

Diplomarbeit über das Thema

**Peter Shaffer's play**

*Amadeus*

**and its film adaptation by Miloš Forman**

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Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz  
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vorgelegt von Małgorzata Kurowska

Referent: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Karl-Heinz Stoll

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*What use, after all, is Man,  
if not to teach God His lessons?  
(Shaffer, Amadeus)*

## 1 Introduction

Peter Shaffer's psychological drama *Amadeus* has aroused controversy ever since its first performance on 2 November 1979 at the National Theatre in London. It has met with enthusiastic reception worldwide and has been translated into twenty-two languages (Plunka, 173). The film version, released in September 1984, has made the drama accessible to a mass audience and thus revived the stormy debate regarding the accurate portrayal of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and the events that led to his death. Simultaneously, the film started a kind of "Mozart-mania".

Both the play and the film have enjoyed great popularity and were commercial successes. The critical response varied from enthusiastic acclaim to devastating criticism. Unaffected by this criticism, the film has received eight Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Screenplay, and Best Director, as well as four Golden Globes. In fact, it was the result of co-operation between two strong artistic personalities, the playwright Peter Shaffer and the film director Miloš Forman. The outcome of this co-operation was a new and remarkable work that bears distinctive marks of both artists. For that reason I will begin with a short portrait of both Shaffer and Forman and show the central themes of their work.

In the main part of my analysis, I will first give a brief survey of the relation of the drama to historical reality and the criticism that it has received. Furthermore, I will analyse some primary issues of the work, such as the psychological and psychoanalytic elements in *Amadeus*, the conflict between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, and the religious themes in the drama. This will establish a basis for the subsequent discussion of the adaptation technique, as well as the changes of emphasis resulting from the re-working of the dramatic substance for a new medium. Finally, after a short introduction concerning the problems of adaptation, I will analyse the selection, addition, and sequence of scenes, the development of the characters for the film version, as well as the use of visual and aural elements in the film.

## 1.1 Peter Shaffer

The dramatist Peter Shaffer has been present on the British stage since his first play, *Five Finger Exercise*, written in 1958. His following plays included satirical comedies, such as *Black Comedy* (1965), *White Liars* (1967), and *Letting It Go* (1987), but he is best known for his philosophical dramas: *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964), *Equus* (1973), and *Amadeus* (1979), as well as *The Battle of Shrivings* (1970) and *Yonadab* (1985). Though very different in place, time, and setting, these plays often show a pair of antagonistic male characters searching for an answer to the metaphysical question about the relationship between man and God.

Shaffer is known to create “principal characters of startling credibility” (Scott, 40) who come into a strong and destructive conflict with each other. All of his plays display the clash between a rational, “Apollonian” personality, and a childlike, “Dionysian” personality, such as Pizarro and Atahualpa in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Martin Dysart and Alan Strang in *Equus*, and, last but not least, Salieri and Mozart in *Amadeus*. His Apollonian characters destroy the Dionysian characters in order to extinguish the divine, but through this act they also kill a part of themselves and suffer for it. Because his plays touch the hidden and painful aspects of the human soul, they “tend to evoke varied and contradictory responses” (Gianakaris 1992, 5).

Music has always been a vital element of Peter Shaffer’s life and career. He plays the piano “far beyond average competence” (Gianakaris 1992, 6) and for several years he worked as a music critic for the magazine *Time and Tide*. Accordingly, he is known for the distinctive and impressive use of music in his plays, where it forms “an integral aspect of their soundscape” (Stern, 639). He employs chant, sounds, and instrumental sequences to reinforce the non-verbal communication with the audience as well as to show the inner state of mind of the characters and the development of their condition throughout the plot. Among all of Shaffer’s works, music plays the most important role in *Amadeus*, as it determines the dramatic structure of the play.

So far, six of Shaffer’s plays have been turned into films: *Five Finger Exercise*, *The Private Ear*, *The Public Eye*, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus*, and *Amadeus*. However, *Amadeus* is the most successful adaptation and the only one with which the author was satisfied. This is largely due to Miloš Forman’s experience at adapting literary material and to his outstanding cinematic personality, as well as to the close co-operation of the two artists.

## 1.2 Miloš Forman

Miloš Forman's career started in Czechoslovakia, where he had already achieved critical success and local popularity in the 1960s. Despite this, commercial success and international fame came only after his emigration to the USA in January of 1969 with such films as *Taking Off* (1971), *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), *Hair* (1979), *Ragtime* (1981), and finally, *Amadeus* (1984).

In contrast to Shaffer's plays, his films do not usually show a clash between two opposed personalities, but "a clash between a solitary person and a restrictive society" (Slater, 1). His protagonists "fight a social system more concerned with maintaining order than providing personal freedom" (Slater, 2). Although less metaphysical, his themes are no less profound than those of Peter Shaffer, but they are always presented as a mixture of comedy and tragedy. This device makes his films deeply moving and, at the same time, easily accessible to a wide audience, which accounts for their great commercial success.

Like Shaffer, Miloš Forman is an artist with an extraordinary empathy for music. In his films, it serves not only as an illustration of mood, atmosphere, and emotion, but is a means of communicating information about a particular society and specific period in time. In *Taking Off* and in the musical *Hair*, music expresses the feelings, ideas, and lifestyle of a whole generation. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, it underlines the numbing atmosphere of the mental hospital. In *Ragtime*, Forman shows a musician who can only find freedom in his music and has to fight against a hostile society, not unlike Mozart in *Amadeus*. In *Amadeus*, though, music becomes the very substance of the film and the driving force behind the actions of the characters.

Miloš Forman "[is] like Shaffer successful, energetic and absolute in his tastes." (Gianakaris 1985, 88) Although the two authors pursue quite different themes in their work, they have found enough common matter in *Amadeus* to turn it into a film. Forman has described his method of adaptation as "tearing the play apart and putting it together in a new form" (Forman, quoted from Kamm, 15). Shaffer, on the other hand, used the occasion to "seek out new means to fulfill previous objectives" (Gianakaris 1985, 88). Naturally, the combined efforts of two such personalities produced a somewhat different work than its stage original.

## 2 The themes of *Amadeus*

*Amadeus* probes universal, profound, sometimes disturbing themes that transcend the personalities of both Mozart and Salieri. It is a play of ideas, in which Shaffer touches upon aspects of psychology, sociology, theology, and musicology, all of which are integrated into the Mozart-Salieri conflict. These various elements interact with each other in every speech, scene, and dialogue of both the play and the film to create a “combined aesthetic and metaphysical conundrum” (Gianakaris 1985, 89) around the eternal mystery of genius.

In the following part, I will describe the various issues and conflicts dealt with in *Amadeus*, as well as changes in emphasis resulting from the film adaptation.

### 2.1 *Amadeus* as a historical drama

*Amadeus* reconstructs personages, events, as well as the spirit of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although its underlying themes are universal, it is not a parallel to contemporary events. Moreover, the action covers a period of more than thirty years. Historical dramas often depict “an age when two cultures are in conflict, one dying and the other being born” (Thrall and Hibbard, 223). From this point of view, the play can be classified as a historical drama.

Yet, *Amadeus* is not an objective representation of history. Shaffer merely uses historical personalities, places, and events, in order to depict a psychological situation that can arise in any century, as, in fact, it does in his other plays. Therefore, he does not stick slavishly to the acknowledged facts about Mozart, although he claims to have spent three years reading all of the available literature on the composer’s life. On the contrary, he reserves the right to “the grand licence of the storyteller to embellish his tale with fictional ornament” (Shaffer 1993, 110), and he describes *Amadeus* as “a fantasia on events in Mozart’s life” (Gianakaris 1985, 90). Like many playwrights before him, Shaffer used historical figures for dramatic purposes. Despite this, he “rarely chose to exert his poetic license on the material and tried to maintain historical accuracy” (Plunka, 179).

### 2.1.1 Historical authenticity

As stated previously, the play sometimes diverges from historical facts in order to explore more fundamental and universal human issues and to achieve a dramatic effect. Only on the surface does it appear to be a composer's biography. Shaffer himself emphasises his intention: "From the start we agreed upon one thing: we were not making an objective life of Wolfgang Mozart. This cannot be stressed too strongly." (Shaffer 1993, 110) Still, this does not mean that Shaffer ignored and distorted historical facts. He based his play on thorough biographical research and only filled the inevitable gaps with his interpretation of the events (cf. Stumpf, 105f). It was his decision, though, which material to include and emphasise, which to leave out, and how to fill the remaining gaps. Following the logic of his premise, he has indeed created his own version of history.

The greatest liberty Shaffer took with the historical material was to build his play around the unproved rumour saying that Salieri poisoned Mozart. This rumour arose shortly after Mozart's death and has haunted many minds ever since. The first to mention it in literature was the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin. In 1830, almost forty years after Mozart's death, he developed the subject into a two-scene verse drama revolving around envy, rivalry, and the role of the artist in society. This play was later turned into a one-act opera by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Although Shaffer claims not to have read the drama or seen the opera, his play seems to be a further development of the same theme and, at the same time, possesses a certain operatic quality.

In Mozart's letters, there are a few hints at a rivalry existing between the two composers, but not nearly enough to believe that Salieri played such an important role in Mozart's life as shown in *Amadeus*. The film takes even greater liberty with the historical events than the play. For example, Shaffer freely invented the scene of Mozart's death, where he dictates the last notes of the *Requiem* to the eager Salieri, as well as the scenes with the servant girl Lölö. Similarly, historical facts are sometimes distorted. Salieri's music, for instance, is shown as dull, simple-minded and "unworthy of his true abilities" (Brown)<sup>1</sup>. The motive of the masked figure is also changed. In reality, the mysterious stranger was not Salieri but a Count Walsegg, an amateur musician who wanted Mozart to write a requiem for his recently deceased wife and planned to present it as his own work.

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<sup>1</sup> In case of Internet documents I did not give any page references, as it is technically impossible to establish the page breaks.

The portrait of Mozart in *Amadeus* is rather accurate, but overdrawn and exaggerated. His letters, above all those to his cousin “Bäsle” (Anna Maria Thekla Mozart), betray his inclination towards scatological word-games. As Martin Esslin puts it, “[...] in his letters Mozart reveals himself as an individual of earthy sexuality and scatological [sic] expressiveness”. Nonetheless, it is hardly probable that he should use the same language in his relations at court. His “unforgettable [...] piercing and infantile” giggle (Play, 24) is likewise an invention.

Finally, if Salieri really did commit a crime against Mozart, which, by the way, is unproven, it was not to destroy his rival by poisoning him but, more subtly, by preventing him from obtaining a secure place at court. It seems that this point will always remain open to speculation.

### 2.1.2 Criticism

The controversial question of historical authenticity has given cause to many discussions in the press. Both the play and the film have been widely criticised for various reasons. I will give a short survey of the criticism and relate it to the various aspects of the drama.

It seems that Shaffer touched an irritable spot, and so “the very innovativeness [...] of the story became a major source of complaint.” (Gianakaris 1992, 110) Innumerable Mozart lovers regarded *Amadeus* as a sacrilegious work that damaged the image of their idol. Their enagement was partly due to the contrast between the portrayal of Mozart in *Amadeus* and his image that arose in the Romantic age. The portrait of Mozart created by the Romantic tradition was that of a porcelain puppet with a red coat, a white periwig, and heaven-cast eyes, playing on a porcelain piano. For many fans the realisation that Mozart was not “the delicate, angelic figure the 19<sup>th</sup> century made him out to be” (Schonberg 1980, 1) was painful and disturbing. Michael Walsh, for instance, maintains that ever since Mozart’s death, “pop culture has been trying to turn him into the first romantic martyr” (51), but nonetheless he accuses Shaffer and Forman of “continuing the honourable tradition of spreading mis- and disinformation about Mozart” (52). He closes his article stating that “it’s too bad that *Amadeus* [...] misses the real Mozart almost completely.” (52) Shaffer, however, realises that “[n]obody has suffered more than Mozart from sentimental misjudgment” (Shaffer 1984, 27) and that, consequently, no one can know for sure what “the real Mozart” was like.

