first symphony at five, his first concerto at four, a full opera at

the audience, which he displaces onto God and not himself.

Salieri justifies blaming God because of a "bargain" he had struck as a youngster to lead a life of virtue in return for fame as a musician. By constantly alluding to this bargain, Salieri draws a measure of empathy when he rages like Lear against God. But even in these moments, his accusations sound trumped up, misguided. The dramatic irony of Salieri's position is that he vainly attempts to attack a God who never accepted Salieri's initial bargain in the first place. Salieri blames God unjustly. In the process of fighting back at God, Salieri causes irreparable damage to a defenseless innocent who has never questioned God's intention and who has assumed God's support of his genius all along. Mozart cannot believe he might die before finishing the *Requiem,* for, as he exclaims, "God can't want it unfinished." Mozart is sacrificed on the altar of Salieri's inferiority. Peter Hall, who directed the first staging of *Amadeus,* notes in his production diary that God "is shown as selfish and uncaring, following his own needs, indifferent to the suffering of man." God thus fails on the cosmic level, for not being there to observe, to judge, or to intervene. It is therefore left to the audience to judge Salieri. In this respect, Shaffer turns the audience into God.

Shaffer has Mozart expressly state that the audience should be God. "That's our *job,* we composers: to combine the inner minds of him and him and her, and her and her—the thoughts of chambermaids and court composers—and turn the audience into God." In this guise, according to the analysis of Werner Huber and Hubert Zapf, the audience plays the part of a "chorus of humanity" with Salieri as the central, guiding voice. The primary role of a Greek-like chorus is to observe and judge, and even though the narrative perspective of Salieri evokes some empathy, he evokes judgment as well. Thus Salieri summons the "Ghosts of the Future," who have "yet to hate" and "yet to kill," to observe and judge him. He seems irrationally to hope, by referring to the audience as the "yet to hate" and the "yet to kill," that they will understand his plight and forgive him. He wants to make himself into a Christ of the mediocre people, who dies for the sins of the mediocre people to come He wants them to join him in blaming God for condemning him to mediocrity and causing him to kill.

But, as many critics have noted, it is not Salieri's struggle with God that lies at the center of the play. More than one critic has noted, with Stanley Kauffmann, that this struggle is "flimsy, fabricated, facetious." Can it be that a playwright who has labored for years to construct a tightly knit plot would produce one with such a soft central core? John Simon of the *National Review* mused that the theme lay instead in Shaffer's own psyche, as a "lamentation of his own mediocrity." Certainly, in verbosity, Salieri mirrors the authorial character that emerges from Shaffer's effusive prefaces and numerous self-reflective articles. But does he have Salieri-like fears? And does his fear find an empathetic response in the audience? As Stanley Kauffmann notes in his review for *Saturday Review,* when

> Salieri totters forward to address us. 'Mediocrities everywhere—now and to come—I absolve you all! Amen!' [it] Sounds grand until one thinks about it What power of absolution does he have, and what is he absolving them of? His legacy of jealousy, of a sense of God's injustice? Of a wish to be more than they are? The best guess may be that, at the last, Salieri is addressing his author

This is decidedly not a play about the author's own feelings of inadequacy. The key lies in the nature of the audience that Salieri invoked at the beginning of the play. After the prelude of *Venticelli,* Salieri calls up the "Ghosts of the Future," who are identified by the house lights shining on them. They are the future, in relation to Salieri, who is being portrayed in the eighteenth century. The important issue here is that it is not the literal audience sitting in those seats, bathed in the house lights, to whom he refers, but a characterized narrative audience—the "audience" to whom Salieri speaks is just another role in the play As such, his "naratee"—the characters Salieri addresses as the "mediocrities everywhere" and the "yet to hate"—constitutes a fictional construction, not the actual audience. This distinction is important because it allows the audience to be "smarter" than the characterized narrative audience—smart enough to realize that Salieri's anger at God is misplaced and that his theme of observer and judge is an analogy. It is a metaphor for the way the judging and fearful inner observer inside the mind of everyman consistently destroys genius.

Shaffer loves his craft, and he is very good at it. Although it is not impossible that the themes of mediocrity versus genius and judgment by inferiors in *Amadeus* touch upon his own experience, this does not imply Shaffer's own mediocrity or his fear of it. On the contrary, his ability to evoke these ideas

consummately attests to his ability to create the world he meant to create.

Source: Carole Hamilton, Critical Essay on *Amadeus,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001

Daniel R. Jones

In the following essay, Jones examines Shaffer's ongoing theme of "God-hunting" in Amadeus, *finding that Shaffer "continues his quest for God in new and increasingly sophisticated ways."*

Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* premiered at the National Theatre of Great Britain in November of 1979 and quickly became the most successful play in that theatre's history, having an extended run of over a year. The play received the same enthusiastic reception when it opened in November of 1980 at the National Theatre in Washington D. C., and when it moved a month later to New York's Broadhurst Theatre.

In addition to being enormously popular, the play also received high critical acclaim, winning five Tonys in New York, including a Tony for best drama of the 1980 season The 1984 film version received nominations for eleven Oscars, winning eight including best picture, best director, and best actor *Amadeus* is without question Shaffer's most popular work to date, surpassing his already highly successful full-length plays *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964) and *Equus* (1973).

Although some have called *Amadeus* a "dramatic masterpiece," the play has also created controversy, particularly regarding the character Salieri. Salieri appears to be so different from earlier Shaffer protagonists that several critics have argued Shaffer's central subject of "God-hunting"—attempting to define the idea of God—has shifted significantly. Michael Hinden, for instance, objects to Salieri's "static character," and suggests that the shift in *Amadeus* is chiefly thematic: "the protagonist now abandons his quest for union with divinity and becomes the antagonist of the God, setting himself against the Deity in personal confrontation and defiance." Hinden notes the uncompromising pessimism of Salieri, and suggests that just as "*The Iceman Cometh* marks a bitter conclusion to O'Neill's quest for union with divinity," *Amadeus* may represent the same end for Shaffer. In another critical article, Janet Larson insists that Shaffer has replaced his "God-hunting" with "contempt for his audience" and sympathy for the harsh cynicism of Salieri.

Contrary to what Hinden and Larson suggest, Shaffer does not abandon his "God-hunting"; instead, he continues to explore his major subject in ways that closely mirror the earlier plays. Four major parallels show that Shaffer continues his quest for God in new and increasingly sophisticated ways. Like the Spanish commander Pizarro in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and the child psychologist Dysart in *Equus,* Salieri is: 1) a hollow man; 2) confronted by someone who represents the idea of God; 3) deeply moved by visions of a greater spiritual awareness; and 4) trapped in a predicament at the end of the play.

Although Salieri seems to be deeply religious, he is as hollow as Pizarro and Dysart. Ironically, Salieri has the bitterness and spiritual aridity of Pizarro and Dysart, and the hypocrisy of some of the religious figures of the earlier plays.

Pizarro is, according to Shaffer, a man "without joy. In his negation he is as anti-life as the bitter Church or the rigid Sun are in their affirmations. For him, the savor of the salt has been lost—lost through a lifetime of . . . rejections: flag, sword, Cross." Pizzaro tells his second-in-command, De Soto, that his soul is "frostbitten" Yet Pizarro is not completely alienated. He is fascinated by the Incan chieftain, Atahuallpa, who believes himself to be a god. He envies the chieftain for the intensity of feeling he experiences, an intensity which contrasts strongly with the lack of feeling in Pizarro's own life.

