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SF PERUSALS

Amadeus

A Drama

by Peter Shaffer

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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CHARACTERS

Antonio Salieri
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Constanze Weber, wife to Mozart
Joseph II, Emperor of Austria
Count Johann Kilian von Strack, Groom of the Imperial Chamber
Count Franz Orsini-Rosenberg, Director of the Imperial Opera
Baron Gottfried van Swieten, Prefect of the Imperial Library
Two "Venticelli", "Little Winds", purveyors of information, gossip and rumour
Major-Domo
Salieri's Valet (non-speaking)
Salieri's Cook (non-speaking)
Teresa Salieri, wife of Salieri (non-speaking)
Katherina Cavalieri, Salieri's pupil (non-speaking)
Guiseppe Bonno (non-speaking)
Servants and **Citizens of Vienna**

The action of the play takes place in Vienna in November 1823, and in recall, the decade 1781-1791

AMADEUS

First produced at the National Theatre, London, on 2nd November, 1979, with the following cast of characters:

The "**Venticelli**"	Dermot Crowley
	Donald Gee
Ignaz Greybig, valet to Salieri	Philip Locke
Antonio Salieri	Paul Scofield
Johann Kilian von Strack, Groom of the Imperial Chamber	Basil Henson
Count Orsini-Rosenberg, Director of the Imperial Opera	Andrew Cruickshank
Baron van Swieten, Prefect of the Imperial Library	Nicholas Selby
Constanze Weber	Felicity Kendal
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Simon Callow
Major-Domo	William Sleigh
Joseph II, Emperor of Austria	John Normington
Servants and **Citizens of Vienna**	

Directed by Peter Hall

Design and lighting by John Bury

It was presented at the Broadhurst Theater, New York, on 17th December, 1980, with the following cast of characters:

The "**Venticelli**"	Gordon Gould Edward Zang
Salieri's Valet	Victor Griffin
Salieri's Cook	Haskell Gordon
Antonio Salieri	Ian McKellen
Joseph II, Emperor of Austria	Nicholas Kepros
Johann Kilian von Strack, Groom of the Imperial Chamber	Jonathon Moore
Count Orsini-Rosenberg, Director of the Imperial Opera	Patrick Hines
Baron van Swieten, Prefect of the Imperial Library	Louis Turenne
Priest	Donald C. Moore
Guiseppe Bonno	Russell Gold
Teresa Salieri, wife of Salieri	Linda Robbins
Katherina Cavalieri, Salieri's pupil	Caris Corfman
Constanze Weber, wife of Mozart	Jane Seymour
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Tim Curry
Major-Domo	Philip Pleasants
Citizens of Vienna	Caris Corfman, Michelle Farr, Russell Gold, Haskell Gordon, Victor Griffin, Donald C. Moore, Brad O'Hare, John Pankow, Philip Pleasants, Linda Robbins
Valets	Ronald Bagden, David Bryant, Rick Hamilton, Richard Jay-Alexander, Peter Kingsley, Mark Torres

Directed by Peter Hall

Designed by John Bury

INTRODUCTION
BY SIR PETER HALL

I want to write about the 1998-99 revival of *Amadeus* in London and New York, and about how the text, presented here, is to my mind the culmination of more than twenty years of work.

Lightning, they say (and they say it with particular foreboding on Broadway), is not known to strike in the same place twice. Some twenty years ago, *Amadeus* bestowed Tonys on me, on Peter Shaffer, lan McKellen and John Bury, the designer. It was an undoubted hit and ran for almost three years. Why on earth, my friends nervously inquired, did I want to direct it again in 1998? And it was not even to be the same production. I was bent on different designs, a different cast, and the production had a much older writer and director. Most of all, there was a possibility to reconsider the text.

Revivals of ancient successes, particularly musicals, are something of a tradition on Broadway and in London. But they are usually (particularly on Broadway) akin to the original productions, dusted down in a spirit of loving nostalgia. To do a new production of an old hit might seem to cast doubt on its original validity. Broadway is a superstitious place: it hates meddling with legends.

So that was the risk. *Amadeus* is probably the most successful serious play of the last half century. It has triumphed everywhere. So what is its extraordinary appeal? Why would it be exciting to direct again? And why did Peter Shaffer want to continue rewriting it?

Amadeus is a clear-eyed celebration of Mozart and his music. He is someone whose genius can stand with Shakespeare's. Wolfgang is of course dangerous to let on to the stage, because playwright and actors have to live up to a creativity that is almost superhuman. He also happens to be one of the great theatre composers: his music easily commands a stage. But if the portrait can be convincing, the fascination is boundless — and makes for high drama.

Shaffer's play of course goes deeper. It looks unblinkingly at the rest of us, who are neither blessed nor cursed (like Mozart) with genius. It analyses with compassion and wit how desperately ordinary most of us are. For however talented we may secretly think ourselves to be, we remain in the great scheme of things relative mediocrities. It is only genius — that rarest and most precious of states — that is unaffected by fashion and indifferent to competition. Only genius goes on creating, whatever the circumstances; it needs neither success nor recognition to sustain it: van Gogh never sold a painting. Only genius makes its own rules.

And we desperately need genius. With the decline of religious faith, artists become more and more our spiritual guides. We urgently scan the past, hoping for some clues for the future. Hence our modern passion for biography: sometimes, indeed, we appear more interested in the artist than in the art. We need to believe that a good artist is also a good man, and we learn time and time again, but never remember, that this is a naïve assumption. Wagner was a deeply horrible man, yet that does not diminish the virtue and vitality of his music. "Goodness is nothing in the furnace of art," says Shaffer's Salieri, the mediocrity who recognizes in Mozart's music the voice of God.