Walsh's article is exemplary of the general criticism of *Amadeus*. The various authors point out that the Mozarts had two surviving children, that Salieri was not at all a mediocrity, that Mozart did not dictate his *Requiem* to Salieri, but to his assistant Süßmeyer, and so on. This criticism focuses on details and springs from a misinterpretation of the role and means of the drama. This point is summed up very accurately by Matthew Scott:

Those reviews of *Amadeus* which I have read seem to me to miss Shaffer's point behind this characterisation of Mozart. Surely the historical authenticity of the character is irrelevant. It is its use in the theatrical whole which is under consideration. [...] I would ask that *Amadeus* be considered as theatre, and that audiences accept those concepts of time, place and character peculiar to theatre, as opposed to longing for the more inflexible rules of history. (Scott, 41)

Warren Sylvester Smith also agrees that "it is not the business of a dramatist to be a historian in any literal sense" (344). "The theater's purpose," he proceeds to explain, "is not to present [...] eighteenth-century musicology with textbook accuracy, but to excite audiences with fresh views of human relationships." (350) Furthermore, the "honourable tradition of spreading mis- and disinformation" (Walsh, 52) was carried on not only with Mozart's successors – for example Beethoven, Chopin, Schubert, and Schumann – but also with innumerable historical personalities, without ever really causing a great sensation.

It is therefore astonishing that *Amadeus* should arouse so much emotion, but due to the status of Mozart in the musical world, the play and the film were viewed as iconoclastic. However, it is important to see the irony in *Amadeus*, especially in the film version. Irony is an omnipresent element in Miloš Forman's films, and *Amadeus* is no exception. The film is a colourful and florid Rococo spectacle that presents Mozart's age in exactly the way that a modern audience wants to imagine it. This is explored in detail by Gilbert Adair who sees *Amadeus* as "a cartoon of the eighteenth century" (143). Curiously enough, other critics neglect this aspect. Furthermore, Shaffer himself states that "[n]either play nor picture represents a documentary life of Mozart, but both borrow deliberately and delightedly from the conventions of his operas". (Shaffer 1984, 38)

One further point that must be remembered is that all perceptions of Mozart are channelled through the eyes of Salieri. In other words, the only liberty Shaffer took was to invent the inner life of his protagonist, of which nothing is known historically. All the remaining events take place in the memory of the old and deranged Salieri, where the distinction between fact and fiction is immaterial.

## 2.2 Psychological and psychoanalytic elements

The emphasis in *Amadeus* lies on the “interior characterization, and on the motives, circumstances, and internal action” (Thrall and Hibbard, 386) of the characters. The drama starts with the confession of a murder and then “goes on to explain the *why* and the *wherefore* of this action” (Thrall and Hibbard, 386). This focus on the interior activity of the characters is typical of psychological plays and films. In *Amadeus*, the psychological elements are presented in a psychoanalytic manner regarding the portrayal of Salieri and the development of his mental condition.

Although the title suggests Mozart to be the protagonist, it is really Salieri and not Mozart who occupies the centre of the stage and whose mind we are invited to enter. The dramatic situation is that of a deathbed confession. At the same time, it resembles a psychoanalytic session in which the narrator is the patient and the audience takes over the role of the analyst. Shaffer has already applied the same device in his other plays (such as *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* or *Equus*), as it enables him to control the dramatic pace and allows for flashbacks and interior monologues. Moreover, “his narrators control the prism through which the work is viewed” (Stern, 638); this allows him to manipulate the spectators’ reception of the events on stage.

In the play, Salieri is the narrator who, at the same time, recounts his own story. He is at no time objective and we see the action on stage only through his eyes, often clouded with envy, hate, and pain. He starts with an invocation to the audience in which he begs the spectators to come and be his confessors (Play, 14). Then he begins to tell his tale in a manner resembling a patient’s monologue to his analyst. At times he gets excited, and is then again distracted by such trivialities as cakes or his servants. The audience is subjected to something that appears to be a free flow of Salieri’s consciousness, but his narration is only seemingly incoherent. In reality, he is leading his listeners deep into his mind, so that they can experience his tragedy almost directly.

*Amadeus* shows “two men of widely differing temperaments linked by a common spiritual bond” (Smith, 352). Throughout the plot, Salieri is shown to develop a love-hate relationship with his rival. Although he pretends only to despise the childish and obscene Mozart, there is a part of him that admires him for his independence. One example of this is Mozart’s libertine behaviour: Salieri is enraged when Mozart seduces his prize pupil Katherina Cavalieri, but only because he regrets not having done it himself when he was given the opportunity. He feels cheated and the incident merely nourishes his hate.

One way of interpreting this relationship is to regard Mozart as the alter ego of Salieri, the personification of all the instincts and secret wishes that he had stifled in himself all his life, in short – his id. This conflict between the id and the superego is carried out on several levels. For example, it is expressed in the clash between Salieri and Mozart:

Salieri is shown as being strongly dominated by his superego, which manifests itself in his permanent and obsessive attempts to be in control of himself as well as of the situation around him. [...] In contrast, Mozart is presented as being dominated much more by his id. (Huber and Zapf, 305)

The only weakness that Salieri allows himself is a taste for sweets, which he positively devours throughout the play. His sweet tooth is obviously a compensation for his poor sex life. While trying to seduce Constanze, Salieri tells her: “I live on ink and sweetmeats. I never see women at all ...” (Play, 52). In the play, he is married to a woman whose main quality is “lack of fire” (Play, 18), and freely admits that “[his] invention in love, as in art, has always been limited” (Play, 60). Nevertheless, he later breaks his vow of sexual virtue and makes Katherina Cavalieri his mistress. In the film, he is presented as strictly celibate, like a mad Satanist monk.

There is also a conflict between Mozart and his father Leopold, a strong and domineering superego. Since Mozart is shown as immature and irresponsible, he is never able to free himself from Leopold’s overpowering influence and always remains the little boy who fears his severe father. In his immaturity, his irresponsibility and childish behaviour, as well as his sexual profligacy, Mozart represents the id. His father, on the other hand, is the controlling agent who looks after his son’s interests, but demands subordination in return. In the end, both psychological conflicts end in disaster.

### **2.3 The conflict of personalities**

In Peter Shaffer’s plays, there is always a conflict between opposing elements: “[e]ast and west collide; faithfulness is played against faithlessness; passion and violence against impotence; passivity and Eastern love against skepticism and violence; and passionate creativity against classical balance and duty.” (Stern, 641) These last two elements are the theme of *Amadeus*. Here, Shaffer “creates two distinct characters in the plot, to reflect what is for him the major schism in our natures” (Gianakaris 1992, 169), namely the archetypal antagonism between the Apollonian and the Dionysian forces of man’s psyche.

The idea of Dionysian and Apollonian personalities originates from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (*The Birth of Tragedy*). According to this theory,

The two elements of tragedy [...] are the Apollonian (related to the Greek god Apollo, here used as a symbol of measured restraint) and the Dionysian (from Dionysus, the Greek god of ecstasy). [...] The essence of this [...] tragic effect is that it both reveals and conceals, causing both pain and joy.

(Conversi, 181)

Nietzsche regards the progress of art to be closely related with the dichotomy between the Apollonian and the Dionysian elements, just as the development of mankind depends on the duality of the sexes. Notably, he emphasises music as belonging to the Dionysian rather than to the Apollonian sphere. He describes two opposing kinds of music, which can be applied to Salieri and Mozart, as well as to the Classical and the Romantic musical spirit:

Die Musik des Apollo war dorische Architektonik in Tönen, aber nur in angedeuteten Tönen [...] Behutsam ist gerade das Element, als unapollinisch, ferngehalten, das den Charakter der dionysischen Musik und damit der Musik überhaupt ausmacht, die erschütternde Gewalt des Tones, der einheitliche Strom des Melos und die durchaus unvergleichliche Welt der Harmonie.

(Nietzsche, 56)

This conflict of sobriety versus passion and mediocrity versus genius lies at the core of *Amadeus*. The childlike Mozart is the incarnation of everything that Salieri has relentlessly banished from his mind: instinct, chaos, freedom, humour, play. However, the struggle between the Dionysian and the Apollonian is carried out not only between Mozart and Salieri, or Mozart and the court, but also *within* both protagonists. In Salieri, the Apollonian forces dominate: his innate Dionysian urge to sing to God is suppressed by his Apollonian inability to break out of established musical patterns. In Mozart, the Dionysian element that allows him to compose original and divine music is so powerful that it stifles the Apollonian reason that would enable him to find social acceptance.

## 2.4 The view of the artist

One aspect of *Amadeus* is the changing role of the artist in society. Salieri represents the passing epoch in which the artist was regarded as a craftsman whose task was to produce works that pleased his employer. Composers, like most artists, depended for their livelihood almost solely upon patronage dispensed by the Church and the aristocracy. They were looked upon as servants, and as such were often required to wear uniformed livery. Mozart stands for the new image of the artist as a free, God-like creature who fights the restrictions put upon him by society. This opposition is already mentioned in Alexander Pushkin's verse drama *Mozart and Salieri*, and it is further developed in *Amadeus*:

The (historical) figures of Salieri and Mozart serve as personifications of two opposing concepts of the artist: the craftsmanlike composer who is a master in his own right but never goes beyond the limit of accepted tastes; and the (divinely) inspired genius, the original, and therefore more successful, innovator of the art.”  
(Huber and Zapf, 303f.)

Salieri fully realises his limitations and accepts them. He represents the conventional musical aesthetics of the time and knows that his success is built upon them:

Yes, we were servants. But we were learned servants! And we used our learning to celebrate men's average lives! We took unremarkable men: usual bankers, run-of-the-mill priests, ordinary soldiers and statesmen and wives – and sacramentalized their mediocrity. We smoothed their noons with strings *divisi*! We pierced their nights with *chitarrini*! We gave them processions for their strutting – serenades for their rutting – high horns for their hunting, and drums for their wars!”  
(Play, 18f.)<sup>2</sup>

He embodies the typical rational man of the Enlightenment. He realises, though, that Mozart's music is based on completely different principles, and that those principles oppose his own. In spite of that, he must admit to himself that his own well-structured music is dull and empty in comparison to the work of Mozart. Nonetheless, the court society does not recognise Mozart's genius. To them, “it is Mozart's music itself that gives the most radical offence, since it is in his music that he expresses the dimension of ‘real life’ which is stifled in the world of the Court.” (Huber and Zapf, 308) On the surface, the Emperor and the courtiers like Mozart's music, but they feel somehow at a loss as to the feelings that it evokes in them:

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<sup>2</sup> I used a non-proportional font for the quotations from the play and the film in order to emphasise their *spoken* character.

MOZART: Did you really like it, Sire?  
 JOSEPH: I thought it was most interesting. Yes, indeed.  
 A trifle – how shall one say? [To ORSINI-ROSENBERG] How shall one say, Director?  
 ROSENBERG [*subserviently*]: Too many notes, Your Majesty?  
 JOSEPH: Very well put. Too many notes. (Play, 37)

In the Romantic age that followed, Mozart's music was to receive the highest acclaim. In his own time, however, he was still regarded as "a young fellow trying to impress beyond his abilities" (Play, 21). It was only later that the artist was allowed eccentricity in both his life and his work.

## 2.5 The theological interpretation

Shaffer often deals with theological problems in his plays. The fundamental question in *Amadeus* is that about the nature of God and the mystery of divine justice and injustice, as well as about man's eternal incomprehension of God's enigmatic ways. There is also the recurrent theme of the destruction of divinity that plays an important role in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and in *Equus* as well.

In *Amadeus*, there are two contrasting views of God. The first view is that of the Lombardy merchants: "[...] a superior Hapsburg emperor inhabiting a heaven only slightly further off than Vienna. All they required from him was to protect commerce and keep them forever unnoticed – preserved in mediocrity." (Play, 15f.) Although Salieri states that "[his] own requirements were very different" (Play, 16), he sees God as the same primitive, anthropomorphic ruler, a "God of Bargains" (Play, 16):

Every Sunday I saw him in church [...] I don't mean Christ.  
 [...] No: I mean 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 irre-  
 versible. 'You give me so – I'll give you so! No more. No  
 less!' (Play, 16)

The other, contrasting view of God is not so explicitly stated, but it is implied through the failure of Salieri's bargain. The "God of Grace" ignores "the virtues of hard work, reverence, and self-denial" (Bidney, 184), ignores Salieri's vows and bestows his gifts upon an apparently unworthy individual. For Salieri, this view of God as a capricious player is unbearable and it leads to the decay of his moral basis. Salieri is not able to recognise and accept divine irony, and so he poses a challenge to the universal force that has disappointed his expectations.

