

# Amadeus Study Guide

## Amadeus by Peter Shaffer

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# Contents

<a href="#">Amadeus Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Introduction.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Author Biography.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Act 1, Part 1.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Act 1, Part 2.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Act 1, Part 3.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Act 1, Part 4.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Act 1, Part 5.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Act 2, Part 1.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Act 2, Part 2.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Act 2, Part 3.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Act 2, Part 4.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Act 2, Part 5.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">60</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">62</a>
<a href="#">Historical Context.....</a>	<a href="#">64</a>
<a href="#">Critical Overview.....</a>	<a href="#">66</a>
<a href="#">Criticism.....</a>	<a href="#">68</a>
<a href="#">Critical Essay #1.....</a>	<a href="#">69</a>
<a href="#">Critical Essay #2.....</a>	<a href="#">72</a>
<a href="#">Critical Essay #3.....</a>	<a href="#">75</a>
<a href="#">Adaptations.....</a>	<a href="#">76</a>



Topics for Further Study..... 77

Compare and Contrast..... 78

What Do I Read Next?..... 79

Further Study..... 80

Bibliography..... 81

Copyright Information..... 82

# Introduction

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 bookshop 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. Tins 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 I

*Amadeus* opens with "savage whispers" that fill the theater. The citizens of Vienna in 1823 has 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 Schonbrunn, 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!" 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 show 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.

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".



# Act 1, Part 1

## Act 1, Part 1 Summary

As the play begins, whispers fill the theatre. At first, individual words can't be made out, but after a few moments, two words stand out: "Salieri" and "assassin." As a chorus of nineteenth century "Citizens of Vienna" fill the stage (giving the impression of people *gossiping*), we become able to see an old man, sitting in a wheelchair with his back to us.

Two men hurry on. The men are the Venticelli (an Italian word meaning "little winds"), characters who both narrate, and participate in the action. Speaking loudly enough to be heard over the whispers, they discuss the subject of the gossip: the old and reclusive composer Salieri, who is thought to be dying and who apparently cries out at night that he killed Mozart, the famous composer. The Venticelli identify Salieri's two servants as the source of the rumor, and ask them repeatedly to confirm it and add more details. The Venticelli become more insistent, the whispers become louder, the servants say nothing, and just when both the whispers and the Venticelli's curiosity are at their most intense, Salieri (the old man in the wheelchair) suddenly shouts out Mozart's name!

Everything is silent for a moment, but then the whispering begins again, the Venticelli continue to gossip, and Salieri speaks in Italian, asking for mercy. The Venticelli mention that there had been rumors when Mozart died that he had been poisoned, wonder if it's possible that those rumors are true, and whether it's even believable that Salieri was behind it. When Salieri cries out again, asking for pardon for his sins from Mozart, the noise *climaxes* in the loudly whispered name of Salieri. The "Citizens of Vienna" leave, the Venticelli quickly follow, and Salieri is left alone.

Salieri wheels his chair around and addresses the audience in Italian, introducing himself and placing himself "at [our] service." Switching to English, he addresses us as "Ghosts of the Future" and his "Confessors." The man invites us to keep him company through this last night of his life. Salieri sits at a piano and plays an Invocation in order to make the "ghosts" appear. Lights come up and make us (the "ghosts") visible to him.

Salieri continues to address us, explaining that he was taught the art of Invocation (among other things) by the composer Gluck, "who was a true Master." Then he goes to a display of sweets, and tells us that the first sin he must confess to is the sin of Gluttony (loving food and drink too much). As he munches on some of the sweets, he tells us about the sweets he remembers from his childhood, which leads him to reminisce about the town where he grew up: the "tiny town of Legnago" in Italy "which [he] could not wait to leave." Salieri tells us his idea of how the people of Legnago viewed God: "all they asked ...of God was to keep them forever unnoticed – preserved in mediocrity," and that that from the time he was a child he knew he was different: he knew he wanted more than to be noticed, he wanted *fame*. Salieri also knew that he wanted it through music, which he describes as "God's art." In vivid, poetic language he



describes how ecstatic music makes him feel, and how he promised that if God made him a famous composer, he would be virtuous, chaste, work to improve the lives of his fellow men, and worship God through music. The man recounts how he heard God speak to him and agree to the bargain, and how the next day "a family friend suddenly appeared ... took [him] off to Vienna and paid for [him] to study music." Then he tells how he rose quickly to power in the court of the Emperor of Austria, and that at the same time, an immensely talented child musician named Mozart was touring Europe. Salieri then smiles at us and announces "for one performance only – [his] last composition, entitled *The Death of Mozart*, or *Did [he] Do It?*" Then he transforms into the younger Salieri, and the set transforms into the Viennese Court.

## Act 1, Part 1 Analysis

This play is based on actual historical events and people: there was a Mozart and a Salieri, and in reality, they had a relationship similar to the one explored in this story. It's *not necessarily true* that Salieri actually acted to destroy Mozart in the way that he does in the play. This is an example of *dramatic license*, or using imagination to build on historical facts to tell a story and illustrate a *theme*.

This scene serves as a *prologue* to the main story, laying the groundwork for several key aspects to the play. It sets up Salieri as the central character, and that the play is going to be a story told by him about his relationship with Mozart; it introduces us to *language* being used in a more *poetic* way than in everyday speech; and it introduces several *conventions*, or ways in which the story is going to be told.

These *conventions* include *narration* by both the Venticelli and Salieri; a *chorus* similar to the chorus in Ancient Greek plays, which was made up of several actors sharing the reactions of *a single character*; and *transitioning*, how the action moves between scenes. In this play the *narration* both *tells* the story and *illuminates* it; the *chorus comments* and *offers opinions* on both the story and the central character of Salieri; and *transitions* move *fluidly* from scene to scene, meaning that there are no *breaks* or *blackouts* between the scenes. More *conventions* (such as the use of music) will become part of the action.

Most importantly, the prologue sets up the play's *central question*, its *conflicts* and its *theme*. The *question* is, as Salieri suggests, is whether he destroyed Mozart. The *conflicts* are between Salieri, Mozart (who's the better composer?), Salieri, and God (will they both live up to their sides of their "bargain." The *theme* has several facets related to Salieri's relationship with God: what is the Voice of God? How do we hear it? How do we know the difference between the Voice of God and our own human desires? How do we *act* on what the Voice of God asks us to do?" Themes such as these, relating to the relationship between God and humanity, are often described as *epic* in nature, in that they deal with larger questions of human existence.



Finally, the prologue *foreshadows* the play's conclusion. By saying that this is the last night of his life, Salieri indicates that at some point, his death is going to become part of the action.

All of these aspects to the *prologue* – language, convention, and the epic nature of the theme - indicate we're witnessing *intensely theatrical* storytelling, making it very different from the kind of storytelling found in novels or movies.



# Act 1, Part 2

## Act 1, Part 2 Summary

Salieri, now with the clothes and energy of a much younger man, tells us we're now in Vienna in 1781, and introduces several other characters. Starting with the women in his life, he introduces his calm and supportive wife Teresa (who is in the play as a non-speaking presence) and his student Katherina (also non-speaking). Salieri then speaks of being tempted by Katherina's sensuality, but tells us his vow to God kept him from breaking his vows of fidelity to his wife. The man also tells us that at the time, his prime ambition was to become "First Royal Kappellmeister," or music master, but the Kappellmeister of the Time (Kapellmeister Bonno) was seventy years old and "apparently immortal." Salieri speaks at length about how composers treated their work and their music at the time, saying that the idea was to immortalize and "celebrate men's average lives" and "mediocrity," that he was good at it, and wonders who will immortalize *the audience's* mediocrity.