The play asks why God would seem to bestow genius so indiscriminately, indifferent to morality or human decency. Salieri worships Mozart's music yet is consumed by a jealous hatred of the selfish creature who creates it. Salieri is seen as the balanced man of the Enlightenment, virtuous, Catholic and — in his music — a man of classical discipline, affronted by Mozart's artful dissonances and sudden painful chromaticisms. Yet he is also overwhelmed by Mozart's originality. As influential Court Composer, he can advance Mozart's career and prosperity. Instead he withholds his patronage. The play (and history) does not say that Salieri killed Mozart. But by blocking his advancement at court in a thousand covert ways he makes it impossible for Mozart to live. And by destroying him, he destroys himself, and the genius that the musician in him worships.

Of course the play is drama, not fact, although the majority of its scenes are based on a nugget of historical truth. One obviously is not: the great Act Two confrontation between the two men which probably never happened in any form, and if it did we are only able to guess at what was said. But this invented scene allows Shaffer to show the heart of his play. Significantly, it is the scene that has undergone the most revision over the twenty years of the play's existence. The dramatist has not been altering, but revealing. Now I think he has found it.

All Shaffer's major plays are about the quest for God: if He exists, why is He so uncaring? So the final contest in *Amadeus* is not between Salieri and Mozart but between Salieri and God. God *allows* Mozart to exist; indeed, He uses him. Salieri in contrast finds himself facing a selfish and uncaring God, who follows His own incomprehensible needs and is indifferent to the suffering of Man. He is indeed so elusive that His very existence has to be questioned. And if He exists, why did He create the world and then seemingly walk away from it, leaving mediocre Man to suffer in confusion?

When Peter Shaffer and the producer, Kim Poster, asked me to do the play again, my first reaction was to refuse. I had lived through half a dozen casts, from Paul Scofield to Ian McKellen; and there had been productions all over the world (the original Broadway production has just been revived for the umpteenth time in Japan). I thought I would be in danger of repeating myself.

Then I remembered, with a flood of pleasure, how Peter Shaffer works and what a joy it is to share the process with him. He has never finished with a play: each production presents a fresh opportunity to challenge the validity of the material. Sometimes there are little adjustments, sometimes whole scenes. In December 1981 we opened on Broadway with a second act entirely different from the one we had performed at the National Theatre in London the year before. It was more human and more tragic. This process — a journey from admittedly thrilling melodrama to a full humanist tragedy — has continued. And the extraordinary thing about this work — which Shaffer calls "carving a play with actors" — is that in my experience the rewrites are always improvements: they get nearer and nearer to the heart of the play.

To my surprise, rereading it excited me profoundly. It was more a tragedy than I had remembered: an agony of bewildered pain rather than an exciting thriller. I realized that Shaffer's continual work had increased the dimensions of the play. And, to excite me further, there was the prospect of collaborating with David Suchet—a tragic actor of the first rank, whom I had always extravagantly admired but had never worked with. A phone call with Shaffer confirmed that he wanted to do still more work. It began to look promising.

We opened at the Old Vic in London in 1998. We then came to the Ahmanson Theatre in October 1999 to begin our pre-Broadway tour. There should be a plaque on the wall of that theatre —"*Amadeus* was finished here October 1999 after twenty years of work" — because the text-work continued there and was (I think) finally concluded.

Scholars will have a merry time with the text of *Amadeus* in the future: there are so many versions—even published ones. They will be able to worry and fret over the differences well into this century. Shaffer has been like a sculptor chipping away at the block of marble, working carefully to release the figure that is concealed within its depths. The play I originally directed at the National Theatre had all the thrills of a melodrama by E. T. A. Hoffmann. In New York, in the 1980s, the play became an anguished metaphysical debate as well. Now, after twenty years, while keeping its thrills and its intellectual edge, it has become a profoundly humanist play about forgiveness and atonement. It is extraordinary that after twenty years a dramatist can work with such passion. He is not trying to find what he means: he knows that. Say rather he is trying to define his meaning more completely in the white heat of the theatre.

I have revisited many plays, but none with more pleasure than *Amadeus*. I've done three *Godots*, two *Homecomings*, two *Cymbelines*, four *Dreams*, three *Hamlets* and half a dozen *Figaros*. Sometimes they have been reworkings of an original production; sometimes they have been completely new propositions, with new designs. It depends on the time, the place and the cast. A director's job is as subjective and instinctive as an actor's: he can only trust

himself. But he must try to communicate the heart of the play to his particular audience, and the more he knows about a great piece, the better his work will be. Sometimes I think I would like to be a conductor, if I ever get the chance of reincarnation. They perform a piece many times.

Past directorial work can never revive precisely, because such a revival would involve an imposition of old solutions on new circumstances: it is not creative. It may, however, be a legitimate starting point. I tried in 1990 to do a new production of Pinter's *Homecoming*. But the original 1965 production, with John Bury's masterly set, kept surging through my head. So the set had to be the beginning of the new production. To impose something else would have been self-conscious. *Amadeus* presented a different set of problems. I found I couldn't remember — twenty years on — very much about the original production. To try to do it again would be not a revival but an exhumation. I remembered the music—not only each piece but exactly where it began and ended. But then I have always had a better memory for music than for words or pictures.

John Bury's beautiful original designs were based on Baroque theatre. Salieri was "performing" his life for the audience. Now, it seemed to me, I wanted to go a step further. The play was a performance of his memories, opulent certainly, but able to change with the speed of light. I had my beginning: the changing images of memory. I said I would do the production.

Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* has always roused high passions: it has its finger on a spot that many find uncomfortable. That, I suspect, is why it has always been so commercial. Nonetheless, there have always been those who cannot bear the destruction of the delicate porcelain Mozart—the composer of tinkling elegance — and the revelation of the mortal child that we meet in his letters.