[...] my life acquired a terrible and thrilling purpose. The blocking of God in one of his purest manifestations. I had the power. God needed Mozart to let himself into the world. And Mozart needed me to get him worldly advancement. So it would be a battle to the end – and Mozart was the battleground.  
(Play, 58)

Because his pact with God turns out to be a mockery, he is determined to rebuke God's injustice and destroy his creation, the "Amadeus", the one loved by God. Salieri breaks down when he has to face the old theological problem of God's preference for the immoral and taboo-breaking, yet repentant sinner over the morally self-righteous pharisee. (cf. Huber and Zapf, 308)

Through Salieri's narration, which is built like a confession, the audience assumes a divine role, because it is asked to judge in God's place. Shaffer uses this as a means to "elevate the audience to a godlike role of omnipotence" (Plunka, 200). By feeling the responsibility being put upon them, the spectators can more directly experience the full extent of Salieri's tragedy. In the film, the dramatic question about the nature of God becomes "less abstract and more personal, Salieri's revenge on God by attacking his medium, Mozart, getting focus without the play's philosophical wrapping" (Deemer).

### 2.5.1 The Cain and Abel motive

Some critics regard *Amadeus* as another variation of the biblical theme of Cain and Abel. Gregory Allen Robbins even calls the film version "A Cinematic Transformation of Genesis 4". In fact, there are many traces of the Cain and Abel myth as well as the underlying issues of that myth to be found in *Amadeus*. Those issues are the innate inequality of human beings, ambition and mediocrity, rivalry and envy between brothers, as well as the mystery of God's preference for one man over the other.

The Cain and Abel theme in *Amadeus* is closely connected with the view of God described in the preceding section. Salieri believes that through his hard work, his worship and chastity he has deserved God's grace. Accordingly, he takes it for granted that his wish to be the world's greatest composer will be fulfilled. When Mozart arrives on the scene, Salieri realises that his offering has been rejected and God's miraculous gift of composing eternal music bestowed upon his rival. He becomes aware that God's preference is arbitrary and does not depend on any business agreement. This sudden and bitter realisation has violent consequences: just like Cain decided to kill Abel after his gift had been rejected, Salieri now decides to destroy Mozart, the undeserving beneficiary of divine grace.

In order to achieve his goal, Salieri pretends to be Mozart's supporter and friend. He wins his trust and for a short while becomes his brother's keeper, only to ruin his plans and chances one by one. He does not kill Mozart with his bare hands like Cain, but he practically starves him by destroying any opportunity that he has to earn an income for him and his family. As opposed to his biblical precedent, he does not hope for grace anymore – he tries to fight God as well as his chosen one. In spite of his diabolical character, he eventually becomes the loser and the victim of his own pursuit.

Another biblical reference is to Mozart as the Prodigal Son and the remorse he feels towards Leopold. Throughout all his childhood, the historical Mozart was emotionally as well as materially dependent on his father and vice versa. When he grew up, he tried to liberate himself from this impeding bond. After a violent argument, Mozart abandoned Leopold in Salzburg and married Constanze without his father's consent. This rupture has left him with a constant feeling of guilt towards Leopold. In *Amadeus*, Salieri learns by chance about Mozart's familial situation at a masquerade. When he sees a performance of Mozart's new opera *Don Giovanni* after Leopold Mozart's death, he realises that in the dreadful, accusing figure of the Commendatore, the guilt-ridden Mozart has summoned his father from the grave. He immediately recognises the power that this knowledge gives him over Mozart and he uses it to torment his victim psychologically. Masked exactly like Leopold at the masquerade, he haunts Mozart to his death.

### 2.5.2 The Christ motive

Another theory on *Amadeus* regards the play and the film as an allegory of the Incarnation and Mozart as a Christ figure who suffers for humanity. This Christological interpretation is advocated by John Fulbright (unpubl. ms.: see Robbins). From his point of view, the title *Amadeus*, which can mean "love of God" or "beloved by God", would suggest that Mozart is a metaphorical *son* of God. He would thus be a second Christ, an incarnation of God sent to bring humanity salvation through divine music, which symbolises the love of God for his creation. Salieri, in this context, "symbolizes Jesus' human antagonists, as well as the disciples who desert Christ, but are finally redeemed by their own sufferings" (Fulbright, quoted from Robbins).

However, one should not try to read too much into Shaffer's work. All his dramas deal with profound human issues and touch upon various aspects of spiritual life, but in the end, he is no more a theologian than a historian. The real issue is always a personal tragedy resulting from a conflict between the protagonist and other characters as well as between the protagonist and the rest of the world.

### 3 The adaptation technique

#### 3.1 The transfer from stage to screen

Due to the different characteristics of the written and visual media, adapting literary works for the cinema poses many theoretical as well as technical problems. The most obvious evidence of this fact is the frequency of complaints about unsuccessful adaptations. In this short introduction, I will outline some of the problems concerning the adaptation of prose works and stage plays for the screen.

One of the most basic problems of adaptation is the necessity to leave out parts of the literary material and, on the other hand, to fill the gaps that the author has left to the reader's imagination. Since commercial films rarely exceed the limit of two-and-a-half hours, it becomes necessary to leave out scenes or whole subplots when the literary work is very long. Here, the films *East of Eden* and *Gone with the Wind*, based on novels by John Steinbeck and Margaret Mitchell respectively, may serve as examples. Very often screenwriters leave out secondary parts, because introducing too many characters in a film may lead to confusion. In a novel, the author always has time and space to explain any points that might be unclear or vague, because he is not restricted by temporal and financial limits like a film director. In the cinema, it is often better to leave out some elements completely than to introduce them without any subsequent development.

Only on the surface does it seem that the adaptation of stage plays is easier than that of novels. It is true that the time extensions of a stage play and a film are roughly the same today (as opposed to the first silent films, which lasted no more than ten to twenty minutes), but there are other factors that make the task of adapting plays a difficult one. One of those factors is the static point of view of the theatre spectator. The action usually takes place in a very restricted area; in the theatre, it is difficult to show a journey or a landscape, or the opposite – a detail, especially the hands and faces of the actors. The theatre director has no means of focussing the audience's attention on a chosen element on stage, although to a certain degree this can be achieved with lighting effects. Film, on the other hand, has the capacity to overcome the confines of the proscenium and eliminate the constancy of distance between performer and spectator. Thus, the film director is virtually compelled to move the camera, and use different angles and distances; otherwise, the film would make a dull and artificial, "theatrical" impression. Very often,

especially in the case of classic or celebrated plays, too great a reverence for the literary material has led to the production of dull and heavily theatrical films.

Moreover, on screen there is a need to concretise every detail of the setting. In a play, the stage directions may speak of “chairs and benches” (Play, 35) that are to represent an opera house, and the audience will be able and *willing* to imagine an eighteenth-century theatre. In a film, the director would either need a real theatre or an expensive studio set, because the cinematic conventions would not allow him a bare, symbolic representation of it. In this case, the screenwriter (and/or production designer) has to decide upon a number of issues, for example: how big is the theatre? how is it built? how many people are sitting in the auditorium? what kind of people are they? what are they wearing? how is the theatre lit? and so on. Consequently, the success of an adaptation depends significantly on “the degree of realism in the source drama and the resulting picture” (Gianakaris 1985, 86).

Furthermore, the film medium requires a fundamental transition from verbal to visual effects and a much greater economy on the textual level. Thus, the text of the drama often has to be reduced in amount as well as in expressiveness. The result is a gap that must be filled with visual means of expression; it is not at all sufficient to concretise the setting. It is here that many adaptations fail to convey the play’s essence due to a slavish fidelity to the dramatic text. A good screenwriter should not hesitate to reduce a long monologue to one fierce look, or a dialogue to an emotional gesture, if the conveyed message remains unchanged. A very good example of this technique is the final scene of Act I of *Amadeus*. On stage, Salieri recites a long monologue in which he curses God and makes an oath to destroy Mozart. In the film, his speech is much shortened, but while he is swearing revenge, he looks up at the wooden cross on the wall, then takes it off, and throws it into the fireplace where it lies burning brightly. This is a powerful image, and it manages to replace the original monologue more than adequately. In other cases, it is often difficult to convey the thoughts or feelings of the characters without words, using only visual means of expression. But after all, this difficulty is a challenge for the ambitious screenwriter or director and therein lies the particular attraction of film adaptations.

An important consideration to make concerning the adaptation of stage plays for the screen is their commercial aspect. Since the cost of producing a film is enormous – the cost of filming *Amadeus* amounted to 18 million US dollars (cf. Plunka, 26) – the producer works under strong financial pressure. He has to ensure that the film is successful with the audience and makes a profit, or that it at least covers its costs. Therefore, the director must consider that the cinema audience is much larger and, as a rule, less sophisticated than theatregoers. Consequently, commercial films are often adapted according to the current taste of the mass audience. For example, many early films had to have a happy ending or could not show nudity. Today, special effects and action scenes are often expected. Of course, this does not apply to all adaptations, but it is the general tendency of commercial cinema.

In summary, one can say that the adaptation of theatre works for the screen is a difficult task, because “motion pictures are primarily [...] a visual medium; theatre is primarily [...] verbal, hence largely metaphoric” (Gianakaris 1985, 85f). Still, with a mixture of talent, experience, and the courage to depart from the original text it is possible to create outstanding works that convey the same message as the original play. In this way, cinema becomes the modern extension of theatre.

### 3.1.1 Peter Shaffer’s staging technique

Peter Shaffer has often been accused of making his plays too “theatrical”. This complaint seems somehow out of place. One might ask, what else should a theatre play be but theatrical? However, this opinion indicates that Shaffer’s production technique is exceptional in many aspects. He has “the unique capability of effectively combining form, content and mise-en-scène” (Plunka, 14) in his plays, where he often experiments with “lighting, scenic designs, music, masks, choruses, sounds and sonority, incantations and rhythms, as well as rites and rituals” (Plunka, 36).

The combination of those dramatic devices produces an effective and “imaginative theatricality, where metaphor and nonrealism dominate” (Gianakaris 1985, 86). This staging technique creates a necessity for a radical method of adaptation. Shaffer’s symbolic language is not suitable for the cinema and therefore has to be changed and replaced with a different visual imagery. On stage, however, his “stunning spectacles, lavish soundscapes, dramatic action, and a powerful artillery of rhetoric” (Stern, 641) turn his plays into an unforgettable theatre experience.

*Amadeus* on stage was equally imaginative and impressive as Peter Shaffer's other plays. For Miloš Forman, this meant that he would have to "take the basic story and characters, and the spirit of the play, and then start from scratch" (Forman, quoted from Kakutani, 1):

The fact that "Amadeus" was so stylized, so theatrical – well, so uncinematic, he argued, was actually a blessing – it meant they wouldn't be tempted to merely translate the play to the screen, but would be forced to demolish the original, then totally reimagine it as a film. (Forman, quoted from Kakutani, 1)

In this way, Peter Shaffer succeeded in "giving birth to the same child twice" (Forman, quoted from Kakutani, 1) and the result of this re-creation of his work was the Oscar-winning screenplay. On the other hand, one must remember that although Miloš Forman's name does not appear in the credits for the script, he really was its co-author and that without his help Peter Shaffer would not have been able to achieve such a *cinematic* result.

### 3.1.2 The origin of the film

Before *Amadeus*, most of Peter Shaffer's plays had already been turned into films. Unfortunately, they were neither successful nor was the author satisfied with the results. The reason for these failures may lie in the difficulties resulting from Peter Shaffer's previously described staging technique. He was therefore very sceptical when Miloš Forman approached him during the first public preview of *Amadeus* in November 1979 and proposed to make a film of it. At first, Shaffer refused to work with Forman. Nonetheless, the director convinced him that they would co-operate very closely and that the film would be true to Shaffer's intentions. As Shaffer himself puts it: "[...] but for the enthusiasm of Mr Milos Forman I doubt if there would be a film of *Amadeus* at all." (Shaffer 1993, 108)

It took Shaffer two years to accept Forman's offer. (cf. Plunka, 26 and Kamm, 1) On 1 February 1982, Shaffer and Forman began to work on the screenplay. For four months, they worked shut away from the world in Miloš Forman's Connecticut farmhouse and eventually produced a workable script:

Isolated from the rest of the world [...] the collaborators suffered from writer's block together, listened to Mozart records together, and improvised scenes from the play together. [...] They argued about scenes and words, and the order of scenes and words. They argued about who would say what in the film. [...] In the end, nothing went into the movie that both did not agree upon. (Kakutani, 1)

In the course of their collaboration, Miloš Forman convinced Peter Shaffer that “the film of a play is really a new work” and that “[t]he adapter’s task [is] to explore many new paths in order to emerge in the end at the same emotional place”. (Shaffer 1993, 109) However, the two authors revised the script not only for a new medium, but also for a larger and less sophisticated audience. Despite his inclination towards theatrical language, Shaffer realises that motion pictures require “less elaborate, less deliberately rhetorical” language and he did his best to “make the language accessible to a large audience without condescending to them” (Shaffer, quoted from Kakutani). This made “a fair amount of demolition work” (Shaffer 1993, 109) necessary, and although it was at times painful to the author, it served to create a masterpiece in its own right.