Dysart is both physically and spiritually sterile. He tells Hesther that Alan "has known a passion more ferocious than I have felt in any second of my life." He admits that his fondness for browsing through art books on mythical Greece is a poor substitute for real worship. "Without worship you shrink, it's as brutal as that . . . I shrank my *own* life." As Michael Gillespie argues, in *Equus* Shaffer gives a

> revealing picture of a 'typical' representative of our advanced technological age, of a twentieth-century citizen whose highly developed rational faculties have caused him to lose touch with his more 'primitive' emotional nature, and for whom an inherited faith in the . progression of scientific inquiry has removed all possibility of worship

As a citizen of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Vienna, Salieri appears radically different from Pizarro and Dysart. At the beginning of the play, Salieri tells us how in his youth he bargained with God, offering to live a life of virtue, a life honoring God through music, in exchange for fame as a composer. Yet Salieri is much like the

Thomas Edward Hulce in a scene from the 1984 film production of Amadeus, *directed by Milos Forman*

Catholic priests Valverde and De Nizza in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and Dora in *Equus*. Like the religion of the priests and the religion of Dora, Salieri's religion is stifled by orthodoxy and practiced through manipulation, a fact which is first apparent in Scene 2 of Act One. Salieri tells us that his God is "an old candle-smoked God in a mulberry robe, staring at the world with dealer's eyes. Tradesmen had put him up there. Those eyes made bargains, real and irreversible." To Salieri, his God is a "God of Bargains", a God capable of entering into a Faustian pact.

That Salieri's view of God is limited becomes more apparent as the play develops. In a long monologue at the end of Act One Salieri addresses "*his God*", declaring war and revealing his own bitterness and pride: "From this time we are enemies, You and I! I'll not accept it from You, *Man* is not mocked! . . . I am not mocked!" Salieri swears to block God on earth and exclaims defiantly: "What use, after all, is man, if not to teach God His Lessons."

In Act Two Salieri's bitterness toward God increases. Salieri reminds us that on the "night of the manuscripts"—the night he learns that Mozart writes down his music with no revisions—he acquired "a terrible and thrilling purpose." From now on Salieri's purpose is "The blocking of God in one of His purest manifestations." In this scene we realize that Salieri's "quarrel now wasn't with Mozart—it was through him! Through him to God, who loved him so."

Salieri implements his plans for destroying Mozart in Act Two in a number of ingenious ways. First, he persuades Emperor Joseph not to appoint Mozart as tutor for Princess Elizabeth. Second, he persuades Rosenberg, the Director of the Imperial Opera, to eliminate the ballet from Mozart's new opera *Figaro* (the only plan which fails because of the unexpected appearance of Emperor Joseph at rehearsal). Third, Salieri ensures that Mozart receives only a minimal salary in his new position as Chamber Composer. Fourth, Salieri encourages Mozart to include some of the Free Masons' sacred rites in *The Magic Flute,* thereby ensuring Mozart's loss of his last benefactor for betraying secrets of the brotherhood. Fifth, Salieri disguises himself in a cloak and mask and appears nightly beneath Mozart's window, terrifying him into believing that he is being haunted by the ghost of his father as he struggles to complete a requiem mass. The

LIKE PIZARRO AND DYSART, SALIERI HAS EXPERIENCED GOD, BUT HE CANNOT AFFIRM HIM SALIERI CANNOT UNDERSTAND WHY HE WAS NOT CHOSEN BY GOD AND WHY MOZART WAS. THE PARADOX OF MOZART REMAINS INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO HIM."

nightly "apparitions" exhaust Mozart physically and mentally.

As Salieri's plans succeed, however, we increasingly recognize how hollow he is. Salieri's faith is spiritless like his music: "I heard my music calmed in convention—not one breath of spirit to lift it off the shallows. And I heard *his*— ... The spirit singing through it, unstoppable, to my ears alone!"

Salieri's idea of God becomes more bizarre as Act Two progresses. Salieri assumes he has vanquished his enemy when Mozart is transformed into "*a very young boy*," crawls out from under a table, and calls Salieri "*In a childish voice*"—"Papa!" After Mozart's display, Salieri boasts quietly: "Reduce the man: reduce the God, Behold my vow fulfilled. The profoundest voice in the world reduced to a nursery tune." After Mozart's death near the end of the play, Salieri says that he feels both relief and pity: "I felt the pity God can never feel."

In the next scene Salieri has an important realization. He says, "And slowly I understood the nature of God's punishment!" Salieri realizes that he has been given the fame he begged for as a boy: "I was to become—quite simply—the most famous musician in Europe!" Yet he also realizes that he would be "bricked up in Fame! Embalmed in Fame! Buried in Fame!" for work he knew to be "*absolutely worthless!*" God's punishment would be that he must "survive to see [himself] become *extinct*!" In the Signet edition of the play, Salieri tells us that he survived to hear "Mozart's music sounded louder and louder through the world!" while his "faded completely, till no one played it at all!"

Convinced that he can still win his battle against an unjust deity, Salieri devises a final strategy to defeat God. He plans to convince everyone that he murdered Mozart so "After today, whenever men speak Mozart's name with love, they will speak mine with loathing!" At this point Salieri is convinced that God "is powerless to prevent" his final plan. Yet in the final scene of the play Salieri has failed completely He fails in his suicide attempt, and he fails to convince anyone that he poisoned Mozart. Why is Salieri so determined to destroy Mozart, and why does he fail so miserably? The answer lies in the paradoxical nature of Mozart.

The symbolic role of Mozart is not immediately evident. Martin Esslin's comment that Shaffer's Mozart is "a figure of grotesque inappropriateness, a veritable monstrosity" is typical of the criticism Shaffer has received in his portrayal of the musical genius. Yet this view has been refuted by C. J. Gianakaris, Roland Gelatt, and others who show that "Shaffer takes almost no liberties with historical fact about Mozart and his times, except where Salieri the man is concerned." Mozart's animal play-acting, his word-play, his financial difficulties, his marriage to a child-like wife, and his domineering father are well documented in the biographies, Mozart's three volumes of correspondence, and in the correspondence of relatives.

Gianakaris notes, "Shaffer has explained that his intent in no way was to demean Mozart"; rather, he "wanted audiences to know Mozart better and more totally—to know a genius of far greater complexity than granted by standard portraits." This genius of greater complexity provides a clue to the symbolic role of Mozart in the play. Regardless of all the criticism Shaffer has received for his portrayal of Mozart, no one objects to the reverence Salieri shows for Mozart's music.

The paradox which is at the root of this play is, according to Gelatt,

> the seemingly inexplicable contrast between Mozart's divine inspiration and the common clay from which it issued For the Mozart in *Amadeus* is not only consistently and impolitically foul-mouthed, but also vain, arrogant, totally wrapped up in himself, and childishly insensitive to the feelings of others He is, in addition, the most perfectly formed, the most astonishingly fertile, the most celestial musical genius who ever lived

When Salieri meets Mozart for the first time, we are as shocked by Mozart as Salieri is, Salieri says, "It seemed to me that I had heard a voice of God—and that it issued from a creature whose own

voice I had also heard—and it was the voice of an obscene child!'' Like Salieri, we witness the mystery of Mozart and his genius.

Paradoxes have been central in suggesting the idea of God in Shaffer's earlier plays. In *The Royal Hunt of the Sun,* Pizarro cannot understand how the Incan chieftain Atahuallpa can consider himself a God. Pizarro tells De Soto:

> To a savage mind it [the sun] must make a fine God I myself can't fix anything nearer to a thought of worship than standing at dawn and watching it fill the world Like the coming of something eternal, against going flesh! What a fantastic wonder that anyone on earth should dare to say 'That's my father. My father the sun!' It's silly—but tremendous . . You know—strange nonsense since first I heard of him, I've dreamed of him every night A black king with glowing eyes, sporting the sun for a crown What does it mean?

In *Equus,* the psychologist Dysart imagines the horse mocking him and asking, '''*Why?* . . . Why *Me?* . . . Why—ultimately—*Me?* . . Do you really imagine you can account for me? Totally, infallibly, inevitably account for Me? . . . Poor Doctor Dysart!' . . . This is the feeling more and more with me—No place Displacement . . . 'Account for me,' says staring Equus, 'First account for Me!'''