Margaret Thatcher was not known for her enthusiasm for the arts. She visited the National Theatre only once during my fifteen years as its director. Unfortunately, it was to see *Amadeus*. She was not pleased. In her best headmistress style, she gave me a severe wigging for putting on a play that depicted Mozart as a scatological imp with a love of four-letter words. It was inconceivable, she said, that a man who wrote such exquisite and elegant music could be so foulmouthed. I said that Mozart's letters proved he was just that: he had an extraordinarily infantile sense of humour. In a sense, he protected himself from maturity by indulging his childishness.

"I don't think you heard what I said," replied the Prime Minister. "He couldn't have been like that."

I offered (and sent) a copy of Mozart's letters to Number Ten the next day. I was even thanked by the appropriate Private Secretary. But it was useless: the Prime Minister insisted that I was wrong, so wrong I was.

With the play and then the film, I would think that Peter Shaffer has done more to encourage the love and understanding of Mozart than anyone this century. I was glad to be alongside him again, undertaking this new journey. It was a new cast, new sets and, as far as I was concerned, a new play. I started again. When I am preparing a production, I scribble notes to myself in a little book. They are reminders, quotations, problems, tentative solutions. Often, I find the same solutions written down three or four times—always as if they were new discoveries. I am not therefore saying that a comparison with the original ghostly prompt copy wouldn't sometimes reveal the same solution for a scene. It is just that I genuinely don't remember them. We often end where we began. But Peter Shaffer is the exception: he begins all over again in all humility. And here, to my mind, he has brilliantly uncovered what he meant.

PREFACE

AMADEUS: THE FINAL ENCOUNTER
BY SIR PETER SHAFFER

The Scene of the last meeting in my play between Salieri and Mozart was always hard for me to get right.

Structurally it obviously forms the climax of the piece. The whole impetus of its story increasingly demands a final confrontation of some kind between those two desperate men: some dramatic resolution, even if it has to be fashioned out of the impediment of a situation that can never really be resolved.

The historical facts are not helpful; they are even in some ways anticlimactic. Salieri survived Mozart by thirty-four years, living on in Vienna, at first in his accustomed state of huge fame and honour until — inevitably in that superficial and impatient town — it faded away completely. The First Imperial Kapellmeister lingered in ever-increasing obscurity, a new tide of Romanticism running in to obliterate his Classicism, popular taste for musical easiness relentlessly overwhelming the virtually used-up formulae of his restrained compositional language. He abandoned writing opera, at which he had most succeeded; his audience turned to less austere and more sugary forms of it; and finally he came to find himself a ghost — retired, replaced and essentially rejected.

Then suddenly, at the age of seventy-three, no doubt abetted by this wounding experience, there came an act of terrible violence. The old man attempted to cut his throat and spent his last three years in the City Infirmary, endlessly accusing himself of having poisoned his immortal rival to death. Between 1823 and 1825 these anguished declarations were duly reported in respectable newspapers and periodicals, and they also appear in the Conversation Books of Beethoven, where visiting friends wrote down the news for the deaf man. They are quoted verbatim to the theatre audience in the last moments of *Amadeus*.

Unquestionably these convulsed self-denunciations form together the smoke that proverbially indicates fire: they stink of burning guilt, and fearful desolation. But, unfortunately for the dramatist, none of them contains the slightest suggestion of a serious emotional confrontation having occurred between himself and Mozart. Of course this is hardly surprising, since it is the nature of professional assassination to be covert. Nevertheless, for the purposes of Drama, there *needs* to be such a Scene: the play urgently demands

one. Just as Schiller's Queen of Scots must face his Queen of England brow to brow, so must my protagonists confront each other. Something — admission or denial, shame or justification, defiance or repentance — has to be revealed to Salieri's victim, and whatever transpires at the conclusion of it has to tighten even more sharply the vice of his torment. Paradoxically, the scene must simultaneously release its audience through a sense of Form and increase the irremovable anguish of its Narrator. The objection that no evidence exists for such encounter is no excuse for not providing one. The playwright's absolute obligations are clear: to obey the formal insistences of theatre, employing Possibility and Credibility as his counsellors, and proudly to produce the specific electricity which he may thereby be able to conjure.

My task here is to review the half dozen Versions of the climax, which I constructed over twenty years under this hard imperative. Thankfully, in doing so, I had the unflagging support of my singularly patient and sympathetic director, Peter Hall, who actually staged the play twice (and brilliantly) in entirely different productions of 1979 and 1999; also the enthusiastic cooperation of Milos Forman, who filmed it in 1982, and the loving assistance of several finely intelligent actors along the way.

However, in the end, of course, the whole conceptual struggle remained what all such writing has to be: the rigorous, obsessed and solitary exercise of the Author. I recall it here now, as briefly as I can, so that this book may stand as at least the partial record of a compulsive and long-evolving process.

THE FIRST VERSION OF THE LAST ENCOUNTER

Amadeus was presented by the National Theatre of Great Britain in December 1979 with Paul Scofield as Salieri and Simon Callow as Mozart. It was a tremendous success with the public; the *Sunday Times* of London reported that people were lining up outside the theatre at six-thirty each morning for seats available only that day. I mention this agreeable fact only to make it clear that it was not because the play was a failure that I became involved in changing it. From the start of its run I was aware of a certain dissatisfaction in myself with its second act. For one thing, Salieri had not enough to do *histrionically* with making Mozart's ruin. He was a little too removed from it, insufficiently contributing to the action through other people, and not quite where he should have been — at the wicked centre of it all. This was particularly noticeable with regard to the circumstances surrounding the commissioning of the Requiem, which had to lead directly to whatever climax was involved.