The Venticelli rush on (in their role as Salieri's spies) and give him news that Mozart is in Vienna, comment on how much he composed as a child, mention that he's twenty five, and that he's in Vienna "to stay." This blends into the next scene, a conversation between Salieri and several high officials of the Court of Vienna whom Salieri introduces to us: Von Strack, the Court Chamberlain (or Chief Administrator); Count Orsini-Rosenberg, Director of the Opera; and Baron Van Swieten, head of the Imperial Library. As the men discuss a new opera to be written in German for the Emperor, they also discuss Mozart, whom Salieri says must write the new opera. Rosenberg dislikes the idea intensely, describing Mozart's music as having "too many notes," calling him "hateful," and predicting they will have trouble with him. As Rosenberg and Von Strack leave, Van Swieten and Salieri have a conversation in which Van Swieten invites Salieri to join the Masons. Salieri expresses his gratitude, and when Van Swieten leaves, turns to the audience and explains that "every man of influence in Vienna was a Mason." Salieri also says that he was worried by Mozart's arrival, saying that Mozart was "praised altogether too much." The Venticelli rush back on with exactly the words of praise that Salieri was talking about, saying that Mozart lodges with a Madame Weber, was involved with one of her daughters, dumped her, and became engaged to *another* daughter. Salieri tells the Venticelli he wants to meet Mozart, and they tell him he will be at the home of a Baroness the following evening, where he will play some of his music. Salieri tells us that he went to the Baroness's, and that "that night changed [his] life."

## Act 1, Part 2 Analysis

In this brief scene, several elements that later become essential to the plot are introduced.



The three court officials each play important roles in the various advancements and downturns in the careers of both Mozart and Salieri; Salieri's interest in Katherina later plays an important role both in his relationships with Mozart and Mozart's wife *and* in Salieri's own *moral downfall*; the mention of the Masons *foreshadows* Mozart's invitation to join and his use of some of their traditions in his compositions.

The Masons were, and are, a men-only organization that publicly put a lot of time and energy into bettering society. In private, they practice rituals and ceremonies that have been in place for hundreds of years and which remain both practiced and secret today. At the time of the play, it was a social advantage to be known as a member of the Masons, which makes Mozart's use of their rituals as a *basis* for some of the action in *The Magic Flute* (as we discover he did later in the play) even more of a betrayal. The mention of the Masons at this point is also the *first step* in the *set-up* for Salieri's final act of destruction against Mozart in the last part of the play.

Salieri's reference to immortalizing mediocrity is the first stage of his *journey of transformation*. It's an *archetypal* or *fundamental* journey in both *dramatic* and *literary* story telling: a character starts out from a place of *certainty*, finds that *certainty* *challenged*, and makes *discoveries*, which lead him to *change*. In the case of Salieri, at this point Salieri is *certain* what music is for (immortalizing mediocrity; starting in the next scene (when he hears Mozart's music for the first time), that *certainty* is *challenged*, and Salieri begins to *wonder* what music is *for*, whether it's the voice of God or the voice of man. When Salieri *discovers* that his music is *not* the voice of God but Mozart's music *is*, Salieri *changes*: his love of God and his vows to serve Him become *hatred* of God and vows to *destroy* Him. This makes Salieri's *journey of transformation* a complete *dramatization* of the play's *theme*.



# Act 1, Part 3

## Act 1, Part 3 Summary

This scene introduces us to Mozart and his wife-to-be, Constanze. At the home of the Baroness, Salieri tells us that she always kept sweets for him, and as he sat concealed in a chair eating his *favorite*, Mozart and Constanze rush in and play out the scene as introduced by Salieri. The couple plays a game of tag, making cat-and-mouse noises and telling crude jokes. When Mozart mentions marriage, Constanze says that Mozart's father will never agree to it. Mozart suddenly becomes angry and defiant. When Constanze imitates his father's voice and judgments, Mozart asks her to marry him and makes a crude comment about defying his father. At that moment one of the Baroness' servants comes in and tells Mozart the Baroness is ready for music. Embarrassed at being discovered on the floor, Mozart and Constanze go in to the Baroness, leaving Salieri alone in his chair.

Salieri narrates what happens to him as a small orchestra plays a Mozart composition. Salieri feels the beauty of the music physically, and describes his sensations in poetic language, until he feels it as an intense pain and has to rush out of the room. Then he runs through the streets, shouting out to God "What? What is this? ... What is this *pain!*?" Salieri tells us that he began to believe that he had heard the voice of God, "and that it issued from a creature [with] the voice of an obscene child!"

Salieri tells of how he immediately buried himself in work: more pupils, more committee work, more compositions praising God, praying all the while for God to allow His voice to speak through him and not Mozart. Then Salieri tells how he sent the Venticelli out to collect as many of Mozart's scores as they could, and when the Venticelli come back with compositions that Salieri describes as "conventional," "empty," and "boring," Salieri tells us he was relieved and even "cheered." Salieri comes to believe that the beauty of that first composition was an accident "which might visit any composer on a lucky day." Salieri resolved to find Mozart and welcome him to Vienna.

## Act 1, Part 3 Analysis

This short scene is extremely important to the play for two main reasons. First, it introduces us to Mozart, and although he's on stage for a relatively short amount of time at this point, his character is immediately revealed: he's immature, playful, childlike, and emotionally extreme. This sets him up in vivid *contrast* to Salieri, who is mature, sedate, very adult, and emotionally quite controlled.

Secondly, and perhaps *more* importantly, the action of the scene begins the *dramatic* and *thematic conflict*. Salieri hears what he calls "the voice of God" in Mozart's music for the first time, which makes him question everything he believed about himself, his work, and his relationship with God. This is the first scene of *challenge* or *wondering* in

Salieri's journey towards *transformation*, initiating *both* the conflict between Salieri and Mozart, and Salieri and God. Salieri's relief that some of Mozart's other compositions aren't as good as the one he heard at the home of the Baroness is *ironic*, in that we know Mozart's work is only going to get better and that Salieri is fooling himself.





# Act 1, Part 4

## Act 1, Part 4 Summary

The scene changes to the Austrian Imperial Palace, where the Emperor excitedly awaits Mozart's arrival. Salieri tells him he's composed "a little march in Mozart's honor," and asks permission to play it when Mozart comes in. The Emperor happily agrees, and sends Von Strack to bring Mozart in at once. While he's waiting, the Emperor wonders about the possibility of having a competition: "Mozart against some other virtuoso."

When Mozart appears, Salieri plays his March of Welcome, and Mozart greets the Emperor with an extravagant bow and excessive hand kissing. Embarrassed, the Emperor tells him to get up, recalling that the last time he and Mozart met, Mozart was six years old and also on the floor. Mozart giggles (he has a unique, almost irritating laugh), and to cover his embarrassment, the Emperor introduces him to Von Strack, Van Swieten, Rosenberg, and finally Salieri, who greets Mozart in Italian and presents him with a copy of the March of Welcome. Mozart thanks him in Italian and bows extravagantly.