Pizarro, Dysart, and Salieri are rationalists who confront someone who presents a fundamental challenge to reason. In this sense, Shaffer certainly has not abandoned his quest for spiritual meaning. Concerning *The Royal Hunt of the Sun,* Shaffer says: ''the theme . . . is the search for God—that is why it is called 'the Royal *Hunt* of the Sun'—the search for a definition of the idea of God. In fact the play is an attempt to define the concept of God . . .'' The remark applies equally to *Equus* and *Amadeus,* not only because of the paradoxes dramatized, but also because of the visions and final predicaments of Dysart and Salieri.

Salieri has glimpses of God during ''the night of the manuscripts'' and when listening to Act 4 of *The Marriage of Figaro.* These glimpses show a God far different from a ''God of Bargains.'' The most important scene occurs when Salieri hears *The Magic Flute* for the first time in Scene 14 of Act Two, Shaffer's new scene for the American production and a scene which strongly ties *Amadeus* with the ''God-hunting'' of the earlier plays Salieri comments on how Mozart has managed to put the Masons into the opera·

> He had turned them into an Order of Eternal Priests. I heard voices calling out of ancient temples I saw a vast sun rise on a timeless land, where animals danced and children floated, and by its rays all the poisons we feed each other drawn up and burnt away! . And in this sun—behold—I saw his father! No more an accusing figure but forgiving!—The Highest Priest of the Order—his hand extended to the world in love! Wolfgang feared Leopold no longer: a final legend had been made! . Oh, the sound—the sound of that newfound peace in him—mocking my undiminishing pain! *There* was the Magic Flute—*there beside me!*
>
> Mozart the flute and God the relentless player! How long could the Creature stand it—so frail, so palpably mortal?

Shaffer says that the scene ''dramatizes the moment—previously only hinted at—when Salieri perceives Mozart to be himself the flute of God . .'' The Order of Eternal Priests and the ancient temples are in stark contrast to Salieri's own ''old candle-smoked God in a mulberry robe, staring at the world with dealer's eyes.''

The priests Salieri sees in his vision recall the Incan priests of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and the Homeric priests of *Equus* Yet, more importantly, Salieri's vision also parallels visions of Pizarro and Dysart Pizarro tells De Soto,

> When I was young, I used to sit on the slope outside the village and watch the sun go down, and I used to think if only I could find the place where it sinks to rest for the night, I'd find the source of life, like the beginning of a river I used to wonder what it could be like Perhaps an island, a strange spit of white sand, where the people never died Never grew old, or felt pain, and never died

Dysart recalls a similar peaceful vision:

> I wish there was one person in my life I could show One instinctive, absolutely unbrisk person I could take to Greece, and stand in front of certain shrines and sacred streams and say 'Look! Life is only comprehensible through a thousand local Gods And not just the old dead ones with names like Zeus—no, but living Geniuses of Place and Person! And not just Greece but modern England!'

All three protagonists symbolize what Shaffer believes is man's primordial need for worship, that purity of faith which is not tainted like the faith of the Catholic priests Valverde and De Nizza in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun,* the faith of Alan's mother, Dora, in *Equus,* and the faith of Salieri in *Amadeus* In their ''God-hunting,'' Pizarro, Dysart, and Salieri are drawn to these more fundamental expressions of worship as demonstrated in Atahuallpa, Alan, and Mozart, respectively. Shaffer captures the greatness of man's spiritual awareness through the youthfulness of these three characters and through the an-

cient religious symbols of the sun in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun,* the horse in *Equus,* and music in *Amadeus.*

Shaffer's insistence on the greatness of man's spiritual awareness and his belief that a sense of the divine is essential are Jungian themes. Indeed, Jung appears to be a major influence. In an interview Shaffer indicates perhaps the strongest Jungian tension in his work:

> There is in me a continuous tension between what I suppose I could loosely call the Apollonian and the Dionysiac sides of interpreting life . . I don't really see it in those dry intellectual terms. I just feel in myself that there is a constant debate going on between the violence of instinct on the one hand and the desire in my mind for order and restraint. Between the secular side of me the fact that I have never actually been able to buy anything of official religion—and the inescapable fact that to me a life without a sense of the divine is perfectly meaningless

The final predicament of Shaffer's protagonists is that they are trapped between reason and faith. They are like that large group of modern men and women Jung discusses in his essay "Modern Man in Search of a Soul" who "cannot believe . . . cannot compel themselves to believe, however happy they deem the man who has a belief." Their chief problem remains "finding a religious outlook on life."

Salieri's predicament at the end of *Amadeus* parallels Pizarro's and Dysart's. Salieri, in his determined pursuit of immortality as a composer (Shaffer describes the determination as "our protagonist's relentless lust to snatch a piece of divinity for himself"), remains bitter and cynical. Just before his suicide attempt, Salieri says,

> I was born a pair of ears and nothing else It is only through hearing music that I know God exists Only through writing music that I could worship . All around me men hunger for general rights I hungered only for particular notes They seek liberty for mankind I sought only slavery for myself To be owned—ordered—exhausted by an absolute. Music. This was denied me, and with it all meaning Now I go to become a Ghost myself

Failing to achieve lasting fame as a musician, Salieri mentions "the taunting of unachievable, uncaring God" and declares himself "'Antonio Salieri· Patron Saint of Mediocrities!'" Then he cuts his throat

In the final scene of the play, "*The light narrows into a bright cone, beating on SALIERI.*" Through the conversation of the two Venticelli, we learn that "Salieri is quite deranged. He keeps claiming that he is guilty of Mozart's death, and made away with him by poison." Salieri's final defeat is that "No one believes it in the world!" Salieri's last words are. "Mediocrities everywhere—now and to come—I absolve you all. Amen!" We last see him "*finally folding his arms high across his own breast in a gesture of self-sanctification*" The predicament of this final scene is better understood when compared with the endings of Shaffer's earlier plays.

At the end of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun,* Pizarro feels cheated when Atahuallpa is not resurrected, yet there is a note of optimism. Pizarro is surprised at the tears on his cheeks. He has never cried before and now this man with a "frostbitten" soul is able to feel again. Significantly, the stage directions tell us that "*The SUNLIGHT brightens on his head.*" He envies the faith of Atahuallpa, and admits sadly that "I die between two darks: blind eyes and a blind sky." Yet clearly Athahuallpa has changed him deeply by giving him a glimpse of a greater reality. Pizarro's final vision is peaceful:

> To make water in a sand world· surely, surely . God's just a name on your nail, and naming begins cries and cruelties But to live without hope of after, and make whatever God there is, oh, that's some immortal business surely

At the end of *Equus,* Dysart also comments on his predicament:

> I need—more desperately than my children need me—a way of seeing in the dark What way is this? *What dark is this?*" . . I cannot call it ordained of God: I can't get that far I will however pay it so much homage There is now, in my mouth, this sharp chain And it never comes out

Like Pizarro and Dysart, Salieri has experienced God, but he cannot affirm Him. Salieri cannot understand why he was not chosen by God and why Mozart was. The paradox of Mozart remains incomprehensible to him. Just as Pizarro feels cheated when Atahuallpa is not resurrected, Salieri feels cheated at the end of the play. Like Dysart who has a "sharp chain" in his mouth, Salieri "*stares ahead in pain.*" Salieri's pain underscores his predicament. His final "*gesture of self-sanctification*" is not mockery but homage, an act of humility. Salieri who desired only to be "owned—ordered—exhausted by an Absolute" affirms what he can.

Source: Daniel R. Jones, "Peter Shaffer's Continued Quest for God in *Amadeus,*" in *Comparative Drama,* Vol 21, No 3, Fall 1987, pp 145–153.