The factual truth of this anonymous commission is almost too improbable for belief. On a morning in the autumn of 1791, as Mozart sat working alone

in his poor lodging in the Rauhensteingasse, the figure of a man, extremely tall and cadaverous, all muffled in grey and staring out at the world with the face of a death's-head, entered unannounced. In deep sepulchral tones he declared: "I am sent by my Master to commission from you a Requiem Mass." Mozart naturally asked: "Who is this Master? And who has died?" The reply came: "Do not seek to know. Only work fast. He will be much displeased if the work is not finished when you see me next." Then he set down a modest bag of money, turned and left the room. The distraught composer, in rotten health and now living largely on medicines and cheap white wine — also quite alone since his wife had (temporarily) abandoned him — at once conceived the vile idea that the Figure was a visitant from the other world, ordering him to compose the Mass for his own death.

In actuality, this Messenger was simply an exceptionally tall, skeletal fellow named Leutgeb, the grim-looking Steward of a rich and eccentric music lover called Count Walsegg, who actually maintained a private orchestra and was consumed by a desperate desire to be regarded as a composer. The Count's wife had just died, so he sent this alarming servant anonymously to Mozart in strictest secrecy to commission her Requiem. Incredibly, his plan was simply to copy out the manuscript in his own hand, perform it in his mansion before an audience of friends — and pass it off as his own work!

In the first production of the play, I employed this weird true story as part of the mechanism of the plot to lead the action to its climax. I invented for Salieri a cadaverous and fanatically religious Valet whom I called Greybig. Salieri confessed to the audience that he had somehow learnt of the Count's preposterous intention and offered to help him accomplish it; accordingly he dispatched his own Valet, in grey cloak and mask, to commission the Requiem from Mozart, in secret and anonymously. He informed Greybig that Mozart was a libertine composer of sublime talent, who had written no religious music for years, that he was rotten with sexual disease and might soon die, and that for the good of his soul he must be persuaded into writing the great Church Mass he was put on earth to compose. The Valet must order him to begin immediately, and finish without delay. Salieri's real motive in doing this, as he also confessed to us, was "a design to hasten Mozart toward madness, or toward death."

In other words, Salieri took a backseat whilst his servant did the dirty work, on and off stage, until one day the man flatly refused to go on with it. It was only then that his master excitedly took over *himself*, donning the same cloak and mask and appearing nightly below Mozart's window, extending his fingers upwards and implacably reducing their number with each visit to indicate the days running out for the terrified creature writing frantically above. Finally, when there were none left to show, the crazed Kapellmeister wickedly changed his gestures into a slow and insistent *beckoning*. Where-

upon, half in terror, half in bravado, Mozart threw open his casement and called down to him, using the words of Leporello from his opera *Don Giovanni*, inviting the statue to dinner: "*0 statua gentilissima, venite a cena!*" And so began the First Version of the Last Encounter, with Salieri unable to help himself, accepting the invitation — "tramping up the stairs with stone feet," and entering the miserable chamber of his now demented rival.

This confrontation scene, bravely played by Scofield and Callow, was quite short. It involved a scared, disordered speech from Mozart, drunkenly apologetic for not having finished the Mass, confessing a feeling of being poisoned, and imploring more time, the while desperately hugging Salieri's knees until finally the man could bear it no longer and, with a great shout of self-loathing, tore off the mask and revealed himself. There followed a dreadful silence — and then suddenly Mozart's shrill accusation that his "friend" had murdered him. *And, helplessly, Salieri admitted it!* In a reply consisting only of the word yes, repeated ten times, he acknowledged the truth of the accusation: "*Eccomi! — il tuo assassino! ... For you I go to Hell*." And in answer to Wolfgang's horrified, uncomprehending "Whys?", he added: "*Eccomi — il tua vittima! ... Be with God!*" Then gravely he bowed to the swaying Mozart and departed. As Mozart fell, calling out for his wife and crawling weakly over the floor to his worktable, Salieri walked downstage and addressed the audience:

> And there it was. It came out of me so easily, the appalling lie! ... Why? Because it was true. I *had* poisoned him. Not with arsenic. No. With everything you've seen me do.

Then Mozart painfully clambered up the table and turned it thereby into his deathbed, curling up on a mattress made of uncompleted manuscripts of the Requiem. Salieri continued:

> Oh, my friends: when you come here, you will feel! God cannot feel. He can only need. He cannot pity. Only Man can pity. Only Man can know shame. Only Man can *atone*. (*Pause*) In that freezing slum I saw my victim. I stood there in my masquerade and looked on my work. The slashes I had cut in him, the Creature. The stinking wounds of all hope denied him. I saw the kind of murderer I was. And I confessed.

And the Scene finished thus:

> **Salieri** I knew he would repeat it through the City.
> **Mozart** *Salieri! ...*
> **Salieri** And the city would repeat it through the world.

Mozart Salieri! ...
Salieri And the world through the years after he died, as die he must, louder and louder. As his fame grew, so would mine. "Salieri, the poisoner of Mozart!" Just that. A horror for all eternity. *Bene e bene ancora!* This would be my atonement!

THE SECOND VERSION

In some ways the above Scene (to be found only in the first version of the play, published in London by Andre Deutsch in 1980, with a glorious photograph on the cover of Scofield as the shawled and dressing-gowned old monster) was tremendously effective. It allowed both actors to play with all guns of melodrama blazing, but, more important, it contained the idea of Salieri's increasing need for *atonement* — a theme which was abandoned in the succeeding Version brilliantly acted on Broadway by lan McKellen (and then all over the world by many other actors) and only put back much later, when I came to work on the play again with David Suchet twenty years after. I stress this most particularly because what in 1999 was announced as a wholly new rewrite really contained at its heart a motif which had actually been there from the beginning. I had dropped it, largely I think because I had come to feel that a lust for repentance might be a weakening emotion in Salieri's strongly villainous character. Now I believe I was wrong. "A small-town Catholic, full of dread", as he came to define himself, would almost certainly become invaded by a deep measure of guilt, especially when confronted by the now helpless and dying object of his hitherto pitiless persecution.