### 3.1.3 The filming of *Amadeus*

*Amadeus* was filmed on locations in Prague and in Vienna; the castle scenes were shot in Kroměříž (Czechoslovakia) (“Amadeus (1984)”, icon “Locations”). Since reconstructing “the Habsburg [sic] Rococo decor within which Mozart spent his life” (Kamm, 1) in a studio would have been far too expensive, Miloš Forman decided that the film could only be made in Budapest, Prague or Vienna, as those were the only cities that provided the required exteriors and interiors. He discarded Vienna because it was too expensive and its historical exteriors too distorted by modernity. Budapest was cheaper, but still the historical buildings were poorly maintained. Prague remained the only possible choice, as it was both cheap and beautifully preserved. It offered “churches, palaces, streets and squares, cobblestones included, such as they were in the days of the Empress Maria Theresa, and the cost of labour and other services [was] much lower in a Communist country” (Kamm, 1).

A further advantage of Prague was that it offered Forman the possibility of shooting in the Tyl Theatre, the very theatre in which Mozart conducted the premiere of *Don Giovanni* 200 years earlier. It provided the filmmakers with unlimited freedom to stage and shoot scenes based on Mozart’s operas, and it gave them “the miraculous feeling of time being reclaimed from oblivion” (Shaffer 1993, 111). Peter Shaffer also admires the ease and natural poise that the Czech extras showed in wearing the Rococo costumes. On the whole, Prague turned out to be a very good place for filming *Amadeus*, as it provided not only the settings, but also the right atmosphere that helped the crew to “get the feel” of the eighteenth century. The historical setting proved inspiring. For example, a “beautiful

series of receding rooms and doorways in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Gyspek Palace inspired them [Forman and Shaffer] to rewrite a scene involving Mozart and the Emperor – in order to take advantage of the setting.” (Kakutani, 20)

On the other hand, there were also some difficulties connected with “making a two-and-a-half-hour costume picture entirely behind the Iron curtain” (Shaffer 1993, 111). For the largely American film crew, the enterprise involved a long stay in a highly restrictive country, and the producer Saul Zaentz had to go through endless fights with Czech bureaucracy. Luckily, the resulting film shows no traces of these impediments, as the merits of Prague outweighed the negative aspects by far.

### **3.2 Deletions and additions**

In order to arrive at a cinematic version of *Amadeus*, Shaffer and Forman were compelled to rewrite the play completely. Peter Shaffer even considers his script not an adaptation, but a parallel work (cf. Kamm, 15). In the process of reworking, it became necessary to remove some elements from the play, and then to fill the gaps resulting from the cuts. The result is that the focus of the film is shifted slightly from Salieri onto Mozart, and the whole drama becomes less of a psychological analysis and more of a fascinating story.

The deletions concerned, among others, Shaffer’s operatic devices such as the two Venticelli. In the play, they function as a chorus informing the audience – as well as Salieri – of what cannot be shown on stage directly. In the film, such a device is not necessary, as the camera can simply show the described scenes. An example of this replacement is the scene of Mozart’s marriage. In the play, the Venticelli tell Salieri that Mozart has married and that his father will be furious at the news (Play, 39). Instead of this, Forman shows Mozart and Constanze standing together before the altar. In the following shot, we see Leopold Mozart reading his son’s letter with the news of the marriage, and crushing it violently. The conveyed message is the same, but the methods are characteristic of theatre and cinema respectively. A character added as a realistic replacement for the Venticelli is the servant girl Lorl whom Salieri hires to work at the Mozarts’ household and to spy on them. She is now the one who provides information about Mozart’s financial affairs, his domestic life, and his work.

An important deletion is Salieri's seduction of Constanze. In the play, Salieri wants to seduce her in order to humiliate his rival, but when Constanze offers herself to him, he is appalled at her vulgarity and rejects her. In the final draft of the screenplay, the seduction scene is extended and Salieri not only seduces Constanze, but also humiliates her deeply. In the film, however, the seduction is again only verbal, because after seeing Mozart's manuscripts Salieri is so overwhelmed that he does not think of his wife anymore. Salieri's own wife, Teresa, is also deleted in the film, where he is shown as strictly celibate.

Mozart's membership in the Masonic Lodge, which plays a very important role in the play, is another element that has been completely removed. In the play, the Masons accept Mozart as a fellow brother and support him financially when he is bankrupt. Salieri's intrigue concerning *The Magic Flute* is both vile and ingenious. Knowing that Mozart is a member of the Masons, Salieri uses this fact to his own benefit and to the detriment of Mozart's opera. Advised by Salieri, Mozart puts Masonic elements into *The Magic Flute*, and thereby arouses the wrath of his fellow Masons. Consequently, he is expelled from the Lodge and is completely ruined financially. The film ignores the Masonic elements of the play altogether. The reason for this may have been the wish to keep the film easily accessible to an audience not familiar with this aspect of European culture, or not to make it too complicated by introducing too many subplots. Be that as it may, without the Masonic context, some elements of the film become ambiguous, for instance Mozart's burial ceremony, or the symbolism of *The Magic Flute*.

Another character who is removed in the film version aside from Teresa Salieri is Baroness von Waldstätten, who does not even appear on stage and whose only function is to provide sweets for Salieri and a library for various encounters. In the film, the first encounter between Mozart and Salieri is simply transferred to the library in the Palace of the Archbishop. This is another example of removing unnecessary parts from the film. The alternative would be to expand the character of the Baroness and let her play a more important part in the course of events.

On the other hand, many scenes were added in order to make the film more realistic, to "flesh out some scenes" (Shaffer, quoted from Kamm). The most important additions concern Mozart's father Leopold and the relationship between them as well as between Leopold and Constanze. In the play, Mozart's father does not appear at all, except in the commentaries of the two Venticelli. The film develops Mozart's family

relationships showing Leopold in Salzburg and his position at the Archbishop's court, as well as his visit to Vienna, his quarrel with Constanze, and the final break between father and son. This allows a much clearer picture of the influence that the masked figure has over Mozart than is given in the stage version of *Amadeus*. In the play, it is only through Salieri's realisation that the audience understands Mozart's emotional dependence on his father and his feeling of guilt towards him. In the film, we can see the relationship develop before our eyes, which permits us a better understanding of Mozart as a man. Moreover, some scenes at the Archbishop's court are added to show the servant status of an eighteenth-century musician and Mozart's lack of conformity.

Further scenes that exist in the play only as drafts or hints are expanded and refined. The most important of these scenes are fragments of Mozart's operas performed on stage. In the theatre, it was only possible to show the audience and play fragments of arias in the background, whereas in the film we can see a live performance *as well as* the audience and hear the music in accordance with the action on stage. Similarly, the vaudeville scenes at Emanuel Schikaneder's theatre underline Mozart's popularity and his ability to write popular tunes. In this way, it was possible to give the audience a better idea of Mozart's musical genius. The use of opera fragments is one the most valuable features of the film, contributing to its success with audiences worldwide.

The final draft of the screenplay that resulted from the secluded co-operation of the two authors still turned out to be much too long. Consequently, some of the scenes added in the screenplay had to be deleted again from the film. Those episodes include a long subplot with Herr Schlumberg (a merchant whose daughter Mozart was to teach), Constanze's relationship with her mother with whom she talks about her husband, as well as many minor dialogues.

### 3.3 Narrative sequence

The plot of *Amadeus* is enclosed in an outer narrative frame, in which Salieri is the mediator between past and present, reflection and action. The story of Mozart's life in Vienna and his early death is told in retrospective by the aged, but still suffering Salieri. There are, however, differences in the method that Salieri's narration is used in the play and in the film. First, the stage Salieri recounts his story directly to the audience; in the film, a realistic device is used and Salieri confesses his crime to a hospital priest. In the play, he is "moving us toward the climatic action of cutting his throat; in the film, this act comes early on and serves as the hook" (Deemer) that arouses the curiosity of the audience. Now, the viewer wants to know *why* Salieri cut his throat and what events led him to do this.

Both the play and the film consist of a blend of enacted episodes from the past and direct comments from the old Salieri. In this way, the spectator switches quickly between the periods and is always reminded that the events shown on the screen take place in Salieri's memory. This creates a greater distance between the viewer and the recounted events and leaves Shaffer a free hand for interpreting history. The dramatic device of the confession also allows Salieri to address the audience directly and to get the spectator involved into the story. Thus, the introduction of the priest in the film reduces the audience's responsibility, as it is not asked to judge any more, merely to listen to a tragic account. Still, the fact that Salieri is less threatening to the audience in the film does not damage his credibility or make his psychological portrait less profound. The story of his downfall is still stirring and distressing.

Deletions and additions aside, the scene sequence in the play and in the film is more or less the same, but their balance is sometimes changed. "Salieri's revenge is the turning point in both the play and film, spinning the story into its more tense second half." (Deemer) However, this point comes a little earlier in the film, or rather the part following it is much longer than the second act of the play, creating a more balanced narration. The events that lead to Salieri's decision to destroy Mozart are now condensed, and the period in which his madness develops is expanded. This creates a fuller picture of Salieri's torment and leaves more room for his viciousness to be portrayed. We are confronted with "a film villain far more evil and dark than the Salieri we see on stage" (Deemer), but with a villain who can still win our sympathy.

One of the most striking changes concerns the scene of Mozart's death, which really is the tragic finale of Shaffer's "black opera" (Shaffer, quoted from Plunka, 194). On stage, Salieri comes to visit Mozart at night and reveals himself as the masked stranger. Mozart, very ill already and shocked at the realisation that a man he believed to be his best friend is in reality his worst enemy, dies shortly afterwards in his wife's arms. In the film, the deathbed scene depicts "a night-long encounter between a physically dying Mozart and a spiritually ravenous Salieri" (Shaffer 1984, 35). Mozart's last night revolves around



the requiem commissioned by the mysterious stranger, a mass that Mozart believes to be for his dead father, but that he is really writing for himself. "[...] [W]hen Mozart gets too ill to compose, Salieri himself writes down the score as Mozart struggles to dictate the notes, a climax that is moving and ironic, engaging and horrifying. The climax of the stage play palls beside it." (Deemer)

Finally, the very last scene of the play and the film, in which Salieri absolves all mediocrities of the world, has changed its emphasis. On stage, Salieri's words "Mediocrities everywhere – now and to come – I absolve you all. Amen!" (Play, 104) are directed to the audience, and so we ourselves, who were gods before, become the "mediocrities" to which he refers. In the film, he says the same words to the patients in the mental hospital as he is wheeled along the corridor. "The difference in tone is striking: even though the climax of the movie is much more powerful than the end of the play, nonetheless there is something personally threatening in Salieri's direct confrontation of the audience at the play's end, telling us of our human mediocrity." (Deemer) The message in the film is more moderate and is not insulting to the spectator, but at the same time loses some of its accusatory power.

### 3.4 The characters in the play and the film

The character development in the play and the film differs greatly. This is partly due to the adaptation technique, and partly a result of Shaffer's further revisions of his text. In the following part, I will describe the changes that the particular characters undergo on their way from stage to screen, as well as the means of their characterisation.

#### 3.4.1 Salieri

The screen Salieri is Shaffer's final and most ingenious version of this dark and tragic character, superbly performed by the Oscar-winning F. Murray Abraham. Although Mozart's personality has been considerably expanded in the film, Salieri remains the driving force at the core of the action. This development is the logical continuation of the changes that Shaffer had already made between the London and New York productions of the play. The most important of those changes was the removal of Salieri's servant



Greybig who played the part of the masked figure in place of Salieri. Upon reflection, Shaffer must have realised that the presence of Greybig – who “performed analogous roles of Wagner to Salieri’s Faust and Leporello to Salieri’s Don Giovanni” (Gianakaris 1983, 93) – brought more disadvantages than benefits. With Greybig for an accomplice, Salieri had simply too little to do with Mozart’s ruin. In the film, Greybig is “replaced in full horror by Salieri himself as the agent of destruction” (Deemer).