Martha A. Townsend

In the following essay, Townsend explores "the striking similarity that Amadeus *shares with the dramatic monologues of Robert Browning."*

When Milos Forman's lavish $18 million film adaptation of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* was released in the fall of 1984, it quickly garnered the praise of both the press and American moviegoers. In just the first month of its release while playing in only one hundred theaters, *Amadeus* grossed over $5 million. The following March, the Directors Guild of America named the Czechoslovakian-born Forman best director of 1984 for his colorful retelling of the supposed rivalry between the obsessed, jealous court composer Antonio Salieri and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, egocentric, impudent genius. A few weeks later, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awarded the film eight Oscars including best director for Forman, best actor for F. Murray Abraham who portrayed Salieri, and best picture for 1984. *Time* magazine's Richard Corliss called the film "a grand, sprawling entertainment that incites enthrallment": *Newsweek*'s David Ansen labeled it "a feast for the eyes and ears"; *Playboy*'s Bruce Williamson praised the production for being "triumphant and courageous . . unequivocally the grandest epic ever made about the life of a great composer."

In spite of the film's popular box office success, some reviewers were less enthusiastic. Pauline Kael, writing in *The New Yorker,* asserted that although the film has a very complicated surface structure, "after a while the rhetoric cancels itself out. . ." and what's left is ". . . nothing but confusion at the heart of the movie." She chided Forman's crudeness in portraying Mozart as a bumpkin with a hideous, high-pitched whinny-giggle and implied that the showmanship in promoting the movie as a "major contribution to art" accounted for its popular acclaim. David Thompson, writing in *Film Comment,* complaining that "Something in the initial appetizing rush of *Amadeus* nagged at me . . . there's something wrong, and it's not disguised by polish and reticence." He decried the film's failure to depict a more fully developed, sensitively aware Mozart and a Salieri less villainous and mired in delusions of undeserved mediocrity. However, neither side of the Amadeus dialectic has articulated the striking similarity that *Amadeus* shares with the dramatic monologues of Robert Browning, both in form and content, a similarity that negates much of the disparaging criticism Poems such as *Fra Lippo Lippi, Andrea del Sarto,* and *My Last Duchess,* for example, contain elements which make them akin to *Amadeus* in ways which critics, both pro and con, have failed to notice and which when taken into consideration add another compelling dimension to the film.

> "THIS BLENDING OF LOATHSOME, EVIL ATTRIBUTES WITH THE CULTURED, REFINED TASTES OF A DISCRIMINATING MAN REVEAL A CHARACTER WHO CAN BE SIMULTANEOUSLY ADMIRED AND HATED THE AUDIENCE EXPERIENCES PALPABLE TENSION AS A RESULT OF SYMPATHIZING WITH SALIERI'S ESTHETIC SENSIBILITIES WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY JUDGING HIS REPREHENSIBLE BEHAVIOR."

Robert Langbaum, who has written the best modern study of the dramatic monologue, cites three characteristics usually present in the form for which Browning and Tennyson are held to be the nineteenth-century exemplars: a speaker, whose voice is generally not the poet's; a listener; and an occasion. The poem's drama results from the interplay between these three. In *My Last Duchess* the speaker is the Duke, a despicable villain who has had his vivacious wife murdered. the listener is an envoy from his prospective wife's family; and the occasion is a meeting in the Duke's palace to arrange the terms for the dowry that will accompany her *Andrea del Sarto*'s speaker is Andrea himself, an artist whose accomplishments have not lived up to his own expectations; the listener is his wife, Lucrezia, who only marginally tolerates Andrea's affection in return for economic support; and the occasion is an early evening meeting in their home during which he desires her company for only half an hour in order to replenish his depleted artistic inspiration. *Fra Lippo Lippi*'s speaker is Fra Lippo, a Florentine artist of some renown; the listener is a

policeman; and the occasion is an encounter between the two resulting from Fra Lippo's suspicious prowling about the streets in the middle of the night. This is, of course, the form Shaffer and Forman have used in *Amadeus.* The speaker is Antonio Salieri, artisitic rival and self-proclaimed murderer of Mozart; the listener is a priest who has come to minister to him, and the occasion is Salieri's confinement in an insane asylum for attempted suicide.

In Browning's poems, the function of the envoy, the wife, and the policeman is merely to provide an audience in the poem to whom each of the speakers can direct his thoughts. The listeners do not respond; no conversation occurs even though two people are present and complex, significant utterances come forth. One feature of the dramatic monologue, as Patrick Murray points out in his book on literary criticism, is that the motives which cause the characters to speak cannot be accounted for in the dramatic context of the poem alone. The utterances arise only partly as a response to the situation; the rest can be seen as an explanation for the character's philosophy, his ambition, or his failure, or perhaps as an expression of his obsessions, desires, or fears. In any case, the speaker does not expect a reply, nor does he hope to accomplish anything or alter events in any way through his speaking.

Why, then, does he speak at all? According to Langbaum, the speaker speaks to understand something about himself and this ultimate purpose is responsible for the curious style of address in the dramatic monologue·

> Not only does the speaker direct his address outward as in a dialogue but the style of address gives the effect of a closed circuit, with the speaker directing his address outward in order that it may return with a meaning he was not aware of when sending it forth I say a closed circuit because the utterance seems to be directed only obliquely at the ostensible auditor, and seems never to reach its ultimate goal with him. Nor does the essential interchange take place with the auditor, for even where the auditor's remarks are implied, the speaker never learns anything from them and they do not change the meaning of the utterance. If the speaker represents one voice of a dialogue, then his other self is the essential second voice in that it sends back his own voice with a difference.

This, too, is very similar to what occurs in *Amadeus* and is, in part, what accounts for the "curious style of address" of F. Murray Abraham's performance. The priest is summoned to the insane asylum to elicit a confession from Salieri, who claims to have murdered Mozart. What transpires, though, is not at all a simple interchange between clergyman and sinner during which the expected confession occurs, but a grueling, twenty-four hour monologue in which the embittered, jealous composer who has outlived Mozart by thirty-one years now finally explains his own life. There is, really, no conversation between the priest and Salieri; the priest's brief replies cannot be taken as any more than token responses dictated by the exigencies of the screen medium. Like the implied responses from the envoy, Andrea's wife, and Fra Lippo's arresting officer, the priest's remarks do not constitute any meaningful interchange with Salieri, nor does Salieri learn anything from them. As speaker, Salieri represents the primary voice of the dialogue and his "other self," in Langbaum's words, is the essential second voice as he looks back examining, explaining, reflecting.

Langbaum points out that one major distinguishing feature of the dramatic monologue is the reader's sympathetic relation to the poem. Because we are forced to experience the dramatic event through the speaker's viewpoint, we necessarily see the event in such a way as to form some sort of sympathetic understanding with him. In *My Last Duchess,* for example, even as outrageous and cruel as the Duke's behavior has been, condemnation is not our primary reaction to him; we are intrigued by his intelligence, his high-handed aristocratic manners, his poise, and his superior appreciation for beauty. Langbaum's point is that by our viewing the events as the speaker perceives them, a tension is created between our sympathy with him and our moral judgment of him. And although few monologues depict speakers as villainous as the Duke, the most successful ones, according to Langbaum, deal with speakers who are in some way reprehensible. Further, says Langbaum, the combination of villain and aesthete creates an especially strong tension.