Incidentally, the need for atonement also gave to this First Version another and most powerful dimension to the whispers that open the play. It was originally Salieri's idea to circulate the calumny through gossiping Vienna that he was a factual — not just a metaphorical — murderer, as an extravagant act of *penance*, violently besmirching his own reputation forever. In all later versions the same idea is replaced by another, far less worthy motive: to grab a piece of Mozart's immortality at any price, so that he would live for future generations, "if not in fame, at least in infamy!" I did this because I felt that the figure we see thirty-odd years later should be more recognizably unbalanced — even in defeat still challenging God. The effect of the rewrite is to substitute a blackly comic effect for a tragic one. (The line about his becoming immortal after all is always greeted with a huge laugh in the theatre — as is the moment when his suicide attempt is unsuccessful and his batty intention thwarted.) All the same, over the years, I really came to think it had been an error to dispense with the theme of atonement so completely.

Why, it may be asked, did I actually embark on the long process of changing *anything*? The answer is threefold, and entirely to do with the commissioning of the Requiem. (A) Salieri's action in dispatching his Valet to Mozart was a wrong choice because it was highly improbable that he would ever get to hear about Count Walsegg's extremely secret plan to pass it off as his own work in the first place. (B) Sending his Valet was far too public an act for Salieri to initiate; he was much too oblique and hidden a plotter to risk being connected with it, or having his servant gossip about it later to others. (C) I came to realize that there was no way at all that Salieri could reckon on Mozart behaving in the weirdly superstitious manner we now know that he did when confronted with the real-life Steward of Count Walsegg — treating him as a Messenger from the Other World. This was to read History backwards. My whole invention in fact was a rather too cheeky exercise in hindsight.

Clearly I had to devise a more natural way into my climactic Last Encounter. Salieri's complicity with Walsegg had to go, and so did Salieri's complicitous Valet. Although he had been played at the Olivier Theatre with a splendid spookiness by the actor Philip Locke, I reluctantly exercised the dramatist's divine right of character assassination and killed off Greybig. Now, whatever I devised, Salieri would have to move to the centre in this part of the play, as I had long wished him to do.

The solution lay finally in inventing something that somehow foreshadowed the arrival of the real Grey Messenger sent by Walsegg, an incident too dramatic in its horrid influence over Mozart's imaginings for me not to use. I decided therefore to invent for him a recurring *dream*, containing a menacing image prefiguring the Count's grim Steward: a misty Figure cloaked and faceless, but with extended arms approaching nearer every night. That gesture was suggested by the sinister beckoning of Scofield in the First Version — an image both paternal and eternal, and growing more urgent with each visitation.

Let me say that this was not just a contrivance. I was sure it was an entirely natural and credible dream for Wolfgang to have, considering the guilt he almost surely must have felt heavily after the death of the father he had regarded all his life as his only real Protector, but whom he had neglected markedly in the ageing man's last years, spent all alone miles away in Salzburg. And of course such a menacing dream was also informed by my knowledge of what he was going to tell Salieri in their final meeting: that he is writing the music for his own death.

Having created the dream, and of course getting Mozart to tell it to his increasingly trusted new friend, I was able to expand the whole notion of Salieri offering himself as a substitute father. This theme became extremely explicit in the new Version. It remained only for Mozart to run to him in terror, announcing that the Grey Figure in his dream had actually become *real* — acquiring a skull for a face and boldly invading his apartment to demand a

Requiem — and the scene was set for Salieri to conceive the cruellest thing he could do to his victim. He would appear *himself* before him, disguised as the Messenger. In his view, of course, Mozart was now starting to "see things": an opinion shared by the audience — who were only told in an aside after his death that the incident with the skeletal figure coming into his chamber had not been a hallucination at all but a real event.

What all this led to was a significant transformation of the Confrontation Scene, achieved on the pre-Broadway tour in Washington. The first great change occurred with the introduction of the actual music of the Requiem. When Salieri reluctantly received a page of the opening movement at the hands of the sick Mozart and sat, still masked, to read it, something glorious happened. As soon as one heard that grief-drenched sound of the Kyrie staining the atmosphere with its aching D Minor lamentation, whilst over it Mozart spoke his own *verbal* lament for his spent youth, the temperature rose perceptively. Since the first time I heard it in rehearsal, standing in the stalls of the theatre, that moment has always been unnervingly moving to me. Suddenly we were in a world totally different from the First Version.

The ensuing week was a tremendously difficult time of labour for the four of us: two magnificently unflagging actors, a director with nerves of steel and a stubbornly possessed author. Together at full stretch over five feverish days, we worked out a largely new Last Encounter. I would write a virtually fresh version of the Scene every morning and leave it at the desk of the Guest Quarters Hotel for lan McKellen and Tim Curry; they would learn it in the afternoon; Peter Hall would direct it in the early evening, and they would play it as convincingly as they could (which meant very) two hours later before an audience, for us to evaluate. We were all simultaneously wrecked and exhilarated by the challenge of breakneck discovery.

At one performance I conceived the most extreme innovation — Salieri actually *chewing* a piece of the paper on which the Kyrie is written, to demonstrate his own poison, and spitting it out at its composer. At another, one of the most effective moments found by Hall was the gentle removal of Salieri's mask by Mozart standing *behind* him as he sat. And, finally, the Scene ended with Wolfgang scuttling under a long worktable, desperately singing his father's little bedtime "Kissing Song" to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," with Salieri yelling down through it from above, "Alone! Leave me alone, *ti imploro*! Leave me alone at last!"

The entire sequence worked extremely well on the tingling plane of melodrama—although I confess it finally went too far, with Mozart imagining he saw his father in the room, and trying to leap up into his arms to form an ending which, despite its boldness, always somewhat embarrassed me. In sum, however, I was pleased with our joint labours, although still not entirely satisfied. The Scene really demanded something more searching than fireworks.