Still, the reason why Salieri manages to fascinate audiences in both the theatre and the cinema is that he is more than a villain, a knave of the devil sent out to destroy God’s beloved Mozart: outside the darker regions of his mind, he is quite a likeable person. He is ambitious, polished, virtuous, ironic – only he is not a musical genius. On the other hand, he is obsessed with “finding an absolute in music” (Shaffer 1984, 22). In his character, Shaffer presents “an anatomy of failed mediocrity” (Gianakaris 1982, 49). “[Salieri’s] self-doubt, which is both the cause and the result of his frustration, eventually turns into self-hate, ready to be projected upon a convenient enemy.” (Bidney, 193) Before Mozart’s arrival, Salieri is a happy man. He is popular and respected as a musician and thinks that the great dream of his life has come true:

OLD SALIERI

[...] One moment I was a frustrated little boy in an obscure little town -- the next I was *here*, in Vienna, City of Musicians! [...] I was introduced personally to the Emperor! Within a few years I was his Court Composer. [...] Everybody liked me. I liked myself. (Screenplay, 11f.)

Although in reality he was “rich, famous, powerful, popular and a good musician” (Schonberg 1980, 35), in *Amadeus* he is presented as a man of little ability and a “musical idiot” (Play, 40). It is true that his music followed different conventions than that of Mozart, but in the play Mozart derides his work as “[t]onic and dominant, tonic and dominant, from here to resurrection!” (Play, 40). Hearing Mozart jeer at Salieri, we begin to understand “the tragedy of the man of modest talent, musical enough to recognise [...] the true greatness of genius, but not talented enough himself to match it” (Esslin). The shots of Salieri listening to Mozart’s music or reading his scores are among the most moving and tragic scenes of the film. After hearing the first concert of Mozart, he reads the score of the Adagio “in helpless fascination” (Screenplay, 20):

OLD SALIERI (VO)

[...] This was a music I’d never heard -- filled with such longing -- such unfulfillable longing... It seemed to me that I was hearing a voice of God! (Screenplay, 21)

Faced with Mozart’s genius, Salieri realises his own mediocrity and suffers so much that he naturally arouses compassion. The emotional effect of Mozart’s music on Salieri is astounding and far greater than on anyone else presented in the film:

The music swells. What we now hear is an amazing collage of great passages from MOZART’S music, ravishing to SALIERI and to us. [...] We see his agonized and wondering face: he shudders as if in a rough and tumbling sea; he experiences the point where beauty and great pain coalesce. [...] It seems to break over him like a wave – and unable to bear any more of it, he slams the portfolio shut. [...] He stands shaking, staring wildly. (Screenplay, 56)

Salieri is in the hopeless situation of a man incurably infatuated with his greatest enemy, or rather his music, and this “madness of a man splitting in half” (Screenplay, 114) sometimes drives him to paradoxical actions. He does everything in his power to stop *The Wedding of Figaro* from being produced at the National Theatre. When the libretto is accepted by the Emperor in spite of its political inappropriateness, Salieri cunningly attacks the presence of a ballet in the third act of the opera. At the time, ballet scenes in opera were forbidden by the Emperor. Under this pretext, Salieri gets Orsini-Rosenberg,

Director of the Imperial Opera, to remove the ballet. When Mozart manages to persuade Joseph to restore it and the opera is finally produced, Salieri uses all his connections, and *Figaro* is cancelled after nine performances. Nonetheless, Salieri secretly goes to see every one of them and every time he is moved to tears. This contradiction results from his self-imposed mission to destroy his idol, and it is the core of his personal tragedy. At times, Salieri even feels pity for his victim who is “so frail, so palpably mortal” (Play, 92), but as “each man kills the thing he loves”<sup>3</sup>, Salieri follows his destiny and destroys Mozart, God’s preferred creature. After this, his life becomes meaningless and his fame a farce:

I was to be bricked up in fame! Embalmed in fame! Buried in fame -- But for work I knew to be *absolutely worthless!* ... This was my sentence: -- I must endure thirty years of being called ‘distinguished’ by people incapable of distinguish- ing! ...and finally -- his Masterstroke! When my nose had been rubbed in fame to vomiting -- it would all be taken away from me. Every scrap.

.....  
I must survive to see myself become extinct! (Play, 101)

Salieri’s last attempt to gain immortality is a false confession, in which he claims to have killed Mozart. He has a desperate longing to be remembered by posterity, “if not in fame, then infamy” (Play, 102):

I did not live on Earth to be His joke for Eternity. I *will* be remembered! *I will be remembered!*  
.....  
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!* (Play, 102f.)

Yet, even this final and desperate attempt fails and Salieri has to drain his bitter cup to the dregs. He survives the suicidal attempt to cut his throat, no one believes his confession, and he has to spend the rest of his days in the torment of oblivion. He has lost his battle against God. By the time he dies, the world has completely forgotten both him and his music.

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<sup>3</sup> Oscar Wilde *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*

### 3.4.2 Mozart



The character of Mozart undergoes the most significant change on his way from stage to screen. It is partly due to the influence of Miloš Forman, who “envisioned a Mozart figure portrayed as more sympathetic in the film than he was shown in the theatre”. (Gianakaris 1985, 92) Peter Shaffer also agreed that it was necessary to “humanize him and make him a more rounded character”. (Gianakaris 1985, 92) In the play, Mozart is not nearly so complex a figure as his counterpart and functions as an antagonist rather than a protagonist. His characterisation is a somewhat one-sided and superficial caricature. Shaffer presents him as childish, arrogant, and foul-mouthed; admittedly, he is gifted, but too boorish and impulsive to be successful at the imperial court. He is a genius and “an obscene Struwwelpeter” (Adair, 142) at the same time. Yet, the play does not show Mozart in a bad light altogether. We are presented with a quite ambivalent picture of

Mozart as a child-man. A Mozart with an anal fixation. A Mozart as a permanent adolescent. A Mozart who used foul language, who had a sharp tongue, who was notably ungenerous about his colleagues, who was a womanizer and, at the end, a poverty-stricken alcoholic. But also a Mozart true to himself and his musical vision. Whatever Mozart was as a man – in his real life as in the play – in music he was pure. (Schonberg, 1)

Nevertheless, Mozart’s positive features are not very convincing in the play, because in comparison to the cinema, the theatre has only limited means of presenting musical genius. This is done much better in the film, and the result is a decidedly more likeable Mozart than we see in the play. On stage, Mozart is mean-spirited and disloyal to his friends. He is vain, conceited, and talks about his colleagues behind their backs or insults them directly:

MOZART: I know what goes on -- and so do you.  
Germany is completely in the hands of foreigners. Worthless wops like *Kapellmeister Bonno*!  
VON STRACK: Please! You’re in the man’s house!  
MOZART: Court Composer *Salieri*!  
VON STRACK: Hush!

MOZART: Did you see his last opera? --  
The Chimney Sweep? ... Did you?  
VON STRACK: Of course I did.  
MOZART: Dogshit. Dried dogshit.

(Play, 40)

He is arrogant and self-assured beyond all measure. Yet his genius is undeniable and, perhaps, gives him the right to consider himself the best composer in the world. On stage, Mozart is also libertine in behaviour and unfaithful to his wife, and shocks audiences with his scatological language and obscene word games. He is altogether a caricature rather than a real man, and he seems a creation of the Devil rather than of God. But we also see Mozart as an inspired composer who is not a mere instrument of God, but a man with his own views about music in general and opera in particular:

[...] all sound multiplying and rising together -- and the together making a sound entirely new! ... I bet you that's how God hears the world. Millions of sounds ascending at once and mixing in His ear to become an unending music, unimaginable to us! [To SALIERI] [...] That's our job, we composers: to combine the inner minds of him and him and him, and her and her -- the thoughts of chambermaids and Court Composers -- and turn the audience into God.

(Play, 66)

The film presents him in a similar manner, but adds some scenes that show his character in a new light. On stage, we see Mozart only through the eyes of Salieri; the eye of the camera, on the other hand, gives the impression of objectivity and requires a more naturalistic approach. Thus, for the screen Shaffer had to tune down Mozart's language and behaviour and deepen his character. Through this realistic technique, he presents us now with a man of flesh and blood who "emerges as a conflicted individual, at once obnoxious and charming" (Kakutani, 20). We see Mozart as a rebellious but devoted son, then again as a loving husband and father. The inserted scenes show Mozart "playing an outdoor concert; trying to compose an opera at home while his wife and father argue in the background; kissing his infant son; and clowning about at a masquerade ball" (Kakutani, 20). The introduction of Leopold helps to show the circumstances that led to Mozart's perpetual immaturity, so that his behaviour suddenly becomes comprehensible. We are now able to see Mozart as the ever-innocent and vulnerable victim of his fame, fighting to survive in a world of intrigues and dependencies at the imperial court. He is too honest and straightforward to conform to the falsity of this world, and fails to gain any significant position at court, or even to secure a steady income for his family.

Especially towards the end of the film, the character of Mozart gains depth, as he is simultaneously composing the *Requiem* and *The Magic Flute*. In those scenes, Shaffer and Forman “tried to emphasize and dramatize a desperate tension created in the composer by these two emerging pieces, and the opposing worlds they represent: the shadowy and shining kingdoms in collision within one man.” (Shaffer 1984, 27)

Tom Hulce’s brilliant and vivid performance leads the audience through all the ups and downs of Mozart’s short life. At first, he seems just a buffoon, for example in the scene at the wigmaker’s shop, and his hiccuping version of the “Mozart giggle” is almost unbearable. Then, however, he develops an unexpected depth of emotion where necessary. He is convincing as a composer, and through his naiveté and suffering in the death-bed scene he manages to move audiences to tears. Hulce’s performance is a compelling feat that etches itself indelibly into the memory of the viewer. This partly explains the indignation of Mozart lovers: they realise that whoever watches the film *Amadeus* once, cannot help forever imagining Mozart as the happy-go-lucky, giggling genius of the film.

### 3.4.3 Constanze

Constanze, considered to be the first profound female role in Shaffer’s work (cf. Thomsen and Brandstetter, 202), turns out rather flat on the screen. In the stage version of *Amadeus*, which is essentially a two-character play, she has a “minor, underwritten part” (Kakutani, 20), but she appears both womanly and mature, especially towards the end of the play. Although a little careless and flirtatious, as presented in the game of forfeits (Play, 42ff.), she is nevertheless practical, charming, sensuous, and full of joie de vivre. What is more important, she loves her husband dearly and stands by his side through every hardship and humiliation. Both Mozart and Constanze are careless bon vivants, but she is the more responsible of the two and often acts as a substitute mother for her boyish husband. In the word games with the childish Mozart she appears equally infantile; but when it comes to facing unpleasant facts such as financial matters or the relationship between Mozart and his father, she shows female maturity and strength of character.



In the play, the key to the character of Constanze lies in the scenes with Salieri at the end of the first and the beginning of the second act. At first, she is truly shocked and appalled at the thought of selling her body to Salieri for the price of a secure post at court for her husband. He gives her time to go away and think over her decision. When she returns, she is ready to sacrifice herself for her husband, but she does not pretend willingness. Her directness is shocking to Salieri:

CONSTANZE [*flatly*]: Where do we go, then?

SALIERI: What?

CONSTANZE: Do we do it in here? ... Why not?

[*She sits, still wearing her hat ... Deliberately she loosens the strings of her bodice, so that one can just see the tops of her breasts, hitches up her silk skirts above the knees, so that one can also just see the flesh above the tops of her stockings, spreads her legs and regards him with an open stare.*]

[*Speaking softly*] Well? ... Let's get on with it.

[*For a second SALIERI returns the stare, then suddenly looks away.*]

(Play, 59)

Salieri is so appalled at her and his own behaviour that he rejects her sexual offer and sends her away. Hearing this, Constanze is so humiliated and hurt in her female pride that she gets furious and insults Salieri, calling him a “rotten shit” (Play, 60), thus ruining every chance for Mozart to obtain the desired post. This is a very feminine and emotional reaction, but it also shows that Constanze realises she has gone too far in offering herself to Salieri in the first place. From this conflict between sacrifice and dignity, she emerges as the moral victor, although she loses the chance for a stable family income.