The Emperor asks Mozart whether he has received the commission for the opera. Mozart surprises him and the others with the news that not only has he received it, he has already found a *libretto* (script and lyrics for the songs). Rosenberg protests that as director of the opera he should have been informed, but Mozart says, "it didn't seem very important" to him to do so, and tells them (with his trademark giggle) that the opera will be set in a harem. When Rosenberg protests that it's not an appropriate subject for a National Theatre, Mozart says there's nothing offensive about it but rather it's a story of love, real "manly love ... not male sopranos screeching or stupid couples rolling their eyes." Unaware that the other men are quite bothered by the idea, the Emperor asks when Mozart will be finished. Mozart says the first act is already finished, and when the Emperor comments that it can't be more than two weeks since he started, Mozart replies that "Composing is not hard when you have the right audience to please." The Emperor, very impressed, bids Mozart farewell in French, which Mozart answers with a flood of French of his own. The Emperor, Von Strack, Van Swieten, and Rosenberg all leave.

Salieri wishes Mozart luck with the opera. Mozart tells him he's already found an excellent soprano for the lead - Salieri's student Katherina. Salieri has an *aside* to the audience, where he explains that even though he had "kept his hands off Katherina" he couldn't stand the thought of anyone *else* touching her, especially Mozart. When he goes back to the conversation, Mozart calls the March of Welcome a "jolly little thing," and tries to play it from memory. Mozart does, perfectly, and then starts *changing* it, making it better and turning it into a famous piece of music from the opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. As Salieri watches, Mozart's playing and revisions of the March become more extravagant until he finishes with "triumphant flourishes and chords!"



In the silence that follows, Salieri excuses himself. When Mozart asks *him* to try a variation, Salieri tells him that he must go attend to the Emperor. Mozart picks up the score for the march and leaves. Salieri addresses the audience, wondering if it was *that moment* when he began to contemplate killing Mozart. Salieri answers himself that he did not want to kill him in life, but he *did* decide to kill him in *art*, and contemplates an opera about a Greek hero, chained forever to a rock and repeatedly struck by lightning. Salieri imagines Mozart in that position, but says that he was in no *real* danger ... "not yet."

This scene blends in with the first night performance of *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, the opera set in a harem. Mozart appears in a flashy coat and "conducts" from the piano as Salieri comments on the music, describing it as "showy." Salieri refers particularly to the aria that Mozart composed for Katherina, saying that it was all scales and fancy singing, exactly "what might be demanded by a foolish young soprano," and adds that he knows *exactly* what Mozart asked for in return - sex. As the "performance" finishes, Katherina and Constanze rush on, excited and happy. Mozart presents Constanze to the Emperor, who calls the opera "a good effort" and "interesting." Rosenberg puts in that there are too many notes, and the Emperor agrees. Mozart protests, but when the Emperor asks Salieri for *his* opinion, Salieri reluctantly agrees. Mozart protests that there are exactly as many notes as is needed. The Emperor suddenly leaves, followed by Rosenberg Strack, and the others.

Mozart asks Salieri if he thinks the Emperor is angry. Salieri tells him no, and that the Emperor respects his views. Mozart asks for Salieri's opinion, and Salieri describes the opera as charming but occasionally excessive and goes on to refer to a piece of advice given to him by his teacher, Gluck, about being careful of creating music that puts too much attention on the cleverness of the *composer* rather than on the music itself. Mozart makes an extremely crude comment about Gluck's work, and when Constanze tries to keep him quiet, he goes on and indirectly insults Salieri. When Salieri comments on the insult, Mozart immediately apologizes. Salieri appears to let the insult go, and asks to be introduced to Constanze.

Mozart and Constanze tell him the difficulties they face in getting married, in particular, resistance from Mozart's domineering father. When Salieri tells them that because Mozart is twenty-six he no longer has to obey his father, Constanze is delighted – but Mozart is still concerned. Salieri advises them to "marry and be happy" and bids them good night. As Mozart and Constanze leave, Salieri tells the audience that at that moment he thought about seducing Constanze in revenge for Mozart seducing Katherina, but decided that to do so would be an "abomination."

After a sudden transition, the Venticelli appear and announce that Mozart and Constanze have married and set up house, but are struggling financially. Mozart is having difficulty getting pupils because of his emotional unpredictability and because he makes enemies.

Another transition moves into a scene that illustrates this point: Mozart, drunk on wine, complains loudly, crudely and viciously to Von Strack about his lack of pupils, the



influence of the aged Kapellmeister Bonno and Salieri, and the lack of adventure or innovation in the music at court. Rosenberg appears, and suggests it's time for Mozart to retire for the night, but Mozart ignores him, going on to make a rude comment about the Emperor. Mozart immediately apologizes, but it's too late. Von Strack is offended and leaves. Rosenberg turns to go as well, but Mozart grabs him and begs for his help. One of the Emperor's daughters needs a music instructor, and Mozart both needs and wants the job. Mozart begs Rosenberg to put in a good word for him, but Rosenberg says that the decision is up to Salieri and leaves. Mozart defiantly calls after him: "Do you know I am better than any musician in Vienna?" Mozart complains about the way the small group of advisors to the Emperor run everything in the court, sings a very crude song, and leaves. Salieri, who has been watching the whole scene, tells us that "barely one month later, that thought of revenge became more than thought."

## Act 1, Part 4 Analysis

This scene is full of demonstrations of just how extraordinary a human being Mozart is, contrasting *positive* and *negative* aspects of his character. Mozart shows that he can speak several languages fluently at the same time while being embarrassingly flattering; he shows that he's willing to look at music and opera in new ways, while being completely unaware that he's offending the very people who can advance his career the most and most importantly for the plot, he displays what a brilliant musician he is (when he improvises the variation on Salieri's march) at the same time he's being extremely insulting (by not being sensitive about how Salieri might feel about that).

This scene also contains the first incident leading to Salieri's eventual *destruction* of Mozart, even though Salieri doesn't *necessarily* do it deliberately by advising Mozart and Constanze to marry without the agreement of Mozart's father. Mozart's concerns about how his father will react *foreshadow* three later aspects of the play - the intensity of grief Mozart experiences when he hears about his father's death, the appearance of the father figure/ghost as Mozart composes *Don Giovanni* later in the play, and the way in which Salieri becomes a father figure to Mozart, dominating him in the same way as his *real* father. Another piece of *foreshadowing* comes when Salieri thinks about seducing Constanze, an idea he rejects in *this* scene but embraces later in the play.

The Emperor's idea of a competition, and the way the idea is immediately dismissed, are *ironic* because there already *is* a competition between Salieri and Mozart. It's just that we know it and they don't.

Another theatrical *convention* appears in this scene with the use of an *aside*, a term for when a character breaks out of a scene to make a comment to the audience then goes back *into* the scene. In this case, Salieri breaks out of his scene with Mozart to tell us his reaction to Mozart's relationship with Katherina.

The final moments of this scene, with Mozart begging Rosenberg to put in a good word to the Emperor, move the plot closer the next point of *change* along Salieri's *journey of transformation* - his attempted seduction of Constanze.