I was going to have to wait quite a long time before I at last saw on stage a version which pleased me all through.

THE THIRD VERSION

The film of *Amadeus* was vastly different from the play, and its treatment of the elusive Final Encounter was spectacularly so: utterly improbable, and in many ways entirely fitting!

Obviously the Broadway rewrite was much too "theatrical" for the screen, and once more finding a substitute taxed ingenuity to the full. Milos Forman and I holed up in his Connecticut farmhouse for what seemed years (actually about sixteen weeks) and came up in the end with a script which was filmed virtually without alteration of any kind in Prague in 1983. Privately I mourned the frequently banal simplification of the language but became partly persuaded that it was, for movie purposes, unavoidable.

Its astonishing triumph worldwide ensured that more people actually received and rejoiced in Mozart's music in one year than in all the nearly two hundred years since his death. As with Shakespeare, even such potentially annihilating popularity — the tapes of our sound track (designed by myself) misused in apparently every café on earth — could not stale the eternal miracle of his sound. And unquestionably the solution we found for the final encounter was in part responsible for that success, ensuring that there was a highly appropriate dramatic climax to crown the film and excite its viewers.

This solution was actually conceived out of a sudden realization that the logic of the story could well lead finally to a desperate attempt by the obsessed and increasingly unbalanced Salieri actually to *steal* the Requiem Mass he knows Mozart is writing, and then pass it off as his own work: a grieving Tribute offered at his rival's tragic funeral, which might not be far off. The idea of course was obviously suggested to me by the equally unlikely but true tale of Count Walsegg's secret commission. However, it also obviously inferred the possible necessity of having actually to murder Mozart — which for me was always a coarse and unacceptable finale. Only when the much less sensational idea arrived of an extremely sick Mozart collapsing at a performance of *The Magic Flute* and being borne off by Salieri to a sickbed, which would prove his deathbed, did things come together.

The piece of music I selected from the Requiem to be dictated by the dying Mozart to a ravening Salieri was the opening of the Confutatis. I actually travelled out to Minneapolis to see the music director of our film, Sir Neville Marriner, and persuaded him to lie on a sofa and perform the part of an expiring young genius, urgently dictating that movement whilst I sat beside him, pen in trembling hand, playing an eager and predatory Salieri. As I

recall it, my verbal part consisted largely of crying, "Not so fast!" over and over again.

It was a bold but right decision to construct this Scene deliberately as the climax, because its central preoccupation is exclusively with *sound* — and Sound is actually the name of the main character in our story. Neither of the principal human characters moves much — one lies on his soaked mattress sweating to compose in his head, the other sits at the foot of it, sweating with greed as he scribbles it all down for his own despicable uses. On paper it all looks to be pretty uncinematic — just line after line of instrumental and vocal notation — but when it is played on a screen, it bursts into vibrant life.

I was especially pleased because I had reflected as I wrote that it would really be an excellent achievement if I could demonstrate, even in a rather obvious way, the kind of mental effort this unique genius could engage in. It involved conjuring almost instantaneously out of his head long aural sequences, heard by him both individually and interlocking, to make a perfectly formed and (in both senses) perfectly moving sound. If the resulting music had not been good, the process would have been no more than a curious phenomenon. But here what was written was actually the code for a profound and absolute beauty, simultaneously fixed in structure, intensity, key and color, all in the same working minute. And I wanted viewers, especially younger ones, who sometimes tend to imagine the act of composition more or less as simply croaking tentatively to a guitar, to feel something of the awe — though not of course the envy — my Salieri knew.

The only thing I regretted about this Scene was actually a dialogue improvisation exchanged by the two actors in the heat of shooting, when Salieri failed to follow Mozart's direction that the drums "go with the harmony". It really would be very unlikely indeed for him not to be able to understand a statement so obviously basic, and, as Mozart has already pointed out, Salieri's own music is largely made of such obviousness.

THE FOURTH VERSION

After the film, the first significant new stage production of *Amadeus* with which I was again involved was in 1997 at the Stratford Festival Theatre, Ontario. It was very beautifully set by Desmond Healey and boasted a fine performance of Salieri by Brian Bedford, a dedicated and hugely accomplished actor who, over the years, has excellently played several of my other pieces, starting with *Five Finger Exercise* and including *Equus*. For him, I renewed my struggle with the Last Encounter. For a moment I was tempted to try putting the bedroom dictation scene from the film on to the stage, but I soon came to feel that it would not work. Paradoxically I felt that the very

quality I cherished about it on the screen would not transfer without close-ups — especially since it could not be interrupted, as it was in the film, by the excited counterpoint of Constanze's carriage dashing towards her dying husband through the night, or any other equivalent suspense.

Perhaps I should have attempted it, but my intuitive reluctance, together with the total alteration of the play's plotline such a plan would involve - collapse of Mozart in the opera house, et cetera — cooled me off, and I returned to renewed work on the same masked Messenger scene I had been tussling with seventeen years before.

The work I did in Stratford was really not radical enough, but it did start me thinking very seriously about how I could humanize Salieri more — removing what I was coming to think of as a betraying coarseness in the use of the masked figure, and deepening his emotions when he is confronted in the end with his palpably dying victim.

THE FIFTH (AND SIXTH) VERSION

So we come finally to what is published here for the first time: the last work on the Last Encounter, done for the admirable revival of 1998 at the Old Vic Theatre in London, with some absolutely vital additions the following year when it transferred (via Los Angeles) to Broadway.

To my great satisfaction, Peter Hall agreed to direct again; the extremely skilled David Suchet played Salieri with a totally persuasive truthfulness, nightly evoking a tremendous personal reception in both cities; and the brilliant Michael Sheen appeared as a superbly credible hyperactive Mozart. My only regret about the production was that the Lincoln Centre in New York, entirely through lack of funds thanks to government cuts, proved unable to record the finished work on film, as it had so expertly done with the first Broadway production. This was a calamity, since for an institution of that eminence to possess *two filmed versions* of the same work, achieved by the same great director and separated by twenty years, would have constituted a rare gift to all serious students of theatre and given a wonderful example of the proper usefulness of a cultural archive.