Again, these ideas are exactly what Shaffer and Forman have capitalized on in *Amadeus.* We are forced to experience the drama through Salieri's eyes as he tells his story in flashback—not actually to the priest but to himself in an attempt to analyze and discover the meaning of his life. And as we become intrigued by *his* intelligence, aristocratic manners, poise, and appreciation for beauty, a tension develops as a certain sympathy is felt for his anguish. At the same time, moral judgment regarding his reprehensible treatment of Mozart comes into play. This tension is strenghtened by the combination of Salieri's villainry and aesthetic sensibilities. Like Browning's Duke, Salieri is capable of

utterly reproachable behavior—interfering with Mozart's court appointments, spitefully influencing the Emperor against him, and finally apparently causing the young composer's death by overwork. Also like the Duke, Salieri is a connoisseur of beauty, of the finer things life has to offer—attractive women, elegant clothing, social status, rich food exquisitely prepared, and, of course, music—the opera, especially, and the chamber performances. This blending of loathsome, evil attributes with the cultured, refined tastes of a discriminating man reveal a character who can be simultaneously admired and hated. Thus Browning's technique of creating dramatic tension by combining these qualities is duplicated in *Amadeus.* The audience experiences palpable tension as a result of sympathizing with Salieri's esthetic sensibilities while simultaneously judging his reprehensible behavior

In addition to these similarities in form which coexist in *Amadeus* and Browning's monologues, the film shares another significant correspondence with the poems in that neither was ever intended to be an historically accurate, factual accounting of its characters. Yet the liberties that both Shaffer and Forman took in creating their work troubled some critics Thompson refers to the way "the historical Mozart" may have affected his contemporaries and later comments, "The worst crime against history in the play and the film is not in painting Mozart as a brat or Salieri as the lizard of murderous envy; it is in presenting Mozart as unaware of what is going on, while Salieri is a sleek Iago. And it is sheer hypocrisy to try to pretend that this wizard Salieri is a mediocrity."

Pauline Kael also found the lack of allegience to truth a disturbing detraction. She found "Forman's insensitivity to what Mozart might have been like . . . if you've read Mozart's letters you know this twerp couldn't have written them."

A precedent for this kind of historical manipulation exists, however, in the three dramatic monologues already mentioned. *My Last Duchess, Andrea del Sarto,* and *Fra Lippo Lippi* are all based on identifiable historical figures who possessed many of the traits, characteristics, circumstances, and professions attributed to them in the poems. Yet Browning was less interested in specific identification and historical accuracy than he was in evoking a spirit of the Italian Renaissance. By grounding the monologues in real people, Browning creates a tone of authenticity and realism perhaps not attainable with completely fictional characters Once this tone is established, though, the poet is free to create, embellish, and restructure whatever he wishes in order to meet his own ends, as Browning does in each poem.

Again, this is exactly the idea Shaffer and Forman have capitalized on in making *Amadeus.* In a lengthy article describing how *Amadeus* the stage play was transformed into *Amadeus* the film, *New York Times* reporter Michiko Kakutani illustrates the successive changes which occurred in plot and characterization. Describing how the role of Salieri was enlarged to heighten the confrontation between the protagonists and to make Salieri a more active cause of Mozart's downfall, Kakutani writes this of the revising process· "Shaffer has moved further and further away from the verifiable facts, and created what is more of an imagined interpretation of history." An imagined interpretation of history—Browning's tactics recapitulated.

Shaffer himself was quite forthright about the lack of historical truthfulness; of his collaboration with director Forman he has written that "from the start we agreed upon one thing: we were not making an objective life of Wolfgang Mozart. This cannot be stressed too strongly. Obviously *Amadeus* on stage was never intended to be a documentary biography of the composer, and the film is even less of one." Commenting specifically on the film's deathbed sequence which portrays Salieri plotting to steal the "Requiem" after Mozart finishes dictating it and dies (a scene Kael calls "the muzziest part of the movie . . definitely one plot too many"), Shaffer boldly explains, "Quite obviously such a scene never took place in fact. However, our concern at this point was not with fact, but with the undeniable laws of drama. It is where holding fast to the thread of our protagonist's mania—we were finally led."

One could make the point, of course, that art patron Vespasiano Gonzaga, Duke of Sabbioneta (1531–91), Italian painter Andrea del Sarto (1487–1531), and the monk/ painter Fillippo Lippi (1412–69) are considerably less well-known than Mozart and that fictionalizing their lives for artistic purposes in poetry has fewer consequences than fictionalizing the life of a far better known composer in a big budget movie intended for wide distribution.

That a work of art based on the lives of famous men need not be grounded on fact did not seem to disturb Charles Morey, however, who directed a production of *Amadeus* at the University of Utah's Pioneer Memorial Theater in Salt Lake City in

1984. With regard to the importance of historical accuracy, Morey said:

> That is really irrelevant in doing the play This is, as Shaffer has said, a fantasia on the lives of two men Shaffer began with some facts and some myths and then took the story into his own speculation concerning the nature of man's relationship with God. In that sense, this play parallels a lot of classical plays Shakespeare's 'Richard III' immediately comes to mind. There are those who believe Shakespeare captured Richard's true character, while others feel Richard spins in his grave every time the play is presented Perhaps Mozart does the same with *Amadeus.*
>
> This play is not a literal document It is an example of an artist who has taken some facts, put them through a blender and then said something he wanted to say That's the joy of art We are able to see a different vision than what facts create Real life rarely creates statements for us, but artists take real life and create artistic statements That is what Shaffer has done and regardless of one's opinion about his observations, Mozart lives on in his music. That is his glory and you can forgive almost anything because of that.

Had Shaffer and Forman intended *Amadeus* to be a documentary biography of Mozart's life, depicting him as unaware and presenting Salieri as villainous and mediocre might well be justifiably criticized Had they intended *Amadeus* an objective portrayal of Mozart's life, perhaps Shaffer and Forman could be accused of insensitivity and crudeness But, clearly, they were attempting something far different from a "literal document" in their blending of fact with myth, something which they knew transcended those statements created for us by real life. What, then, was their purpose in straying so far from historical accuracy? What was it that these artists wanted to say when their "facts" came out of the blender?

The answer to these questions leads, I think, to yet another correspondence with Browning's monologues which may be more striking than the already mentioned similarities in form. And that is the content of the film, for many of the issues that Browning raises in *My Last Duchess, Fra Lippo Lippi,* and *Andrea del Sarto* are examined in *Amadeus* as well.

In *My Last Duchess* Browning explores the problem of jealousy and envy as motives for murder. The Duke was apparently so jealous of the Duchess's beauty that he would permit only a monk to paint her portrait and allowed even him only one day with her to complete the work. And after her death, the Duke's jealousy continues, for he keeps the portrait veiled and controls who may view it. His overwhelming envy of her zest for life and joyful nature led him to "give commands so her smiles would stop."

In *Fra Lippo Lippi* Browning explores the relationship between religion and art In answering his own question "Come, what am I a beast for?" Fra Lippo concludes that his purpose in life is to praise God through his painting. Art is a gift from God, he says, and he can best repay the gift with his ability to interpret God to his fellow man. His painting will serve its purpose if religion grows in those who view it.

In *Andrea del Sarto* Browning's theme is mediocrity in the face of genius as well as the jealousy and despair that one suffers as a result of the comparison. Andrea recognizes that although his paintings are technically faultless, they fail to achieve the masterful distinction of his contemporaries Raphael, Michaelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci. He questions where the responsibility for his mediocrity lies, first blaming Lucrezia but ultimately holding God accountable

Threads of all these concerns dominate *Amadeus.* The issue of who holds responsibility for mediocrity begins to be probed just minutes into the film as the priest assures Salieri that "All men are equal in God's eyes." Salieri's sarcastic rejoinder is icy, bitter, introspective. "*Are* they?" As Salieri's monologue unfolds through the series of flashbacks, these thematic correspondences become clear. First, the concept of celebrating God's glory through one's artistic talent is shown as Salieri recalls the presence of his desire from his early childhood. Next, he thanks God for the gift of his artistic ability as he composes a piece of music. Finally, Salieri recognizes the voice of God speaking through another man and questions God's justice in bestowing this gift of genius on a profane, giggly creature like Mozart while denying the full gift to a devout man like himself.