# Act 1, Part 5

## Act 1, Part 5 Summary

Back in the home of the Baroness at another musical evening, Salieri sits in his usual chair eating his usual sweets as Constanze and the Venticelli play a sexy game. As part of the game, the Venticelli ask to measure Constanze's calves. Constanze pretends to protest, but the Venticelli insist, and finally Constanze gets up on a table so they can measure. As Salieri excitedly watches, one Venticelli holds her ankles while the other gets out a ruler and starts measuring, then sticks his head under her skirts. At this moment, Mozart comes in and reacts with outrage, demanding that the Venticelli leave (they do) and telling Constanze she has just ruined *both* their reputations. Constanze tells him that *he's* done more to ruin his reputation by having sex with every female pupil he's had than she has. Constanze compares his number of pupils to Salieri's, saying that Salieri has more because he doesn't sleep with them. Mozart says that that's because he *can't* have sex with them, and that Salieri's music is the music of someone unable to have sex at all. Constanze bursts into tears, Mozart apologizes, and tries to tease her into not being angry again. Mozart starts to play a rhyming game with her and begs her to beat him with the ruler as punishment for making her cry. Constanze remains angry for a long time, but the rhyming game wins her over and she starts spanking him playfully. As their laughter gets louder and louder, Salieri can't take it any more and cries out from his chair.

As Mozart and Constanze calm themselves down, Salieri pretends that his cry was the result of a nightmare and that he's just woken up. When Constanze tells him that she and Mozart have been quarreling, Salieri sends Mozart into the next room to fetch sweets for them all as an apology. Mozart bows and leaves.

Constanze takes the opportunity of being alone with Salieri to ask him for help in getting a position at court for Mozart □ specifically, the job of music teacher to the princess. Salieri invites her to discuss the issue at his home the next day. Concerned about her reputation, Constanze at first refuses, but Salieri tells her that it's "in his interests." Constanze doesn't answer, but smiles and runs off. Salieri turns to us and wonders whether she'll turn up, and what it means to his vows of chastity and compassion for his fellow man if she does.

As Salieri continues the scene changes to his home. Salieri tells us that the next afternoon he waited anxiously for Constanze to arrive and she does, at exactly the time Salieri proposed, saying that she's nervous about what would happen if Mozart found out because "he's a very jealous man." Salieri asks her to sit, and tells her she's looking very pretty. Constanze shows him some of Mozart's manuscripts which she's brought to prove he's worthy of a job at court. Salieri offers her sweets with a suggestive name, and as she eats them and enjoys them, Salieri tells her that his wife is away visiting her mother. As Constanze realizes what Salieri is doing, he tells her that one word to the Emperor would get Mozart the job, suggests that "service of that sort deserves a little



recompense in return," and starts by proposing a kiss. Constanze kisses him □ he hints that another one would help even more □ she kisses him again □ but when *he* tries to kiss *her*, she tells him that's enough. Salieri tells her it's "small pay to secure a post every musician in Vienna is hoping for." It finally becomes clear to Constanze just what Salieri wants, and she gets up to go. Salieri hurriedly explains that he's "a clumsy man," and that she is so pretty and so charming that he hoped she "might spare [him] one coin of tenderness [her] rich husband does not need." Constanze tries the same crude playfulness on *him* as she uses on Mozart and actually goes to smack his bottom, but he yells at her furiously, calling her a "silly, common girl."

In the silence that follows, Salieri becomes coldly calm, and tells Constanze that the princess needs a teacher in vocal music as well as piano, that he's not convinced Mozart is the right man for the job, but that he'll look at the music she brought to make sure. Salieri tells her he will study the music overnight □ and that *she* will study his proposal. Constanze leaves, and Salieri turns to the audience, angry with himself for participating in something so low, and shouting that it's all Mozart's fault. Then he rips open the scores to study them, and music begins to fill the theatre (the music that Salieri's reading).

As he reads the scores, he tells us that the scores and the music are both perfect, and realizes that the beauty of Mozart's earlier composition (the one he heard in the Baroness' living room) wasn't an accident at all, that he's looking at Absolute Beauty. The music fills the theatre and builds to an explosive climax as Salieri falls to the floor.

As he slowly climbs to his feet, Salieri calls out to God his feelings of betrayal, frustration, and resentment that Mozart, "a giggling child," can transcribe the voice of God while he, Salieri, who has been given "perception of the incomparable, which most men never know □ would know [himself] forever mediocre. WHY?" Salieri's anger builds and his language gets cruder and more intense until finally he vows that he will now look upon God as his enemy, and that "to [his] last breath [he] shall block [God] on earth as far as [he is] able!"

Suddenly, his anger released, Salieri becomes the old man he was at the beginning of the play. Salieri tells us that before he reveals what happened next, he must take care of the needs of his bladder. Then he promises to reveal the truth about the war he fought with God □ "in the waging of which, of course, [Mozart] had to be destroyed."

## Act 1, Part 5 Analysis

The rules of society and fashion of the time restricted the amount of skin that a woman could show in public. As a result, the game that Constanze plays with the Venticelli is extremely daring, and Mozart's reaction is valid. It's also *ironic*, in that Mozart appears to be more concerned with Constanze's behavior and its affect on his reputation than he is about his *own* behavior. In other words, Constanze's reaction to Mozart's reaction is *also* entirely valid.



On one level, Salieri's shout that breaks up the game between Mozart and Constanze may be the result of genuine moral anger. On the other hand, given that Salieri's moral decline has already begun (with his thinking about seducing Constanze earlier), it's perhaps more likely it is a cry of frustration that he's *unable* to be as playful as Mozart. In other words, it's a different aspect to Salieri's growing *jealousy* of Mozart, not just because of Mozart's music but also because of Mozart's free spirited-ness. Is this free-spiritedness part of the reason that Mozart's music is "the voice of God," while Salieri's emotional and moral rigidity is part of the reason that *his* music *isn't*? The play never really addresses this question, but it may be possible.

When she reveals that she knows about Mozart's affairs with his pupils, Constanze reveals herself to be wiser and more worldly than we thought. Up to now, she's come across as playful and sexy, but not much more. Now, though, we understand that *she understands* a lot more than she's let on. This means that when Salieri invites her to his home, she knows *exactly* what he wants from her - sex. Again, because of the rules of society she has to pretend that she doesn't, but there's very little doubt that she goes to Salieri's house with her eyes open. Constanze's eyes are not open enough, though, for her to realize that she can't treat Salieri in the same way that she treats Mozart. When she makes the mistake of trying to do exactly that, it triggers a release of Salieri's rage, not just at Mozart for being better than he is but at *himself* for being a failure, and at God for not making him a success. This is the point on Salieri's *journey of transformation* where he *changes*

After Constanze leaves, and as Salieri reads the manuscripts, the music *illuminates* his feelings and frustration. Music is used this way often in this play, which makes it another *convention*. In its volume and intensity, the music *also* foreshadows Salieri's moral death, Mozart's physical death, and the anguish they both go through just *before* their deaths. The moment of Salieri's collapse to the floor, and his vow to take revenge on God, is the *climax* of the first act. This is the most significant *point of change* on his *journey of transformation* and *dramatizes* the play's theme of questioning the relationship between Man and God.