I believe these final rewrites of this most troublesome scene were ultimately the best of the many I undertook. They represent a huge rethinking of the whole trajectory of action concerning Salieri's growing guilt, which I had long wanted to explore in greater depth: a need for atonement — first broached in the earliest production with Scofield — more and more urgently arising in the man from his realization of what he has actually done with his own self-debasing life. The whole scene, representing as it does the ultimate confrontation between the two protagonists, should

be delivered with an increasingly agonized intensity, and by Salieri — in his pleas to receive Absolution — a fiercely voracious passion. His need to get it must approach dementia.

To prepare for the necessary alteration in my villain's implacable destructiveness, I had first to reconceive the episode where the two men go together to *The Magic Flute*, substituting for the great choral outburst at the end of Act Two the infinitely serene song for Prince Tamino in Act One when he literally plays on the magic flute he has been given and wild animals draw near to listen: "*Wie stark ist nicht dein Zauberton!*" Sitting on his bench Salieri also becomes enchanted — moved to a hitherto unexperienced wonder that such sweet exaltation can issue from a man whom he has deliberately reduced to ruin. Instinctively he reaches up to grasp Mozart's hand, only to be prevented by a furious interruption he himself has brought about: Baron van Swieten appears, scandalized at discovering his cherished Masonic secrets exposed in a theatrical vaudeville. From this moment, the seeds of *shame* start to grow in Salieri, leading ineluctably to a desperate need to acquire some sort of forgiveness — not from God but from Man: Mozart.

The rejection of Mozart by the Masons (an obviously fictional event, though there were persistent rumours in the ensuing two centuries that some of the Brotherhood had been deeply displeased by the vaudeville and its indiscreet composer) is the final and most lethal injury engineered by Salieri in the play. The Venticelli now report to him that the poor man has shut himself away in his apartment, seeing nobody, yet glimpsed continually at his window staring down wildly into the street, as if expecting something — *or someone*. The gossip in Vienna is that Mozart has lost his wits. Salieri is suddenly galvanized: loss of wits would surely mean loss of talent! Excited and horrified as well that he might have literally driven a man mad, he muffles himself in his cloak and hurries across the freezing city at dead of night to spy on him in secret.

What follows is almost farcical, as unexpectedly the moon comes out to expose him staring up from the dingy alley, and a seemingly demented Mozart calls down an infantile little rhyme inviting him to enter the "Palazzo Amadeo". Salieri has no choice but to climb his stairs. And so their Last Encounter begins. There is really no need for me to describe this hugely emotional meeting between the two men in detail here, since it is to be found in its rightful place in this book, published for the first time. I would like only to point out the enormous differences in the scene from anything that was ever played in previous Versions, which made it for me supremely worth doing.

As soon as Salieri enters the chamber which is Mozart's last lodging, and looks upon the foul place to which his machinations have consigned him, he sees also, strewn across the floor, a pavement of manuscripts — and of course guesses instantly what Wolfgang has been doing all this time alone. He is

actually engaged in writing the Requiem to present to that ghostly Messenger whom he has already described, and who Salieri (along with the audience) of course believes does not exist. And now he is even more shaken as the unstrung man confesses his conviction that he is writing this music for his own death. The idea of death in fact invades the room in a startling way. With deep apprehension (as in all previous Versions but now with a very different result) Salieri is persuaded to read the Kyrie — and experiences the most harrowing moment of his life.

The music is appalling. He holds in his hand an unnerving contradiction: something indestructible yet rotting, immortal yet stinking of death. *But whose?* ... As the terrible chorus fills his head with its reverberating despair, he is seized with a sickening realization. It is sounding not for Mozart but for a Boy: that eager, innocent boy he himself once was, stumbling round the fields of Lombardy singing his apprentice anthems up to the God he ached to serve — now destroyed forever by his own unrelenting malice. Only then does he urgently seek Mozart's pardon.

And now comes the most bitter consequence. Desperate, Salieri tries to confess, even begging for forgiveness on his knees with wild frustration to an increasingly terrified victim, who in self-protection is palpably regressing before him into childish avoidance. The more urgently he declares his guilt, the more Mozart sings his father's little good-night "Kissing Song", over and over again, to exclude all possible knowledge of what is being told him, until finally Salieri gives up in defeat and leaves — denied any form of Absolution. We are some way from the 1980 scene on Broadway with Ian McKellen yelling down, "Leave me — alone! Alone!" through the table under which Mozart sits cowering — undeniably effective as that was.

Of course it is a different kind of effectiveness with which this alteration is concerned. It seems to me the play is moved from high melodrama into a more awful area, akin to tragedy. This was certainly my intention, eagerly abetted by the director and the leading actor, both of whom were not merely supportive but passionately grateful for all the new writing coming their way. From the beginning, it had been Mr Suchet's greatest desire to palliate the monstrosity in Salieri with a strong dose of familiarity, so that his audience could actually recognize *themselves* in the character.

These rewrites allowed him to do that. Salieri remained a cunning assassin but emerged as more complex. One now received a clearer sense of what it might feel like to be a man for whom Music is Life, yet who rises every morning with the fixed determination to destroy its finest manifestation. I always wanted him to be what he called himself — "A good man, as the world calls Good" — corrupted by an unassuageable need to be a vessel for the Great: a nature turning evil through an infatuation with an Absolute. Even an archvillain like Richard III has his nightmare of self-confrontation in his tent on the night before the battle: the ghosts of those he has murdered arise and

denounce him, all with the same phrase — "Despair and die!" Salieri's tent is that freezing, filthy room in the Rauhensteingasse, and the Requiem intones to him the same damning injunction.