Although Shaffer's initial interest in the story centered on the conflicting reports about Mozart's death, it soon evolved into a larger form. "'I had a bigger and grander story,' he told the *New York Times.* 'It was the enormous theme of the envy of genius by mediocrity. It is also about the relevance of human goodness to art.'" The relevance of goodness to art is one of those issues or "statements rarely created for us by real life" that Shaffer wanted to illustrate and surely accounts for some of the liberties taken with Mozart's characterization. Yet it makes for provocative thinking. Again,

Charles Morey's comments illustrate the heart of Shaffer's idea:

> . grace is a free gift of God. You can't bargain or beg for it. God gives it to whom He will Salieri, who is a good and virtuous man, thinks otherwise and that's the nature of his dilemma God won't grant him his sole ambition in life which is the opportunity to create music that reaches beyond him Instead He gives it to Mozart who is a foul, offensive, scatological little pig.

Too often we assume, Shaffer implies, that God automatically rewards virtue; we need an occasional reminder that this is untrue. God cannot be bargained with as Salieri attempted to do in offering to live a life of chastity in return for God's bestowing upon him a gift of artistic talent. Echoes of Andrea's complaint sound in Salieri's words, "All I ever wanted was to sing to God. Why did he give me that longing then make me mute?"

A major portion of the film demonstrates, then, that because Salieri was unable to reconcile "what God was up to" he "began to know violent thoughts." Here, more echoes of Andrea reverberate in Salieri's recognition of his own mediocrity and as his envy of true genius overwhelms him. It is in this looking back, reexamining, as he tells his story throughout the night ostensibly to the priest, but really to himself, that Salieri's "essential second voice" comes back to him. He sees the degree in which his obsessive envy of genius has affected his life, bringing him to an asylum for madness and attempted suicide. Langbaum describes the climax of Browning's monologues as the point where "the speaker reaches his apotheosis of perception." This describes exactly the conclusion of *Amadeus,* as well: having achieved his moment of godlike insight, Salieri is now capable of forgiving others of his sin and is wheeled through the corridors of the asylum, a patron saint proclaiming, "Mediocrities, I absolve you."

Source: Martha A Townsend, "*Amadeus* as Dramatic Monologue," in *Literature/Film Quarterly,* Vol 14, No. 4, 1986, pp. 214–219.

Dennis A. Klein

In the following essay, Klein examines Amadeus *as the third part of a trilogy which includes* The Royal Hunt of the Sun *and* Equus, *comparing common elements among the three dramas.*

In an article in the London *Observer,* Peter Shaffer wrote that three of his plays began as a mental image of the climactic scenes. The earliest play, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964), began as a picture of the Incas in a nighttime vigil, awaiting the resurrection of Atahuallpa. *Equus* (1973) began with the picture of a young man stabbing wildly at the eyes of a stableful of horses. *Amadeus* (1979) started as a vision of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, dying in his slum. It is not only the source of inspiration that the three plays share; they also share the common theme of the death of a god: the Sun-god of the Incas, the horse-god of Alan Strang, and Mozart, the god of music. This study will treat the themes, character types, structure, and techniques that the three plays have in common. Since *Amadeus* has not yet received the amount of critical attention that the other two plays have, here it will receive the most detailed treatment of the three.

All three plays are parallel in their structure. They have two acts, divided into short scenes and are narrated by a principal character. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* is narrated by Old Martín, once a page of the Spanish *conquistador* Pizarro, conqueror of the Incas of Peru; *Equus,* by Dr. Martin Dysart, a child psychiatrist in a provincial hospital in England; and *Amadeus,* by Antonio Salieri, court composer of Emperor Joseph II of Austria. All three men share a disillusionment with life Martín, when he was a boy worshipped Pizarro, who has long since betrayed his trust. Dr. Dysart's life is one of both physical and emotional sterility. Salieri's complaint is with God. He, a religious and virtuous man who desires more than anything else to be able to create Great Music, is betrayed by his Creator into being the only man alive able to appreciate the natural genius of Mozart, a foul-mouthed, infantile boor, whose middle name Amadeus means loved by God. In each play the action is continuous throughout and covers long periods of time; the major events take place in flashbacks.

Salieri uses the audience of *Amadeus* as his collective confessor. He summons the audience to witness his only performance of "The Death of Mozart or Did I Do It?" on what he thinks is the last night of his life. He confesses to having contributed to Mozart's early death through his petty dealings to ruin him professionally and financially, but stops short of claiming that he physically poisoned Mozart. From the night they met, Salieri lived in envy of Mozart's musical genius and devoted himself to Mozart's demise, even at the cost of his own values· dedication to the betterment of humanity and sexual virtue.

PLOTS, CHARACTERS, AND TECHNIQUES ARE ULTIMATELY ONLY MEANS TO AN END—THAT OF PROVIDING A THOUGHT-PROVOKING THEME PIZARRO'S STRUGGLE IS FOR WORSHIP AND IMMORTALITY, DYSART'S CRAVING IS FOR WORSHIP AND PASSION; AND SALIERI'S BATTLE IS AGAINST GOD FOR NOT HAVING BESTOWED ON HIM THE GIFT OF GENIUS THAT HE LAVISHED ON MOZART."

Salieri's lengthy monologues (the play is in fact a continuous monologue interrupted by scenes in flashback) parallel Shaffer's method in presenting Martin Dysart to the audience. Through his monologues, Dysart reveals his lack of passion in life and the envy that he feels for Alan Strang, whose obsession with horses led to his horrible crime. Dr. Dysart is the play's protagonist· it is he who struggles with an internal emptiness that fully manifests itself during the process of treating Alan Strang for his crime of passion against horses. Dysart has apparent outer conflicts and a far deeper personal one First, he must force Alan to cooperate so that he may find out the details that led up to his crime. Secondly, he must convince *himself* that he is doing Alan a service rather than a disservice by proceeding with the treatment which will turn him into another "normal" member of society. It is not easy for Dysart to convince himself, since he envies Alan his ability to worship, even if the object of his worship be horses, and his ability to feel passion, even if that passion ended in criminally psychotic behavior.

Like Salieri, Martín Ruiz narrates from the perspective of old age the events that took place in his youth between him and Pizarro and between Pizarro and Athuallpa. Unlike the other two narrators, he is not involved in the saga of Pizarro's conquest and envy of Athuallpa but rather is the victim of his own loss of faith in Pizarro. Martín trusted in Pizarro's humanity, much as Alan trusted in Dr. Dysart's and Mozart trusted in Salieri's.

The apparent conflict in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* is between Pizarro and Athuallpa, the Sun-god of the Incas. Both are historical figures, but the body of the play is based on a mere mention of their relationship in William Prescott's monumental *History of the Conquest of Peru.* The conflict exists on at least four levels. The simplest is that of Pizarro holding Athuallpa captive until the latter agrees that if Pizarro releases him he will not lay siege on the Spanish soldiers. Athuallpa can make no such promise after the massacre that the Spaniards perpetrated on his men. Outwardly, Pizarro is trying to find a solution to their impasse; internally, he is struggling with the need to live up to his word that he would not kill the Incan emperor if he could fulfill his promise of giving Pizarro the wealth of the Incan nation in gold and silver. Finally, there is a metaphysical conflict involving religion, faith, and envy. Pizarro has no real belief in Christianity and finds it ironic and brutal that: "To save my own soul I must kill another man!" The hole in the middle of Pizarro's life is his lack of faith, lack of any belief that would give meaning to his existence. He envies Athuallpa'a simple faith that his father is the Sun, that he is the Son of the Sun, and that after death he will be resurrected. Pizarro is unable to accept the parallel Christian doctrine. Athuallpa, who in many ways is Pizarro's soul brother, has no problem identifying Pizarro's problem and spelling it out to him: "Pizarro, you will die soon and you do not believe in your God. That is why you tremble and keep no word. Believe in me I will give you a word and fill you with joy."