# Act 2, Part 1

## Act 2, Part 1 Summary

The act begins with Salieri again an old man, addressing the audience as he leads us into "the very last hour of [his] life." Salieri describes what happened on "the dreadful night of the manuscripts" as giving him "a terrible and thrilling purpose" - to block God "in one of his purest manifestations" meaning Mozart. Then he speaks of being glad that in having the opportunity to obstruct God, he also had the opportunity of obstructing a rival, and asks us how many of us would turn down such a chance. As he transforms back into his younger self, he tells us that he wondered how God would respond, and that he got the first part of the answer an hour later. Constanze returns, fully prepared to let Salieri have sex with her in exchange for giving Mozart the job at court.

When Salieri returns the manuscripts and tells her to go, she swears at him and attacks him. Salieri throws her to the floor, telling us in an *aside* that he realized at that moment that he didn't want anything "petty" and that his quarrel wasn't *with* Mozart, it was with God and would be fought *through* Mozart. At this point Constanze runs from the room.

Salieri calms himself with a sweet, and tells us that instead of seducing Constanze he seduced Katherina, and kept her as a mistress for several years, erasing both her memory of Mozart's body and his own vow of sexual virtue. Then he tells how he also resigned from all his committees for good works - "so much for [his] vow of social virtue." Then he recommended a man "of no talent whatever" for the position of music teacher to the princess, a scene that blends with the Emperor receiving the news of Salieri's recommendation with puzzled surprise. When the Emperor wonders why he isn't recommending Mozart, Salieri suggests that Mozart can't be trusted with young women. The Emperor accepts that explanation and gives the job to the man Salieri recommended. Salieri tells us that Mozart had no suspicions about his (Salieri's) plotting, and Mozart blames himself, saying he'll get "sixteen lectures" from his father.

Salieri comments to us that it was a "most serious loss," and the Venticelli rush on with comments that Mozart has hardly any pupils. Salieri tells us that in contrast, *he* became more successful in spite of the fact that over the next two years Mozart wrote some of his best music. Salieri says the public at large enjoyed it then forgot it, even though they were in fact "the most perfect things made by man in the whole of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century."

## Act 2, Part 1 Analysis

Constanze's quick return and acceptance of Salieri's proposal is unexpected, but not completely surprising. Once again she reveals herself to be a woman of the world, knowledgeable in the way things work. Constanze also reveals herself as being willing to make sacrifices for her husband, which indicates to us that she is very much in love with him, believes strongly in his work, or just needs him to be paid so they can actually



eat. In actuality, her motivation is made up in equal parts of all the above, as indicated by her rage when Salieri turns her down (which he has to do in order to proceed with his plan to deny God by destroying Mozart).

Salieri's seduction of Katherina and his resignation from his committees *represent* the destruction of his relationship with God. Salieri had vowed to be faithful and he had vowed to contribute to public life as part of his deal with God that he should become famous through music. Now that he feels that God has broken the bargain, Salieri feels that he must do the same. In short, he's continuing his *journey of transformation*, abandoning all his morals in order to free himself to pursue his war with God.

Mozart's comment about being lectured by his father again *foreshadows* the menacing presence of the father figures later in the play - Salieri himself, the mysterious ghost, and the father figure in *Don Giovanni*.

Salieri's success in the face of Mozart's failure is extremely *ironic*, which Salieri knows and he wonders briefly whether this is God's answer to his challenge, but prefers to believe that it *isn't* God's answer because he wants to destroy Mozart completely.





## Act 2, Part 2

### Act 2, Part 2 Summary

As the scene changes to Salieri's home, now more richly furnished, Salieri and the Venticelli discuss Salieri's successes - in particular, his latest opera, how Mozart completely dismisses it, and how Mozart has asked permission to write an Italian opera based on *The Marriage of Figaro*, a play by a French playwright that Van Swieten describes as "a vulgar farce." Mozart enters, continuing his argument with Van Swieten, saying he wants to set opera in "a real place" because he wants "life in opera, not boring legends." Mozart continues with a long, extravagant, blunt speech about why he prefers stories of real people over stories of "gods" and "heroes," and why music is the perfect way to represent life and all the complications of "this second in time." Mozart wonders if that's how "God hears the world. Millions of sounds ascending at once and mixing in His ear to become an unending music." Once he's finished, he giggles and apologizes for talking nonsense. Van Swieten forgives him, says that underneath all the "nonsense" is a good fellow. Van Swieten also says that he's sure Mozart will make a fine "brother Mason," urges Mozart to be more serious with his gifts, and leaves. As he goes, Mozart announces that the opera's finished - in his head, "the rest's just scribbling." As Salieri reacts in disbelief, Mozart bows his elaborate bow and goes off.

Salieri tells us that he struggled to find ways to block the production of *Figaro*, and that Mozart finished it in six weeks. Rosenberg appears with the news that the first performance is approaching, and says there's no way to stop it. Salieri has an idea, however, and explains it to him in Italian. Rosenberg is pleased with the idea and runs off to make it a reality.

The story transitions to a meeting between Rosenberg and Mozart, in which Rosenberg reminds Mozart of a rule against having ballets in opera and tells him that a piece of music in the third act of *Figaro* is a ballet and must be removed. Mozart protests that it's a dance at a wedding and is essential to the story, but Rosenberg rips out the pages of music with the dance and tells Mozart to obey imperial commands in the future. Mozart suddenly cries out that this was Salieri's idea. In an aside to us, Salieri wonders how Mozart could have suspected, and whether God put the idea into Mozart's head. Mozart tells Rosenberg that he can't rewrite the music, not when the first performance is two days away and not when the music is already perfect! Rosenberg promises to get the Emperor to attend a rehearsal and make a ruling on whether the music should be allowed. Mozart swears at Rosenberg, throws the music to the ground, and storms away. Then he meets Salieri, who promises to talk to the Emperor. Mozart goes away, much calmer.

Salieri tells us he *didn't* talk to the Emperor, but the Emperor showed up at rehearsal anyway. Salieri recounts what happened at the rehearsal. The opera went along normally until the point when the music for the dance was supposed to be played. Then the action continued in silence, without the music. When the Emperor asks why, Mozart



tells him that Rosenberg told him to remove it because it was a ballet. Under protest from Rosenberg, the Emperor decrees that the music be put back in. Mozart thanks him extravagantly.

Salieri then tells us what happened at the first performance of *Figaro*. As other characters "watch" the opera – the Emperor, the three courtiers, Constanze, Katherina, the Venticelli, and the Chorus of Citizens – Salieri tells us that Mozart took the improvisations he did on the March of Welcome and incorporated them into the opera. Salieri calls the music "astounding," and says he watched the final scenes in tears. The Emperor, however, responds much more calmly, and says only that encores must be eliminated - they make things far too long. When the Emperor, the courtiers, and the others leave, Mozart asks Salieri what *he* thought. Salieri describes the piece as "marvelous," but Mozart says it's the best opera ever and "no-one else living" could have done it.

The Venticelli rush back with the news that Rosenberg is furious and will do anything to get back at Mozart. Salieri tells us that he worked *with* Rosenberg to get the opera canceled. When Mozart complains, Salieri tells him "if the Public does not like one's work, one has to accept the fact gracefully." Salieri then tells *us* that he didn't have to worry about destroying Mozart *professionally* any more because the Viennese audiences would take care of it for him. Then he resolves to destroy Mozart *as a man*.