In the film, the seduction is practically omitted. When Constanze brings Mozart's manuscripts to Salieri, he merely tries to flirt with her a little, but he forgets her immediately and completely after turning his attention to the manuscripts. While he is studying them, he experiences a kind of musical orgasm (see quotation on p. 28), which is perhaps a substitute for the deleted seduction scene. This hypothesis is confirmed by Abraham's acting in this scene, in which his excitement bears a strong resemblance to sexual stimulation. Although the scene of Salieri studying the manuscripts can also be found in the play, it has an extended function in the film. Unfortunately, the deletion of the seduction diminishes the role of Constanze, who is now acting childishly and innocently, thus losing much of her female strength.

Generally, the stage Constanze is a more adult character than her screen version played by Elizabeth Berridge. She is more complex in her relationship with Mozart, being at once his lover, his mother, and his companion. She submits to Mozart's sexual wishes, for example scatological riddles or "botty smacking" (cf. Play, 52), and she is jealous of his pupils with whom he deceives her. In the film, Constanze's eroticism is rather infantile, restricted to the Rococo costume accenting the lines of her body, and to her sulky mouth. Very often, she gives the impression of a dressed-up child, as, for instance, in the scene with the manuscripts, where she is more sensitive to the sweets in front of her than to Salieri's sexual allusions. While in the last part of the play Constanze is described as wearing poor clothes and looking worn out, in the film she remains an immaculate and colourful Rococo bird till the very end. This again presents her as an expensive toy rather than a companion to her husband during hard times. She does not participate in the Mozart-Salieri relationship anymore, but is pushed into the background and almost becomes one of the minor characters.

#### 3.4.4 Supporting characters

Due to the naturalistic requirements of the film medium, the supporting characters, which have been just schematic figures on stage, gain plasticity in the film. Some additional characters are introduced, for example Leopold Mozart, Madame Weber, Emanuel Schikaneder, or the maid Lorl. The introduction and development of those minor parts serves to make the film appear more realistic than the play and some scenes more entertaining. There are, for instance, splendid comic performances by Jeffrey Jones as the "musical king" Emperor Joseph II, and by Patrick Hines as Kapellmeister Bonno. The humorous elements are mostly a contribution of Miloš Forman who is known for his ironic approach towards his screen characters.

An important character added in the film is Leopold Mozart. "Mozart's father – who was nothing but a symbol in the play – has become a real person, who arrives in the flesh to chastise his self-indulgent son." (Kakutani, 20) The father-son relationship is more fully developed in the film than on stage. Leopold is shown as an overpowering personality who wants to keep total control over his son's life. He is against Mozart's living in Vienna and marrying Constanze, whom he considers common. When he comes to visit his son in his new home, he disapproves of everything he sees, and he nags at the young couple constantly. Finally, when Mozart refuses to return to Salzburg with his fa-

ther, Leopold has a violent quarrel with Constanze and leaves Vienna. Several months later, he dies in Salzburg without having reconciled with his son. Leopold's grim portrait on the salon wall forever reminds Mozart of their conflict and haunts his conscience. Even after his death, Leopold has not lost his power over Mozart, and he reappears in his operas, first as the vengeful Commendatore in *Don Giovanni*, then as the forgiving Sarastro in *The Magic Flute*. Through *The Magic Flute*, Mozart achieves a spiritual and artistic reconciliation with his father. Despite this, Leopold's final incarnation is the masked messenger of death embodied by Salieri.

The other secondary roles – Emperor Joseph II, his courtiers and other figures in the music world – have been “stripped of their stylized mannerisms and given naturalistic lines” (Kakutani, 20). They now appear far more human. An example of this is the comical scene of Mozart's introduction to the Emperor, in which Joseph plays a March of Welcome for Mozart. Struggling through the manuscript, he no longer resembles a dignified ruler, so that Mozart is mistaken and bows to one of the courtiers. The fat, puffing Kapellmeister Bonno with his heavy Italian accent also contributes to this naturalistic effect.

Other characters, including “Mozart's shrill mother-in-law, a maid hired by Salieri to spy on his rival, the Archbishop, and various singers and performers, were totally invented for the movie” (Kakutani, 20) and have important functions in the plot. The Archbishop Colloredo, who is the employer of Mozart and his father in Salzburg, is introduced in order to show the servant status of an eighteenth-century musician and Mozart's insubordination. The maid Lorl serves as a replacement for the Venticelli, providing information on Mozart's private affairs, which would not be available to Salieri otherwise. She is also the only one who cries openly at Mozart's funeral, which is perhaps a symbol of Mozart's popularity with the common people, who are happily singing the melodious tunes from Mozart's operas in Schikaneder's vaudeville theatre. Emanuel Schikaneder provides the inspiration for *The Magic Flute* in place of the masons, who are not mentioned in the film. Father Vogler, the young priest to whom Salieri is confessing, takes over the role of the theatre audience, because the audience in a cinema is much too impersonal to participate in the drama. He is much younger than Salieri, and so inexperienced that he can easily be classified as a mediocrity in his profession. This ensures the necessary premise for Salieri's confession. Those characters are necessary to replace theatrical devices with cinematic ones and to give the film a solid body.

### 3.5 Visual language

#### 3.5.1 Costumes and make-up

*Amadeus* on screen is a very colourful costume drama displaying elaborate, rich costumes and wigs. They are, in fact, so elaborate and exaggerated that Gilbert Adair calls the film “a cartoon of the eighteenth century” (Adair, 143). The Rococo setting requires wide hooped skirts, tight corsets exposing much of the voluptuous breasts, high and powdered wigs, and fanciful hats with feathers and veils. In addition, in *Amadeus* there are whole crowds of extras, for example the audience in the opera house, people in the streets, and dancers at balls. In some scenes, the result is an impressive sea of wigs, silk and lace, frills and feathers. Nevertheless, the individual costuming and make-up of the actors are also very carefully designed, and consequently *Amadeus* won the Academy Award in the Best Makeup and Best Costume Design categories.

The most remarkable achievement in this field is the make-up and clothing that transformed the forty-year old Salieri into a dodderly, wrinkled, toothless old man. F. Murray Abraham’s excellent acting completes the illusion: his gaping mouth and wrinkled brow, along with the yellow skin and white strands of greasy hair, make him appear like a living mummy. Similarly, Mozart’s make-up throughout the film transfigures him from a radiant, rosy-cheeked youth into a pale and ill drunkard. This change applies also to his overall appearance. In the beginning of the film, Mozart is a dedicated dandy, which is most apparent in the scene at the wigmaker’s shop where he cannot decide which of the three wigs to buy:

MOZART

They’re all so beautiful! Why don’t I have three heads? (Film)

Finally, he buys all three wigs. He is always neatly and stylishly dressed. Towards the end of the film, though, his appearance becomes increasingly dishevelled and we see him more often at home, without a wig and carelessly dressed. Shortly before Constanze leaves him, he even sneaks out to a drinking party in a nightdress. On the night of his death, his skin looks ashen and his lips are chapped. These make-up effects help the spectator to follow the development of Mozart’s illness and to witness his physical exhaustion. Constanze, on the other hand, remains fresh and glowing even in times of poverty, and thus she does not seem to participate in her husband’s hardships.

One of the most prominent elements of the *Amadeus* costumes is the wig, which Adair calls “the bubble bath periwig [...] pink, punk and high as an elephant’s eye” (Adair, 143). The wigs are indeed extravagant, varying from white, over pastel tones of blue, yellow,



low, and pink, to sinister black. They are often changed according to mood and situation, and equally often treacherously disarranged, as for example Mozart’s wig after his obscene play with Constanze on the palace floor. On the whole, the rich and lavish costumes serve to illustrate the hedonistic way of life of the Viennese upper class. They are also used extensively in Mozart’s

operas, for example in the exotic *Abduction from the Seraglio* or the fantastic *Magic Flute*. All of the operas shown in *Amadeus* display the characteristic, modern choreography of Twyla Tharp, who had already worked with Miloš Forman in *Hair*.

### 3.5.2 The use of symbols

There are many symbolic elements in both the play and the film, starting with the very name *Amadeus*, which Shaffer chose both for its romantic sound and for its allegorical value. Aside from that, there are also many visual images, which carry various meanings. Another interesting element is the use and role of masks throughout the plot. Shaffer was inspired to use this device by Mozart’s operas:

[...] it is remarkable how dependent all these operas are upon masks and disguises. Both Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte, his librettist, appear to have had an almost obsessive interest in their use. (Shaffer 1984, 38)

Masks play an important role in Shaffer’s plays, and also in the film version of *Amadeus*. Salieri’s plan to murder Mozart is based on the use of a disguise, which leads Mozart to believe that his father has risen from the dead. When Leopold Mozart arrives in Vienna, he is wearing a long black cloak. Later, at a masquerade, he adds to this a black double-faced mask with a tricorne hat, one side of it smiling, the other side frowning. In a scene at the masquerade, we see that Mozart cannot distinguish the mask from reality. He is laughing delightedly over Constanze’s penalty in a game of forfeits, which consists of showing her legs to the guests. Suddenly he sees the back of his father’s head with the mask frowning at him, and his laughter is immediately stifled. When his father turns

around and faces him with the smiling part of the mask, Mozart starts to laugh in relief. Thereupon, Leopold takes off the mask and we can see that he is really frowning underneath. Again, Mozart's laughter dies away. From then on, this sombre costume remains associated with Leopold and later serves Salieri, who has observed the incident, as a way to manipulate his victim. Another symbol of Leopold is his portrait, staring coldly at Mozart from the salon wall. The portrait seems to observe every move of Mozart and to disapprove of him just as Leopold did when he was still alive.

At the masquerade, Mozart is wearing a mask in the shape of a unicorn's head, which is a symbol of his male potency and a subtle allusion to the stylised horse masks worn in *Equus*. Together with the mask, Mozart's giggle sounds like a horse's neighing. Constanze is disguised as a beautiful swan, which underlines her light-heartedness and vanity. Salieri is not wearing a disguise, but only covering his face with a black eye-mask, in accordance with his simple, almost ascetic lifestyle.

Throughout the film, Salieri is symbolised by the colour black. He has black hair, while Mozart's hair is blond. The keyboard of his fortepiano has the black and white keys reversed. He always wears a small, dark wig, as opposed to most other people in the film. He dresses in plain black or dark clothes, and he even wears black stockings, although white stockings are fashionable. This colour symbolism serves to associate him with evil forces, not necessarily with the devil, but with the dark battle against God that he is fighting within his mind. He stands for darkness, and Mozart stands for divine light. While confessing his crime to the hospital priest, Salieri expertly spits on a candle and extinguishes it, just as he will later snuff out Mozart's flame. The wooden Christ on the cross is another symbol that constantly appears as Salieri's inscrutable partner in his dialogue with God.

Mozart, on the other hand, dresses in colourful coats and loves big, fanciful wigs. Yet, he is wearing a dark wig while conducting *Don Giovanni*, which symbolises his state of mind. Usually, though, he is shown as the eternal prodigy, the son remaining forever under his father's influence. This is underlined by Tom Hulce's shortness in comparison to the other actors, but also by his movements and the way that he is filmed. He always has to look up a little while talking to his respective counterpart, who is mostly standing stiffly and upright. He is only taller in relation to the immature and girlish Constanze.

The vicissitudes of Mozart's life in Vienna are symbolised by the seasons of the year. When Mozart is in his prime and still in the Emperor's favour, it is summer and the sun is shining constantly. However, when he is impoverished and has no money for heating, it is winter and the streets are covered by snow. Returning from a drinking spree, he keeps slipping on the frozen streets, and when he comes home, he finds it cold and empty, Constanze having left for the spa in Baden. The cold and the snow symbolise a bleak and depressing period in Mozart's life.

Finally, the mental hospital to which Salieri is brought after his suicide attempt is a reverberation of Forman's famous *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Another echo of that film is Salieri's valet, a bit part performed by Vincent Schiavelli who plays one of the patients in *Cuckoo's Nest*.