Alan destroyed the horses, which had become his religion; Pizarro consented to the execution of Athuallpa, whose faith he admired; and similarly Salieri destroyed the composer, whom he believed was God's Voice on earth. The terms in which Salieri describes Mozart's music and its effects on him border on the zeal of a religious experience. The following is his description of Mozart's "Serenade for Thirteen Wind Instruments": "It started simply enough: just a pulse in the lowest registers—bassoons and basset horns—like a rusty squeezebox. . . And then suddenly, high above it, sounded a single note on the oboe. It hung there unwavering—piercing me through—till breath could hold it no longer, and a clarinet withdrew it out of me, and softened it into a phrase of such delight it had me trembling." This experience is not ony religious, it also verges on being sexual, just as are

Alan Strang's midnight encounters with his lover/god Equus: the object of his worship is also the object of his lust.

Plots, characters, and techniques are ultimately only means to an end—that of providing a thought-provoking theme. Pizarro's struggle is for worship and immortality, Dysart's craving is for worship and passion; and Salieri's battle is against God for not having bestowed on him the gift of genius that he lavished on Mozart. "I wanted . a fame that would precede me everywhere into the chambers of the Great!. . . I wanted to *blaze* like a comet across the firmament of Europe! And yet only in one especial way. Music." Salieri's attempts to secure immortality through his music are similar to but less successful than those of Pizarro to earn a permanent place in world history If Salieri did not earn a place in history for his music, he did so as a candidate as Mozart's assassin Salieri did not want genius just for its own sake; but as a means of praising the Lord; he wanted to use music to religious purpose:

> By twelve I was stumbling about in the countryside, humming my arias and anthems to the Lord My only desire was to join all the composers who had celebrated His glory through the long Italian past ' *Signore,* let me be a composer! Grant me sufficient fame to enjoy it In return I will live with virtue I will strive to better the lot of my fellow And I will honor you [*sic*] with much music all the days of my life '

To that end, Salieri prayed, and even bargained with God. You give me fame, and I'll give You sacred music. When Salieri's music never rose above the mediocre and Mozart's reached the level of the greatest of the century, Salieri declared war on God, "*Il nemico.* " Since Salieri viewed Mozart as God's vessel on earth, he decided to get even with God through Mozart: his battle was not *with* Mozart but *through* him. In the last analysis, the theme of *Amadeus* is the granting of godly gifts, just as *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*'s is the ability to believe and *Equus*'s is the ability to experience passion. All three are about a loss of faith in conventional religion and the destruction of the gods of the new religions.

A variety of lesser plot devices, character traits, and techniques stamp the three plays with Shaffer's inimitable trademark. In all three, the roles of the women are of little consequence. In *The Royal Hunt of the Sun,* only one woman appears and briefly at that. In *Equus,* there are Alan's mother, who makes a speech of justification for the way in which she reared her son; Hesther Salomon, the magistrate to whom Dysart unburdens himself; and Jill Mason, who first led Alan to horses and finally to the discovery of his impotence. The roles of the three characters are of secondary importance. Dysart's wife never appears on stage, and the picture of their marriage is presented only from his point of view· their marriage is one of convenience, but not of love. Pizarro speaks of the passion he once felt for women, but which is now just a part of his past. And Salieri admits that his "invention in love, as in art, has always been limited." The only woman who has a speaking part in *Amadeus* is Mozart's wife, Constanze, whom Salieri is tempted to seduce as the price of his furthering her husband's musical career. Brought on by hard financial times, the Mozarts' marriage is a battlefield, and Salieri's is without life: "I own a respectable house and a respectable wife—Teresa. . . I do not mock her, I assure you I require only one quality in a domestic companion—lack of fire. And in that omission Teresa was conspicuous." Negligible are the differences between the Salieris's and the sterile marriage of Dr. and Dr. Dysart: "Mind You, if you're kinky for Northern Hygenic [*sic*], as I am, you can't find anything much more compelling than a Scottish Lady Dentist." And in strong contrast to her first marriage to Mozart which had a certain buoyancy to it, Constanze's second marriage is to a Danish diplomat, who is described as being "as dull as a clock."

There are two techniques which prevail in all three plays, those of masks and of dreams. In *The Royal Hunt of the Sun,* the masks of the Incas are a part of the spectacle In *Equus,* Dysart dreams that he is a priest in ancient Greek, and that during the sacrifices of children that he performs he must wear a mask, something like the Mask of Agamemnon found at Mycenae Dr. Dysart, in his dream, must be careful that the mask not slip and reveal how sick the sacrifices he performs are making him. In addition to Dysart, the actors playing the horses wear stylized masks. Shaffer specifies that "Great care must be taken that the masks [be] put on before the audience with very precise timing—the actors watching each other, so that the masking [have] an exact and ceremonial efect." The meanest of Salieri's acts against Mozart is making him think that he is dying by leading him to believe that he is writing his own Requiem Mass. Each night Salieri dons a mask, the greyness of death itself: "To a fretted and exhausted mind he could well represent some fearful and even spectral emissary." Salieri haunted Mozart at every moment: "The figure appeared everywhere. . . I confess that for one entire week,

whilst he was writing *The Magic Flute* at night—his wife convalescing at Baden with a new baby—I would walk to Raubensteingasse in the moonlight. And precisely as the clocks of the city struck me, I would halt outside his window and be his more terrible clock." Each night Salieri would indicate that Mozart was one day closer to death. Salieri's cruelty coupled with the wine (which Mozart believed was poisoned) left for him anonymously each day, helped bring Mozart to his death.

In addition to the masks, dreams are also an important technique. In *The Royal Hunt of the Sun,* Pizarro tells that he dreamed of Athuallpa every night until finally they met; the content of Dr. Dysart's dream appears above. The published version of *Amadeus* (based on the London production) makes no reference to a dream, but the revised version as presented in New York does In its final form, Shaffer has the mysterious figure appear to Mozart in a dream, and when Salieri learns of the dream he decides on his final torment of the young composer.

Fathers and sons have been alienated from each other in Shaffer's works since his 1957 radio play, *"The Prodigal Father,"* and his first successful stage play, *Five Finger Exercise.* Such is the situation in this dramatic trilogy. Pizarro's case is the most extreme: he was illigitimate and never knew who his father was. Like Stanley Harrington in *Five Finger Exercise,* Frank Strang in *Equus* believes that his wife has driven a wedge between him and his son. Louise Harrington used the arts (and psychological intimidation) to keep her son Clive on "her side." Dora Strang used the Bible, which is as distasteful to her husband as music and theatre are incomprehensible to Stanley. According to Count Franz Orsini-Rosemberg, the Director of the Imperial Opera, Mozart's father was "a bad-tempered Salzburg musician who dragged the boy endlessly round Europe. . ." (Furthermore, Wolfgang criticizes his father for kissing the ring of the "Fartsbishop" of Salzburg.) Mozart's adult relationship with his father was far from ideal. The young man had to risk losing his father and his inheritance when he decided to marry Constanze Weber, And she always hated the senior Mozart for having turned his son into an emotional cripple, a perpetual child. His immaturity is most clearly manifested in the games he played with Constanze, some of an innocent, verbal nature, and others more risqué. On the night Salieri saw Mozart for the first time, Mozart was on the floor with Constanze at the library of the Baroness Waldstädten and saying to his intended· "I'm going to pounce-bounce! I'm going to scrunch-munch! I'm going to chew-poo my little mouse-wouse! I'm going to tear her to bits with my paws-claws!. . I think you're frightened of puss-wuss. . . I think you're going to sh—t yourself." He later gives cries of pleasure when his wife whacks him with a ruler and playfully begs her to "Do it again! I cast myself at your stinking feet, Madonna!". Although Shaffer insists that the information in his play is factual, it was after all the playwright's decision of which material to include.