## Act 2, Part 2 Analysis

This scene is fairly straightforward plot. The action moves quickly and directly as Salieri plots to destroy Mozart and deny God. Salieri's lie about going to see the Emperor is another step on his *journey of transformation*. Before making his vow to block God, Salieri's morals would have never permitted him to lie and play the kind of politics he plays now. However, even though he manages to get *Figaro* cancelled, he feels frustration and he feels he's getting no indication from God that his efforts at blocking Him are being felt. In other words, he's experiencing no *punishment*, which leads him to wonder if God is taking any notice of him "at all." This makes him more determined than ever to destroy Mozart and get God's attention.

Mozart's long speech looks at *thematic questions* about the Voice of God from the opposite angle. What does *God* hear? Is the noise of humanity, in all its confusion and desire and joy and anger, music to *Him*? It suggests that Mozart believes that with his work he is praising God. This is the *opposite* of what Salieri believes, which is that Mozart is in effect *speaking for* God.

When Van Swieten invites Mozart to join the Masons, it is the final stage of the *set up* for the final stage of Salieri's destruction of Mozart and the turning of the Mason's against him in the final part of the play.

The contrast between Mozart and Salieri is vivid in this scene. Where Mozart reacts to setbacks (such as Rosenberg's cutting of the dance music) with hysterics and a lot of



emotion, Salieri reacts to setbacks (like the Emperor's arrival at the rehearsal) calmly and thoughtfully. This *dramatizes* another aspect of the way in which Mozart and Salieri are complete opposites.



## Act 2, Part 3

### Act 2, Part 3 Summary

The setting moves back to the home of the Baroness, Salieri is back in his chair and back eating his favorite dessert, and Mozart is pacing, saying he'll go to England, where they love music and love him. When Salieri encourages him to go, Mozart changes his mind and says he can't because he has a wife and family. Mozart says that he wrote his father to take care of the family for a while so a trip to England would be possible, but he refused. Then he complains that his father is bitter, jealous, and "dried up."

During a *transition*, the Venticelli arrive with the news that Leopold Mozart (Mozart's father) is dead. The Venticelli leave, the transition ends, and Mozart is instantly hysterical with grief and confusion, saying that his father always looked out for him and protected him from the wickedness in the world. Mozart accuses himself of betraying his father by marrying, when his father said he shouldn't and by talking badly about him. Salieri comforts him and opens his arms to him. Mozart almost embraces Salieri but instead falls to his knees and breaks down. Salieri turns to us and says this moment is the origins of "the Ghost Father in [Mozart's opera] *Don Giovanni*."

As music from the opera plays, Salieri tells us that all he could do was stand by and watch as Mozart created art from his "ordinary life" and comments that while they were both "ordinary men ... he from the ordinary created legends – and [Salieri] from legends created only the ordinary." Salieri asks himself, and us, whether he could have shown any pity and then answers that he could if only God had shown pity on *him*. Salieri tells us that even in the midst of his plotting he still prayed for his compositions to sound good, but every day his compositions continued to lack spirit at the same time as he heard spirit soaring through Mozart's work. Then he describes Mozart's giggle as "the laughter of God" and resolves that the only way to defeat Mozart is to send him into poverty.

The Emperor expresses concern about Mozart, and plans to offer him the job of Chamber Composer, which had been held until his death by Salieri's old master, Gluck. Salieri resists at first, but when the Emperor insists he gives in, suggesting that Mozart receive a much reduced salary. Mozart calls the salary an insult, but when Salieri mentions that getting the post in the first place was his idea, Mozart immediately becomes grateful, but suddenly "doubles over" from an attack of stomach cramps, telling Salieri it's nothing, that it happens all the time now. When he leaves, Salieri says that he waited again for God to crush him, but instead he received his dearest wish, Kappellmeister Bonno died, and Salieri was appointed "First Royal and Imperial Kappellmeister to our Court." Salieri tells us he was now truly alarmed, and wonders how long he'd go unpunished. The Venticelli arrive to congratulate him, and bring the news that Mozart is unwell, and that he and Constanze are expecting another baby.



## Act 2, Part 3 Analysis

Mozart's description of his father is *ironic*, in that it sounds to us as though he's also talking about Salieri. Does Salieri realize the similarities? It's a question for the actor playing Salieri and a director, but raises interesting possibilities if he *does* – particularly since, in the moments that follow this description of Mozart's father, Salieri begins to *take the place* of Mozart's father, as a creative and emotional *mentor* but also as a force *manipulating* Mozart in the same way as his father did.

The playwright, through Salieri, offers us a definition of *art* in this scene – not just theatrical art, but art in general. The idea that artists make the ordinary *legendary* or *extraordinary*, and the *extraordinary ordinary* is not new, but has been proved true over and over again. The Italian Renaissance painter Caravaggio made the ordinary extraordinary by using prostitutes and street people as models for his paintings of saints. The Impressionist painter Monet made ordinary flowers and gardens into gauzy illuminations of heaven. The American playwright Arthur Miller used the life and death of an ordinary salesman to delve into the extraordinary trials faced by the human spirit in *Death of a Salesman*. Shakespeare used the stories of extraordinary men and women, kings and great lovers, to explore *thematically explore* everyday vices like ambition (in *Macbeth*) and virtues like love (in *As You Like It*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and any number of other plays). Any number of painters, writers, and poets have taken the extraordinary story of the life of Jesus Christ and found parallels in it of our day-to-day human existence.

Mozart's attack of cramps *foreshadows* his death at the end of the play.

When Salieri is appointed Kapellmeister, it's *ironic* to us in that we see him as being rewarded in some way for his awful behavior towards Mozart. *He* seems to think it's a mistake, that he should be punished. This suggests to us that his goal of attention from God in the form of *fame* has changed. Now he wants to feel *any* kind of attention from God, which makes his actions as he destroys Mozart more desperate and extreme.



## Act 2, Part 4

### Act 2, Part 4 Summary

Salieri (accompanied by the Venticelli) meets Mozart and Constanze on the street. The couple wear shabbier clothes, and Constanze is obviously pregnant. Mozart congratulates Salieri on his new position; Salieri congratulates Mozart on the new baby. When Salieri asks about Mozart's health, Mozart tells him the stomach pains are continuing and that he can't sleep at night because he has bad dreams of a figure "cloaked in gray" beckoning to him. Constanze tells Salieri that she never dreams, "things are unpleasant enough ... awake," and suggests that if Mozart had "proper work he might dream less." Mozart is embarrassed, and quickly hurries off with her. The Venticelli comment that Mozart is growing "freakish," tell Salieri that Mozart and Constanze have moved into an even more slummy section of Vienna, and reveal that not only is Mozart making no money at all apart from his small salary, but that he's starting to beg from the Masons. It suddenly strikes Salieri that the Masons, with their commitment to social good, could stand in the way of Mozart's destruction. Salieri decides to destroy Mozart's reputation with the Masons, and sets about doing so.

At the Masonic Lodge, Van Swieten tells Mozart that the Masons are not a place for begging, but gives him some music to arrange which will pay him a small fee. When Mozart tells Salieri about the job, he also tells him that a new member of the lodge owns a small theatre and has asked Mozart to create a piece for "ordinary German people." Mozart says he's been thinking about writing something about Brotherly Love, something that would be popular. Salieri suggests that since the Masons are all *about* "Brotherly Love," that the opera should be about the Masons. Mozart likes the idea, and when Salieri suggests that the Masons' rituals are *secret*, Mozart says he could "adapt them a little." Mozart goes off full of excitement about his new idea, and Salieri tells us "if that didn't finish him off with the Masons, nothing would."