### 3.5.3 Camera, shots, montage

In order to make *Amadeus* a cinematic rather than theatrical experience, Miloš Forman applies various technical means to convey emotion as well as information. One device that he uses often is a series of fast cuts from one scene to another, almost in the manner of a comic strip. On its own, this technique might have a comical effect, but in *Amadeus* it serves as an illustration of Salieri's simultaneous account. The series of cuts becomes a counterpart of the natural sequence of scenes flashing up in the old man's memory. One example of Forman's combined narrative technique is a scene in the beginning of the film, in which Salieri tells the priest about his youth and the death of his father. In his monologue, Salieri talks about his wish to become a famous musician, about his restrictive father who thinks little of his son's wish, and about his father's death that enables him to come to Vienna and study music. On screen, we see the fourteen-year-old Salieri singing in church and praying for fame, then the Salieri family eating outside, Salieri's father choking on a fishbone, and then again the young Salieri singing in church over his father's coffin. Both image and sound are very condensed and carry a great amount of information. In this short scene, the viewer not only learns about the course of events, but also sees the ecstatic face of young Salieri listening to music, as well as the wooden Christ on the wall whose image returns throughout the film.

Another example of the same technique is the series of cuts following the news of Leopold Mozart's death. When Constanze tells Mozart that his father is dead, there is a sharp cut to Leopold's portrait hanging on the wall, which seems to stare back at his son. The next shot shows the vengeful figure of the Commendatore in *Don Giovanni* breaking through a brick wall. The costume of the Commendatore clearly resembles Leopold's cloak and mask, which he wears at the masquerade during his visit to Vienna. This serves to associate Leopold with the Commendatore, and later with the masked messenger who commissions the requiem from Mozart.

The most striking characteristic of the narration in *Amadeus* is the constant switching between scenes from the past and the face of the old Salieri commenting on them. For example, the first step back into the past occurs when Salieri starts conducting an imaginary orchestra in his hospital room. The moment that he raises his hands from the piano in a graceful conductor's movement, the music begins and there is a cut to Salieri, now thirty years younger conducting a real orchestra in a real opera house. Then, when the music ends and Salieri bows to the applauding audience, the camera returns to old Salieri, who is bowing to applause that he alone can hear. The transitions between past and present are usually smooth, and the shots of the old Salieri form a frame for complete episodes from the past, which are accompanied by Salieri's commentary in voice-off. Sometimes, though, Forman inserts unexpected shots of old Salieri in order to emphasise a particular comment. This technique helps him to keep the viewers alert throughout the long film.

In other cases, Forman often uses surprising but effective cuts. For example, when Salieri tells the priest about his youth in a small town and his admiration for the prodigy Mozart, he says:

OLD SALIERI (VO)  
I was still playing childish games when he was playing music  
for Kings! Even the Pope in Rome! (Screenplay, 9)

Simultaneously, he shows the six-year-old Mozart playing the piano blindfolded before an audience of cardinals, and then makes a sharp cut to the fourteen-year-old Salieri playing blind man's buff in the streets of his Lombardy home town. In this example, the visual elements are a vivid complement to the information contained in Salieri's speech and express the contrast between the musical skill of the two boys.

In another case, a fast cut is not used to achieve contrast, but to introduce a new subplot. After Mozart has married Constanze, he writes his father a letter informing him of the marriage. Leopold is shaken by the news and he crumples up the letter in distress. The rustle of paper is followed immediately by a shot of startled deer in a park. This gives the impression that it is the rustle of paper that startles the deer, whereas in reality it is the Emperor approaching on horseback. The new scene is the beginning of a subplot dealing with Mozart's unsuccessful attempt to be appointed as the instructor of Princess Elizabeth.

Two other scenes, which are always very popular with the audience, concern the introduction of Mozart's operas. The first opera shown in *Amadeus* is *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. After it has been revealed that the action of the opera is set in a Pasha's harem, Salieri's pupil Katherina Cavalieri arrives for her lesson dressed *à la turque*. She hopes to get a part in the new opera, but Salieri assures her that it would not be proper for her to play the part of an odalisque. Katherina agrees and starts to sing her scales, but when she reaches the highest tone, we suddenly see her on stage, dressed in a fantastic Turkish costume and singing the exceedingly florid aria "Martern aller Arten" from *The Abduction*. This cut indicates a lapse of time and a change of circumstances. The other famous cut is used to show how Mozart gets the inspiration to an aria for his last opera, *The Magic Flute*. After Constanze has left her husband and gone to the spa, Mozart visits his mother-in-law to find out what has happened. Madame Weber fiercely berates Mozart for not taking care of her daughter and grandson well enough. She works herself into a rage and "with a scream Madame Weber's voice turns into the shrill packing coloratura of the second Act Aria of the Queen of the Night" (Screenplay, 139) in *The Magic Flute*.

Aside from these spectacular effects, Forman uses conventional cinematic techniques. One example of this is the lighting. When the situation in the film requires suspense, the screen is dark or lit by candles, as for example in the beginning of the film when Salieri cuts his throat. Lighting effects are also used to show the contrast between the luminous National Theatre and the dimly lit popular theatre of Emanuel Schikaneder, which symbolises the decline of Mozart's career. Another conventional device is used in the scene of Mozart's agony to show the approach of Constanze. She suddenly decides to return home, and from then on the shots of Mozart dictating the *Requiem* to Salieri are interlaced with shots of Constanze travelling in a stagecoach in a desperate race against time. The camera movements are remarkably steady and natural, and seldom surprising. Nonetheless, the camera work is not boring: it is merely so smooth that one hardly notices it at all throughout the film. The effects that are usually achieved through camera work are brought about by means of aural elements.

### 3.6 Music and sound

The drama of *Amadeus* revolves around music – as the rivalry between the two protagonists is a musical one – and for this reason Mozart’s music is essential to the underlying structure of both the play and the film. In the screen version, however, music creates the true texture and ambience of the film. “In sheer quantity [...] the amount of music performed on screen and heard off screen is enormous.” (Gianakaris 1985, 93) Since “the camera can sustain visual interest while underlining the ravishing aural experience” (Robbins), Forman and Shaffer make extensive and effective use of the Mozart repertoire. Peter Shaffer admits that this effect would not be possible in a theatre:

In the picture, the music naturally becomes more prominent than in the play. This is not just because on the screen one can show operas that can only be described on stage. The paradox is that in a live theater one cannot successfully play long stretches of music without subverting the drama and turning the event into a concert, whereas the cinema positively *welcomes* music in floods [...]  
(Shaffer 1984, 22)

In *Amadeus*, the music is not used as a background, in which case it would serve to underline the atmosphere, accentuate grief, joy, or any other emotion. Even in the theatre version it plays a more important role. In the film, though, “music almost becomes a character, the most important character” (Shaffer, quoted from Kakutani, 20).

The importance of music in *Amadeus* results from Shaffer’s esteem for Mozart’s musical genius. In his eyes, “Mozart’s incomparability lies in the absolute nature of his achievements: The best of them cannot be even slightly rewritten without diminishment.” (Shaffer 1984, 22) He even states that “[...] the existence of Mozart (as of Shakespeare) is central to [his] belief in the sovereign value of mankind” (Shaffer 1984, 22). Shaffer’s admiration of Mozart’s operas is expressed in his description of *The Magic Flute*, in which he sees “destructive darkness dissolved in the sun of joyful humanism” (Shaffer 1984, 38):

“The Magic Flute” is a sacred pantomime with a special and ineffably wonderful sound, simultaneously earnest and infant-like, sweet and sublime and solemn as childhood: It is almost too good for human beings. (Shaffer 1984, 35)

Through this “worship” of Mozart, “Shaffer has found in Mozart’s music an evocative aural symbol of divinity equivalent to the sun and horse images of the earlier plays” (Lounsberry, 21). Although the court society in *Amadeus* regards Mozart’s operas as vulgar and showy, Shaffer sees and presents them as the composer’s true masterpieces, which represent the voice of God. In order to communicate this to an audience without musical education, he uses Salieri as a translator of music. When Mozart’s music is heard for the first time, Salieri immediately puts it into words:

OLD SALIERI (VO)

[...] The beginning simple, almost comic -- just a pulse --  
bassoons and basset horns -- like a rusty squeezebox ...  
Then suddenly -- high above it -- an oboe -- a single note -  
- hanging there unwavering -- till a clarinet took over and  
sweetened it into a phrase of such delight ...

(Screenplay, 20f.)

Salieri explains every important fragment of Mozart’s music in a similarly expressive manner. He is talking to the hospital priest, but the priest with his average musical knowledge represents the audience. Through this device, even the most tone-deaf of viewers can understand the core of Mozart’s genius and of Salieri’s tragedy.

The music in *Amadeus* is not only prominent in amount, but also recorded with great attention to detail. The musical director is the renowned conductor Sir Neville Marriner. For *Amadeus*, he recorded Mozart’s music in London with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields. He had a great advantage in that the film was shot around the music, not vice versa, which is usually the case. Accordingly, the music becomes a perfect complement to the scenes shown on screen. Another element that contributes to the musical and visual quality of *Amadeus* is the staging of fragments of Mozart’s operas and including them in the film. These sequences from *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, *The Wedding of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Magic Flute* form “the wonderful icing on the cake” (Forman, quoted from Kakutani, 20).

Mozart’s operas shown in *Amadeus* are not mere ornaments; rather, they are closely connected with the plot. They function as instruments of the Mozart-Salieri rivalry: Mozart uses them to assert his position as the best composer in the world, and Salieri to harm his rival and to turn his work against him. Moreover, elements and tunes from

the operas have a symbolic function throughout the film. From the very beginning, the dramatic opening chords of *Don Giovanni* become associated with fear and despair. They are first heard in the opening sequence, when the screen is in distressing darkness and Salieri shouts Mozart's name begging his forgiveness. Later in the film, they accompany Leopold Mozart, his portrait, and the masked messenger.

An extraordinary feature of the music in *Amadeus* is that it illustrates what goes on in Mozart's head. He is depicted as the "magic flute" who takes dictation directly from God. He constantly hears music in his head, and all he has to do is to put it down on paper. This ability to create music so easily is used in a number of scenes. For example, shortly before the introduction of Lort, Mozart is composing and we hear the music together with him. Suddenly Constanze comes in and she has to shout at Mozart to make herself heard over the sound of music playing in his head. The music stops abruptly. Then Lort arrives and Constanze starts to quarrel with Leopold. Mozart does not participate in the argument; he returns to his work, and gradually the sound of music rises again, while the voices of Constanze and Leopold fade away, leaving them in a pantomime of a quarrel. In another scene, Mozart leaves the sleeping Constanze and his work on the *Requiem* and goes to a party at Schikaneder's cottage. He amuses the drunken company by playing and singing fragments from *The Magic Flute*, but he cannot drown out his feeling of guilt for having left his wife and his work to go out and carouse. Although he starts to sing louder and louder, the sombre choir of "Rex Tremendae" gradually overshadows the joyful *Magic Flute* overture. This use of music is another example of a cinematic technique through which complex ideas can be expressed entirely without words. Usually, the cinema employs image rather than sound to achieve this aim, and therefore the application of music in *Amadeus* makes it a unique cinematic feat.

Apart from the music playing in Mozart's head, both Salieri and Mozart are shown to possess the unusual talent of hearing complete music as soon as they see the score. Exaggerated as it may be, this feature allows for such unforgettable scenes as that of Salieri reading Mozart's manuscripts: while Salieri quickly turns over the pages, the audience hears "an amazing collage of great passages from MOZART's music" (Screenplay, 56). A similar scene takes place on the night of Mozart's death, as the dying composer dictates

the unfinished *Requiem* to Salieri. Mozart's over-hurried dictation is practically incomprehensible to any one but Salieri, but as soon as a passage is written down, we can hear it in its final form, first the single voices and instruments, and then the whole ensemble. The individual parts of the *Requiem* are combined with the plot: Constanze's return journey at night is accompanied by the fierce "Confutatis", and the peaceful "Lacrimosa" resounds over Mozart's grave. Shaffer stresses the importance of music in this scene:

[...] we were able to construct a scene which is highly effective in cinematic terms, yet wholly concerned with the least visual of all possible subjects: music itself. I do not believe that a stage version of this scene would have been half as effective. (Shaffer 1993, 110)

Finally, one of the more remarkable sound elements in *Amadeus* is the famous "Mozart giggle", an unforgettable noise at once unnerving and disarming, which manifests the duality of the screen Mozart. As a last salutation, it echoes through Mozart's music during the final credits. Despite his hard life and early death, it is Mozart who has the last laugh as *Amadeus* comes to an end.