Many of Shaffer's works fall into the category of being a part of a trilogy There is, for example, the musical trilogy, composed of *Five Finger Exercise, The Private Ear,* and *Amadeus,* in which the theme of music becomes increasingly more important from its point of departure in the first play to its more overt use in the plot of the second, and finally as the very subject on which *Amadeus,* sub-titled "a black opera," is created. There is the historical/epic trilogy in which *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Amadeus* are joined by "The Salt Land," about the immigration of Jews to Israel after the Second World War. There is a lesser trilogy on the themes of truth and identity in *Black Comedy, White Lies,* and *The White Liars.* Shaffer wrote on the rebellion of children against their parents in three plays: *Five Finger Exercise, Equus,* and *Shrivings;* and on philosophical inquiry in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Shrivings,* and *Amadeus.*

A myriad of small touches links *Amadeus* to other works in Shaffer's dramatic *oeuvre.* In three of his plays, the lives of the characters are determined by the introduction of an intruder into their little worlds. The Harringtons of *Five Finger Exercise* are forever changed after Walter Langer settles in with the family as daughter Pamela's tutor. The hopes and illusions of the residents of *Shrivings* are destroyed after Mark Askelon spends a weekend with them. And even before they met, Salieri knew that Mozart's arrival on the musical scene in Vienna would forever upset his life: "From the start I was alarmed by Mozart's coming. . . So to the Baroness Waldstadten's I went [to meet Mozart]. That night changed my life." At the palace Salieri played a spiritless, little march that he had written in honor of Mozart's arrival at the Austrian court. Mozart asked if he might toy with the piece of music at the piano. Through his reworking of it—with acting that becomes more and more exhibitionistic—Mozart turned the drab original into the model of what eventually became the march "Non più andrai" from *The Marriage of Figaro.* And Salieri reacted: "Was it

then—so early—that I began to have thoughts of murder?'' Not only Salieri but also Count Orsini-Rosemberg felt threatened by Mozart: ''He [Mozart] was a child prodigy. That always spells trouble... All prodigies are hateful—*non è vero, Compositore* [Salieri]?''

If there is one lesson—one message—that dominates above all others in Shaffer's work, it is that of the importance of passion in one's life, the lack of which renders life empty and meaningless In three plays the theme of passion, and the lack thereof, is towering: *Equus, Shrivings,* and *Amadeus* The theme is most dramatically and convincingly portrayed in *Equus,* in which the emotionally impotent psychiatrist falls into a fit of envy of his severely psychotic patient To Dysart, Alan's crime is less important than the fact that the boy had known ecstasy. In *Shrivings* (in many ways a companion piece to *Equus*), philosopher Gideon Petrie's dedication to social causes is contrasted with the emotional sterility of poet Mark Askelon, who, even as a youth envied one and all who could feel excitement *Amadeus* completes the passionate trilogy, again by contrasting its presence and its absence. Salieri contrasts his discipline with Beethoven's lack of it Salieri is proud that for fifty-seven years he has been using the same carpet, but that Beethoven has worn out one carpet for each symphony. What he fails to mention is that there is passion in Beethoven's music which is lacking in his own As Mozart describes Salieri's music. ''That's the sound of someone who can't get it up ''

Mozart's unfounded charges of Salieri's impotence (he did have an affair with one of his students) recalls the situations in both *Equus* and *Shrivings.* Dysart never mentions impotence, but does acknowledge his sterility and the fact that he has not even *kissed* his wife in six years. Alan's impotence when he attempts having sex with Jill, is the immediate cause for his blinding of the horses. Gideon Petrie's young secretary Lois insists that the only reason her employer renounced sex was because ''It's easy to be chaste when you've got no cock, Giddy.'' The one real passion that Salieri does have is for pastry: *''He turns to the cake stand with a reverence akin to lust—hesitates for a delicious second about which pastry to take—and finally selects a custard. In deep silence, punctuated only by a little moan of ecstasy, the old man devours it. His body shudders with pleasure ''*

There is a trilogy of secrecy among *The public Eye* (the companion piece of *The Private Ear*), *Equus,* and *Amadeus.* The husbands in both *The Public Eye* and *Equus* lead private sexual lives away from their wives: Charles Sidley (*The Public Eye*) with a prostitute, and Frank Strang at an adult cinema. Salieri is known to his valet, Greybig, as ''Secret Salieri,'' since his whole demeanor is secretive, especially his plot to ruin Mozart both professionally and personally. The most clandestine acts are Alan's wild, midnight rides on Equus, one night every three weeks.

Amadeus bears other strong resemblances to *Equus.* The technique of the ''Equus Noise,'' (a choric effect which heralds the presence of Equus the God) is paralled by the presence of two Venticelli (Little Winds), who go about Vienna collecting bits of gossip for Salieri. Also there are ''stage whispers'' that fill the theatre with a snake-like hissing of Salieri's name.

Amadeus is closely aligned not only with *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Equus,* but also with *Shrivings,* in its sexual elements, its anti-Catholic sentiments, and its anti-patriotic spirit. Gideon revealed that. ''When I was young, I had as they say sex on the brain .. Sex was everywhere. A girl's hair bobbing down the street. The sudden fur of a boy's neck. The twitching lope of a red setter dog In flowers, even—the smell of cow parsley in a field of poppies would almost make me faint.'' How similar Gideon's description is to that of the effect of music on Salieri—a reference that strongly hints at sexual release· ''Already when I was ten a spray of sounded notes could make me dizzy—quite literally—almost to falling down.'' His reaction to Mozart's wind serenade was equally as paralysing.

After declaring God his Enemy, Salieri becomes irreverant with a decided bitterness toward the Catholic Church. He refers to a Patron Saint of Stomach Aches; to himself as the Patron Saint of Mediocritics; to his religion, as being based largely on waxworks; and especially to the ''God of Bargains''.

> Every Sunday I saw Him in Church, staring down at me from the mouldering wall Understand I don't mean Christ. The Christs of Lombardy are simpering sillies with lambkins on their sleeves No, I mean an old candle-smoked God on a mulberry robe, staring at the world with dealers' eyes Tradesmen had put Him up there Those eyes made bargains—real and irreversible. You give me so—I'll give you so No more· no less

This description is reminiscent of *Shriving*'s Lois, whose childhood was dominated by ''a beautiful plastic Jesus... It had these great ruby tears on

its face and I'd have to pray to it before turning out the light: 'Dear Lord, make me a Good Catholic and a Good American. Amen!'" The resentment that Lois implies in good citizenship, Gideon states unequivocally: "Country can be a mental prison, and patriotism an apes adrenalin." And so does Salieri, the limit of whose patriotic feelings for Italy are limited to his enjoyment of Lombardy's sweetmeats.

Amadeus ends with a memorial tribute to Mozart through his funeral music; with Salieri's lapse into anonymity, save for the rumor that he started that he in fact poisoned Mozart (Shaffer deliberately leaves the question unresolved); and Salieri's absolution of the mediocritics of the world. One of the beauties of Peter Shaffer's theatre is the relationship among his plays; with each new play Shaffer's concerns are repeated, but they become broader, their treatment deeper *Amadeus* not only completes the trilogy which includes *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Equus,* but brings to a full circle the themes and techniques that he set down in 1958 in his first play, *Five Finger Exercise.*

Source: Dennis A Klein, "*Amadeus.* The Third Part of Peter Shaffer's Dramatic Trilogy," in *Modern Language Studies,* Vol XIII, No. 1, Winter 1983, pp 31–38.

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