A transition takes us into a setting that shows us *both* Salieri in his luxurious home eating sweets *and* Mozart and Constanze in their much poorer home, starving as Mozart composes his new opera. Constanze, still pregnant, complains about the cold, and Mozart comments that his father was right. They *did* end up beggars, exactly as he said they would. Constanze tells him that his father is the *reason* they're beggars, that he kept Mozart a child all his life, and that she and Mozart's father hated each other. When Mozart protests, she tells him that the wonderful fire they had the other night was made up of his father's letters, and almost hysterically begins to dance to keep herself warm. Mozart is at first furious that she destroyed the letters, but can't help being drawn into her dance. Soon they're dancing and playing together in their old way, but suddenly stop when Constanze goes into labor.

The Venticelli rush on and tell Salieri that not only did Constanze give birth to another baby, but that she's taken *both* her children and left. Mozart tells Salieri she's gone to Germany, and that it will cost them the last money they have. He also tells Salieri that



that the cloaked figure has again been appearing in his dreams, and that the figure has been ordering him to write a Requiem (a composition played at a funeral). When Salieri asks whether he's still writing the opera, Mozart tells him it's finished and is about to be produced. Salieri tells him he'll come, and bring Katherina with him, saying she's no substitute for a wife but that seeing her will cheer Mozart up. Mozart becomes excited and, as usual, over-enthusiastic in his gratitude.

## Act 2, Part 4 Analysis

Mozart interprets the figure in gray as a representation of his father, calling him to die for betraying him and he writes *Don Giovanni* in an attempt to *appease* the figure, or make him change his mind. To *us*, however, the figure represents something different. Mozart's destruction as engineered by Salieri and Mozart's own crudeness and childishness. In either case, the appearance of the figure *foreshadows* Mozart's death.

Salieri's manipulation of the Masons and their belief in "Brotherly Love" in the destruction of Mozart is extremely *ironic*. It's doubtful that there would be *less* of an example of "brotherly love" than what Salieri is doing to Mozart.

The section in which we see both Salieri's home *and* Mozart's home is another *theatrical* convention to shape the action so we can see two realities, and how they reflect on and relate to each other, *at the same time*. In this case, the two realities present us with an *ironic contrast* - Mozart (the musical genius and "voice of God") lives in poverty, while Salieri (the musical mediocrity and "voice of destruction") lives in luxury. This, in turn, adds another layer to the central thematic question. What is the *value* of being the Voice of God, or *hearing* the Voice of God, if your reward is poverty, grief, and destruction? It's the same question posed by *other* characters portrayed as being close to God – characters like Joan of Arc, who was burned as a witch because she claimed God spoke to her and wouldn't deny it. In this scene, and in fact in the play as a whole, Mozart comes close to being portrayed as a *martyr*, or someone who was killed because he served God.





## Act 2, Part 5

### Act 2, Part 5 Summary

The action of the previous scene flows smoothly into this one as Van Swieten sneaks in and watches a performance of *The Magic Flute* while Mozart, Katherina, and Salieri sit with "the common people." Salieri tells us that not only did Mozart include very specific references to the rituals of the Masons, he included a ghostly figure similar to the figure in gray, but one who gestured with *welcome* and *love* rather than beckoning. Salieri describes this figure as representing a newfound peace in Mozart, and calls Mozart *himself* the magic flute (which represents the ideal of *brotherly love*). At the conclusion of the opera, Van Swieten charges forward angrily. Mozart is surprised to see him, but Salieri tells us in an aside that he made sure he'd be there. Van Swieten accuses him of betraying the Masons by including portrayals of their rituals in the opera, tells him that no Mason will ever help him again, and says that Mozart is never even to *speak* with him. Salieri pretends to protest, but Van Swieten is too angry and storms off. Salieri tells Mozart that it's not over, but tells *us* that it *was* over, and that Mozart had nowhere else to turn.

The Venticelli rush on and tell Salieri that Mozart sits all day and all night at a window, going back and forth between staring out the window as though he's looking for something and urgently writing down music. Salieri tells us that he believed Mozart was looking for the figure in gray who would be bringing him some kind of message. Salieri tells us he realized that it would take one more thing to send Mozart over the edge, and that he decided he was going to *be* that thing and disguise himself as the figure in gray and visit Mozart! Salieri narrates the story of how he visited Mozart every night for a week, on every visit gesturing that Mozart had one day less to live. On the final day, Mozart calls out from his window and invites the figure up to his rooms. Salieri goes up, still in disguise. Mozart shows "the figure" his Requiem, begs for more time to make it really good and as he remembers how well things started out for him and his father, finally pleads for "the figure" to speak in his father's place and tell him the requiem's good. Salieri says it *is* good, tears it up, eats a piece of the paper it was written on, and then reveals his identity. Mozart calls out to God for help, but Salieri turns on him viciously, saying that God does *not* help, he only *uses*, and confesses that "ten years of [his] hate have poisoned [Mozart] to death." Salieri tells Mozart that God is finished with him and all he can do now is die.

Mozart collapses, crying out for his father and *imagines* that Salieri is his father, holds out his arms to him, and starts to sing a song they sang together when Mozart was a child. Salieri sees this as his final victory, "the profoundest voice in the world reduced to a nursery tune" and he leaves, taking with him his mask and cloak.

Mozart continues to sing. Constanze returns and comforts him. As she talks about how she and the children both need him, Mozart goes back and forth between recognizing her and his situation and listening to the music in his mind. It's the same music filling the





theatre - Mozart's requiem. We see him hearing it, and composing it, in his mind as he dies. Constanze chatters about how *he* needs *her* as much as she needs him, but soon realizes he's dead.

The Chorus of Citizens comes on, dressed in black. Salieri tells us that Mozart was buried in a mass grave for the poor, "twenty other corpses. An unmarked ... pit." Van Swieten offers Constanze some money for the children, rather than spending it on a fancy funeral. As Mozart's body is carried off, followed by Van Swieten, Salieri tells us that his main emotion at the time was relief – and a little pity for the man he helped destroy. Salieri tells us that Constanze married again, a dull Danish diplomat. Constanze tells us that she sells manuscripts "by the ink: so many notes, so many schillings. That seems...the simplest way." Finally, Salieri tells us that Mozart didn't imagine the initial appearance of the figure in gray telling him to write a requiem. Apparently, an eccentric nobleman showed up one day and asked Mozart to do exactly that. Salieri says that after Mozart's death the requiem was performed – and that he conducted it.

As he transforms once again to his older self, Salieri tells us that he stayed in Vienna for thirty-two more years and became more and more famous, but then suddenly God finally took his revenge. Mozart's music suddenly became famous, and Salieri's virtually disappeared. Then he also tells us that he *started* the rumors about how he killed Mozart himself in order to achieve the fame he always sought. "As [Mozart's] name grows in the world so will mine! I'm going to be immortal after all." Salieri goes on to say that God is powerless to prevent it.

Salieri pulls out a razor and tells us that he could only know that God existed through hearing music, that the only way he could worship was through *writing* music, and if he can't be Mozart then he didn't wish to be anything. Then he tells us he goes "to become a ghost himself," and describes himself as "Antonio Salieri, Patron Saint of Mediocrities." Salieri then slits his throat and falls into the wheelchair.