## 4 Conclusion

The play and the film versions of *Amadeus* have been conceived on several levels. The title is Mozart's middle name and means literally "beloved of God", but it covers many symbolic meanings. The simplest interpretation of the name *Amadeus* is that it stands for Mozart, God's chosen instrument and thus his "beloved" one. Another interpretation is to read the name as "lover of God", which would mean Salieri rather than Mozart. Thus, "the title ironically doubles back to reflect Salieri's situation" (Gianakaris 1982, 51), the situation of a man who loves his god, but decides to destroy him. Salieri's real god, however, is music, and therefore the title comes to mean "lover of music" as well.

The transfer of the drama from stage to screen was a difficult enterprise, because it was necessary to "translate" Shaffer's elaborate theatrical language into cinematic means of expression. Therefore, the overall structure of the drama had to be changed, which required not only the rewriting of existing scenes, but also the invention of new scenes and characters. However, Miloš Forman's experience in adapting literary works for the cinema and his willingness to co-operate closely with Peter Shaffer resulted in a successful adaptation.

What survives all criticism, and what is central to *Amadeus*, is not Mozart's mischief or Salieri's scheming, but the music that dominates the film in a way not possible in the stage version. Unfettered by the three walls of a stage, Miloš Forman and Peter Shaffer expanded *Amadeus* in space and scope to recreate impressively the musical world of Mozart.

What we are left with are two Amadeuses, each powerful in its own way, the play more confrontational to the audience, the film more powerful in its overall storytelling, each a solid accomplishment. (Deemer)

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## 6 Appendices

### Appendix 1 Scene sequence in the play and the film

(Scenes existing only in the play or the film respectively are set in *italics*.)

#### PLAY

##### Act I

Overture. Salieri's claim to be the murderer of Mozart.

Salieri's invocation to the audience. Young Salieri in church.  
Mozart touring Europe. Salieri's riddle:  
"The Death of Mozart, or Did I Do It?"

1781: Salieri in his prime. The arrival of Mozart in Vienna.

The Emperor commissions an opera to Mozart; discussion  
about language.

Salieri sees Mozart for the first time. Mozart's obscene play with  
Constanze. Mozart's concert and its effect upon Salieri.

Salieri prays for inspiration.

Mozart meets Emperor Joseph II. He gets permission to write  
The Abduction from the Seraglio. He humiliates Salieri by im-  
provising on his dull march of welcome before the eyes of the  
court.

The Abduction from the Seraglio. The Emperor's criticism. The  
news of Mozart's marriage.

Mozart criticises Salieri's music while drunk. He wants to teach  
Princess Elizabeth.

*Game of forfeits. The Venticelli measure Constanze's calves. Mozart and  
Constanze quarrel. Salieri overhears them and interrupts. Constanze begs  
Salieri to support Mozart at court and promises to visit him alone.*

*Salieri tries to seduce Constanze. She mocks him, but he leaves her with the  
choice whether to yield or to starve.*

#### FILM

Salieri accuses himself of the murder of Mozart and cuts his  
throat. *He is brought into a mental hospital.*

*Father Vogler comes to hear Salieri's confession. Salieri plays him some  
tunes.*

Salieri's admiration for Mozart. Mozart as a child prodigy. Sa-  
lieri's prayer and his pact with God.  
*Death of Salieri's father.*

Salieri comes to hear a concert of Mozart, wonders what  
a genius looks like. He steals into a room full of sweets  
and observes a couple playing obscene word games on the  
floor. Suddenly the music starts and Mozart dashes off to  
conduct it. Salieri is shocked by the realisation, but he is  
deeply moved by the music.

Mozart is chided by the Archbishop. Mozart insults him by  
bowing to his admirers with his back to the Archbishop.

Salieri looks at the score and realises the touch of genius.

The Emperor plans to employ Mozart and commission  
a German opera to him.

Salieri composes a March of Welcome for Mozart. He is  
proud of the result.

*Mozart in a wigmaker's shop.*

The audience at the Emperor's. Joseph plays the March of  
Welcome. Mozart asks permission to write in German. He  
sneers at Italian opera, then improvises on Salieri's dull march  
of welcome.

*Katherina Cavalieri's singing lesson. Salieri is jealous.*

Katherina Cavalieri sings in The Abduction from the Seraglio.  
The Emperor congratulates Mozart. Constanze is introduced  
as Mozart's fiancée.

*Leopold Mozart begs the Archbishop to take Mozart back in his service.  
The Archbishop agrees, but Mozart marries Constanze in Vienna.*

Emperor Joseph wants Mozart to teach Princess Elizabeth.  
Salieri arranges a competition.

## PLAY

Constanze brings Salieri Mozart's manuscripts. Salieri is overcome by the music and realises that God has betrayed him. He makes an oath to destroy Mozart.

### Act II

*Constanze returns and offers herself to Salieri. He rejects her but finds consolation in Katherina Cavalieri.*

*Salieri recommends a bad musician to teach Princess Elizabeth.*

*The Mozarts are poor. Salieri is successful with Semiramide.*

Mozart wants to write The Wedding of Figaro and defends his choice before the court. *He is admitted to the Masonic Lodge.*

Orsini-Rosenberg removes the ballet from Figaro. Mozart insults him and turns to Salieri for help.

The Emperor unexpectedly appears at the rehearsal and restores the ballet.

The Wedding of Figaro. Salieri is overwhelmed, but he does everything in his power to cancel the opera.

*Mozart is badly off and speaks to Salieri about his father.*

Don Giovanni. Salieri meditates bitterly how to destroy Mozart.

*Mozart is offered the post of Chamber Composer at a low salary. He is offended but grateful to Salieri. Salieri is appointed Kapellmeister.*

The Mozarts are destitute. Mozart has stomach cramps and nightmares of the cloaked figure. *His Mason brothers support him.*

*Masonic Lodge. Mozart plans to write The Magic Flute. Salieri suggests that he should put the Masons into it.*

The Mozarts are starving. They have a row. Mozart is ill. Constanze bears him a son and leaves him. Mozart talks to Salieri about the masked figure who has commissioned a requiem mass from him.

## FILM

Mozart is furious and refuses to submit samples of his work to the committee. Constanze brings them to Salieri. He studies them and is overwhelmed.

Salieri feels cheated by God. He burns the cross and makes an oath to destroy Mozart.

*Leopold Mozart arrives in Vienna. He is appalled by the way his son lives.*

*Mozart, Constanze, and Leopold go to a masquerade. Game of forfeits. Mozart imitates Salieri on the pianoforte.*

*Servant girl Löl, hired by Salieri, comes to Mozart's apartment. Constanze and Leopold have a violent row and Leopold leaves for Salzburg.*

*Salieri spies on Mozart with the help of Löl and sees the manuscript of The Wedding of Figaro.*

Emperor Joseph wants to stop Mozart from writing Figaro. Mozart pleads for real people and events in the opera and manages to convince the Emperor.

Rosenberg removes the wedding dance from Figaro. Emperor Joseph attends a rehearsal and restores it.

The Wedding of Figaro. Salieri is overwhelmed. The Emperor yawns. The opera is cancelled after nine performances.

*Salieri has great success with his new opera Axur. Emperor Joseph calls it the best opera yet written. Mozart mockingly congratulates Salieri.*

The news of Leopold Mozart's death.

Don Giovanni. Salieri realises Mozart's fear of his father. He begins to see a way to destroy Mozart.

Salieri buys a black cloak and mask like those that Leopold was wearing at the masquerade and then anonymously commissions Mozart to write a requiem mass. Mozart is terrified and accepts.

*The parody of Mozart's operas at Emanuel Schikaneder's vaudeville theatre. Schikaneder asks Mozart to write an opera for his theatre.*

*Schikaneder wants to know if the opera is finished. He quarrels with Constanze who wants Mozart to write the requiem mass because it pays better.*

Löl is terrified and wants to quit the service at the Mozarts'. She tells Salieri about the new opera.

The masked stranger urges Mozart to finish the requiem mass. Constanze also wants him to continue because of the money. They quarrel.

## PLAY

The Magic Flute. Salieri feels pity. *Van Swieten* is outraged and Mozart is expelled from the Lodge.

Salieri haunts Mozart masked in grey. He comes to his apartment and reveals his identity. Mozart is shocked, later mistakes Salieri for his father. Constanze returns and Mozart dies in her arms.

Mozart's funeral. Constanze glorifies him after his death.

Salieri remains in Vienna to be "buried in fame", which later passes. Mozart's music becomes increasingly popular. Salieri is forgotten.

Salieri confesses to have poisoned Mozart in order to become immortal, then cuts his throat. He survives. No one believes his story. Salieri is defeated and absolves all mediocrities of the world.

## FILM

Mozart leaves Constanze asleep and goes to a drinking party at Schikaneder's cottage. When he returns home, he finds that Constanze has left him.

Madame Weber berates Mozart for abandoning Constanze and becomes the inspiration for the Queen of the Night in The Magic Flute.

The Magic Flute at Schikaneder's vaudeville theatre. Mozart is conducting, then feels dizzy, so he sits at the *glockenspiel*. He collapses during Papageno's aria. Salieri takes him home in his carriage.

Schikaneder comes by after the performance and brings Mozart's share of the receipts. Salieri tells Mozart that the money comes from the Masked Stranger. Mozart wants to work on the Requiem but is too weak to write. He asks Salieri to take dictation.

Constanze at the Spa in Baden suddenly has a foreboding and decides to return home. She travels with little Karl in a stagecoach.

Mozart dictates the finished Requiem Mass to Salieri until complete exhaustion.

Constanze returns to find her husband dying and Salieri asleep. Re-united with Mozart, she locks away the Requiem and shows the door to Salieri. Mozart dies.

Mozart is buried in an unnamed mass grave. Lort weeps bitterly.

Salieri is done with his confession. Father Vogler is shaken to tears. Salieri is carted out along the hospital corridor and absolves all mediocrities of the world.

## Appendix 2 Cast and technical data

# Amadeus (1984)

USA 1984 Color  
8.1/10 (3617 votes) (top 250: #47)

**Certification:** USA:PG / UK:PG / Sweden:11  
**Language:** English  
**Genre/keyword:** drama / mystery / music / talent / mediocrity / jealousy / composer / flashback / biographical / historical / murder  
**Runtime:** USA:158 / Sweden:161  
**Sound Mix:** Dolby Digital (Laserdisc) / Dolby  
**Distributed by:** Orion Pictures Corporation

**Directed by:** Miloš Forman

### Cast (in credits order) complete, awaiting verification:

F. Murray Abraham	Antonio Salieri
Tom Hulce	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Elizabeth Berridge	Constanze Mozart
Simon Callow	Emanuel Schikaneder
Roy Dotrice	Leopold Mozart
Christine Ebersole	Katherina Cavalieri
Jeffrey Jones	Emperor Joseph II
Charles Kay	Count Orsini-Rosenberg
Kenny Baker (I)	Parody Commendatore
Lisabeth Bartlett	Papagena
Barbara Bryne	Frau Weber
Martin Cavani	Young Salieri
Roderick Cook	Count Von Strack
Milan Demjanenko	Karl Mozart
Peter DiGesu	Francesco Salieri
Richard Frank	Father Vogler
Patrick Hines	Kapellmeister Bonno
Nicholas Kepros	Archbishop Colloredo
Philip Lenkowsky	Salieri's Servant
Herman Meckler	Priest
Jonathan Moore	Baron Van Swieten
Cynthia Nixon	Lorl
Brian Pettifer	Hospital Attendant
Vincent Schiavelli	Salieri's Valet
Douglas Seale	Count Arco
Miroslav Sekera	Young Mozart
John Strauss (I)	Conductor
Karl-Heinz Teuber	Wig Salesman

<b>Written by</b>	Peter Shaffer (also play)
<b>Cinematography by</b>	Miroslav Ondříček
<b>Music by</b>	Neville Marriner Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart John Strauss (I)
<b>Production Design by</b>	Patrizia von Brandenstein
<b>Costume Design by</b>	Theodor Pistek (II)
<b>Film Editing by</b>	Michael Chandler Nena Danevič
<b>Produced by</b>	Bertil Ohlsson (executive) Saul Zaentz
<b>Other crew</b>	
Mark Adler	music editor
Mark Berger	re-recording mixer
Phil Bray	still photographer
Garth Inns	special effects supervisor
Paul LeBlanc	wig designer
Neville Marriner	musical conductor musical director
Christopher Newman (I)	production sound mixer
Jan Schmidt	director: second unit
Tom Scott (IV)	sound
Dick Smith (II)	old Salieri make-up
Jonas Thaler	assistant music editor
Twyla Tharp	choreographer

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