The Venticelli hurry on with comments on his death taken from musical journals and other sources, which refuse to accept the idea that Salieri was responsible in any way for Mozart's death. The Venticelli say that they themselves do not believe it, and that "no-one believes it in the world."

Salieri looks up one more time ... raises his arms as though to embrace the audience ... then folds his hands across his chest as "the last four chords of the Masonic Funeral Music of Amadeus Mozart sound throughout the theatre."

## Act 2, Part 5 Analysis

The action of this section of the play builds in *theatrical* and *emotional intensity* through to the *dramatic* climax of Mozart's death, which is also the climax of Salieri's journey of transformation. As Mozart dies, Salieri is at his *most changed*. Now he's a killer, at least



in his own mind and possibly in our minds, something he couldn't imagine himself being before he started his *journey*.

If we haven't before, we feel *pity* for Mozart in this scene. Mozart's so obviously being manipulated, and so trustingly childlike when it comes to his faith in Salieri, that we can't help but feel sorry for him even if he *is* crude and over-excitabile.

The sequence in which the disguised Salieri visits the dying Mozart has two significant pieces of religious (Christian) imagery. When Salieri eats a piece of the score of the Requiem, it *symbolizes* the act of taking communion found in many Christian churches. The act of communion *symbolizes* a person taking Christ's body into him, and therefore living a more Godly life. By eating a piece of the score, Salieri is saying two things. That Mozart's music is *of God* in the same way that Christ is *of God* and that by symbolically taking the score into him, he is taking a piece of Mozart, and therefore God, into him. This reinforces the idea discussed earlier that Mozart is a *martyr* who is killed in the service of God.

Another religious reference is Mozart's final cry for his father. At this moment of his life, and death, Mozart feels *forsaken* (abandoned) by both his father and God in the same way that Christ did on the Cross. Mozart cries out to his father in the same way as Christ cried out to God and they are essentially asking the same thing, "where are you?" and "why have you left me?" The *irony* in this moment is that throughout the play, Salieri has been asking *exactly the same question*, with the significant difference that Salieri has become bitter and evil, giving in to the darkness instead of continuing to fight it and stay connected to God as Christ and Mozart did.

Later in the play there is a third religious reference, although this one is perhaps a little more obscure. When Salieri tells us that Mozart's music finally became famous, it is a kind of *resurrection* for Mozart, a triumph over death, which *resembles* Christ's triumph over death at Easter.

Constanze's comment that she sells Mozart's manuscripts by the note is *ironic*, in that one of the *criticisms* of Mozart's work throughout the play is that it has *too many* notes. In other words, it's because Mozart's music has so many notes that Constanze's able to make some money. Mozart's burial in a mass grave is also *ironic* and quite sad. If ever anyone stood *alone*, and deserved a grave that marked the resting place of a unique, very individual genius, it was him.

At the end of the play, Salieri remains *unredeemed*. Even though he says that he finally does feel pity for Mozart, his continued pursuit of fame (by starting the rumor that he killed Mozart) shows us that he has not gone back to where his *journey of transformation* began. At this moment, we realize that his journey didn't end with Mozart's death, but that it ends *now* with his continued quest for fame at any price. Salieri's transformation is complete, and eternal.

At the end of the play, its thematic questions remain. The conclusion of Salieri's story leaves with no clear answers about the nature of the voice of God, except perhaps the idea that attempting to obstruct God only results in destruction.



# 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-winch 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, winch 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 Salieri's 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." Pizarro 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, Atahualpa, 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 both 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 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 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 tills 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 Atahualpa 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. I. 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 Atahualpa, Alan, and Mozart, respectively. Shaffer captures the greatness of man's spiritual awareness through the youthfulness of these three characters and through the ancient 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 Dionysian 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 Atahualpa 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 Atahualpa, and admits sadly that "I die between two darks: blind eyes and a blind sky." Yet clearly Atahualpa 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 Atahualpa is not resurrected, Salieri feels cheated at the end of the play. Like Dysart who has a "sharp chain" is 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 Porman'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 Porman 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 Porman, 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 Porman'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.





such as *Fra Lippa 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.

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 Lippa 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, artistic 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 sun pie 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 over-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 strengthened by the combination of Salieri's villainy 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 lingo. And it is sheer hypocrisy to try to pretend that this wizard Salieri is a mediocrity."

Pauline Kael also found the lack of allegiance 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 Lippa 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 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 mama-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 Lippa 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 Lippa 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, Michelangelo, 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 Me 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 replies, 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 Atahualpa. *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 Martin, 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. Martin, 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.

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, Martin Ruiz narrates from the perspective of old age the events that took place in his youth between him and Pizarro and between Pizarro and Atahualpa. Unlike the other two narrators, he is not involved in the saga of Pizarro's conquest and envy of Atahualpa but rather is the victim of his own loss of faith in Pizarro. Martin 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 Atahualpa, 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 Atahualpa captive until the latter agrees that if Pizarro releases him he will not lay siege on the Spanish soldiers. Atahualpa 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 Atahualpa 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. Atahualpa, 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 Atahualpa, 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 only 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, "*It 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 Salieri'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 effect." 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 Atahuallpa 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 illegitimate 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. Lonise 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 Waldstadten and saying to his intended' "I's going to pounce-bounce! I's going to scrunch-munch! I's going to chew-poo my little mouse-woose! I's going to tear her to bits with my paws-claws, I think you're frightened of puss-wuss. . . I think you're going to shut 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 Waldstatten'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 piu 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 Orsinoi-Rosemberg felt threatened by Mozart: "He [Mozart] was a child prodigy. That always spells trouble. . . All prodigies are hateful-non e 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 paralleled 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 paralyzing.

After declaring God his Enemy, Salieri becomes irreverent 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 mediocrities 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.



# 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 Cavalier, he restrains himself and redoubles his commitment to the celebration 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."



# 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 acclaim 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 (ie., 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 rumors 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

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3



# Critical Essay #1

*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,

. . . 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 J 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."

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 hi 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 lus 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 me 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 lus 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



## Critical Essay #2

*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.

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; Atahualpa and Pizarro, 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 opposites in many respects. Salieri, upholding the edifice of the Court composer, stands for artifice, Mozart for art. Salieri labors to produce banal stones 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 MacMurrough-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 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 my. self 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. "



## Critical Essay #3

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 "

# 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.



## 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?



# Compare and 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.



## 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.





## Further Study

Chambers, Colin, "Psychic Energy," in *Plays and Players*, Vol 27, No 5, February 1980, pp. 11-13.

Chambers includes comments from Shaffer on his plays, including *Amadeus*.

Connell, Brian, "The Two Sides of Theatre's Agonized Perfectionist," in *Times* (London), April 28, 1980, p. 18.

Connell interviews Shaffer on several topics including his literary development and the structure of his plays.

Taylor, John Russell, *Peter Shaffer*, Longman Group, 1974

Taylor analyzes Shaffer's use of language in his plays.

Toynbee, Polly, Review, in *Spectator*, Vol 243, No. 7896, November 10, 1979, pp 29-30.

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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

### Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

### Other Features

DfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.





Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

### Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

### We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: [ForStudentsEditors@gale.com](mailto:ForStudentsEditors@gale.com). Or write to the editor at:

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