I know that to some people my attempts to escape from unalloyed melodrama are unwelcome, and part of me sympathizes with them. I actually adore melodrama — the world of masks and muffled figures at midnight — and especially the enlarged gestures on which theatre thrives, for which I believe it is still most properly loved. This is why I restored in this published version the wildest moment, when Salieri *chewed* a piece of the Requiem. I missed this sorely in our revival, because it really belonged there and should never have been omitted. But I did not miss (or perhaps missed just a little) his standing cloaked in that dingy alley with upraised fingers ticking off the time left for Mozart to complete his Death Mass. That always seemed to me to be forced. The most extreme genres, like melodrama or farce, have the most palpable limitations, to be ignored at the peril of discrediting them.

And now, before concluding my observations on this final, Final Encounter, I have one last, considerable change in it to reveal. For the pages in this volume, and all subsequent copies, I have inserted not merely Salieri's chewing of the Kyrie but, a few minutes later in the action, some totally new additions which I now consider vital. As I worked on this whole scene for publication, I came to realize that, longer as it already was than any of the other performed Versions described in this Preface, it was actually *not long enough*. Essentially, the way Salieri's emotional journey was charted after he had embarked on his attempt to get Absolution from Mozart appeared to me, on reviewing it, too compressed. It seemed almost over before it started.

At the risk of prolonging the encounter too much for the play to bear, I knew I had to give its unfolding a more expansive rhythm. Chiefly I felt I had to deal more fully with the ambiguity of Salieri's anguish — and also to accommodate what must surely by now be a need in the audience to hear this wretched man, standing before his victim, offer not only contrition but some fierce words of *self-justification* as well. Even his demand had to show some ferocity as well.

A few of these words (referring to the indifference of God) are actually reproduced from the 1980 Broadway version where they were spoken with memorable intensity by Ian McKellen; the majority, however, are new. As a result, I believe I have now achieved a realer exchange between the two, and also — though I have not actually heard it all acted out on a stage — that the added stretch of dramatic action will give it a more powerful charge of theatrical suspense. This last quality is essential: it is, after all, the drama's true climax, wherein my corrupt chief protagonist is clearly seen to be foiled in his desperate attempt to gain forgiveness, which generates the finale of the piece.

In his disturbed head, Salieri would naturally attribute his defeat to the intervention of God. Hence — after thirty-two increasingly anguished years — he would finally come to hatch his crazed counterattack: a desperate attempt to achieve, through false confession followed by suicide, in place of Absolution an infamous Immortality. This constitutes the man's last pathetic plot, put into motion at the very beginning of the play (when he is heard crying out for all Vienna to hear: "*Mozart, pardon your assassin!*") — which of course is also foiled, even more humiliatingly, at the very end of it.

A playwright lucky enough to have his work done in several large cities in several different Versions over several years cannot really be blamed for repeatedly considering textual material as it reappears — scrutinizing it through the glasses of Then and Now, as perspectives change and with them his own taste. Indeed, sometimes I wonder at those writers who display no desire to alter anything when work is revived. And sometimes, too, I envy their seeming certitude — or even their indifference, which may be a form of instinctive wisdom!

Critics or perceptive friends are of little help in this, mainly because they recall — or more often misrecall — a past Version with a fondness that will automatically exclude all one's efforts to alter it. In the case of *Amadeus*, on the one hand, many strangers in the audiences confessed to me they were strongly moved by this latest reshaping, and I could see in their eyes how this was true. On the other hand, there were others who prefer being appalled, in the deepest sense, to being moved. It is hard to judge between such reactions; although one should always remember when appraising tragedy that Aristotle spoke not only of terror but also of pity. Certainly it has to be recorded here that the "new" play was greeted every night of its nine-month run at the Old Vic Theatre with a rapturous standing ovation — a rare sight in London at a play — and with the same athletic accolade on Broadway.

Perhaps the last word on all this really belongs to Peter Hall, who is in a position to know the piece rather well, having directed all leading stage versions in England and America. He regards the play now, in his own words, not only as "immeasurably improved" but also as "finished". If I don't agree with him publicly here in print, it is only because I may well ask him to direct it again in another twenty years, and would need to have something in reserve with which to tempt him.

THE SET

Amadeus can be played in a variety of settings. What is described here is to a large extent based on the exquisite formulation found for the play in 1979 by the designer John Bury, helped into being by the director, Peter Hall.

This is not to denigrate in any way the superbly original set designed twenty years later for this newly published Version by the brilliant William Dudley, which I shall always remember with pleasure. I choose to describe Bury's set again here partly as a tribute to this most dazzling career but also in homage to the man himself, who died in November 2000 after a long and distressing illness. John was a fine, hugely talented man and a great designer.

The set consisted basically of a handsome rectangle of patterned wood, its longest sides leading away from the viewer, set into a stage of ice-blue plastic. This surface shifted beguilingly under various lights played upon it, to show gunmetal grey, or azure, or emerald green, and reflected the actors standing upon it. The entire design was undeniably modern, yet it suggested without self-consciousness the age of the Rococo. Costumes and objects were sumptuously of the period, and should always be so wherever the play is produced.

The rectangle largely represented interiors: especially those of Salieri's salon; Mozart's last apartment; assorted reception rooms and opera houses. At the back stood a grand proscenium sporting gilded cherubs blowing huge trumpets, and supporting grand curtains of sky blue, which could rise and part to reveal an enclosed space almost the width of the area downstage. Into this space superb backdrops were flown, and superb projections thrown, to show the scarlet boxes of theatres, or a vast wall of gold mirrors with an immense golden fireplace, representing the encrusted Royal Palace. In it also appeared silhouettes of scandalmongering citizens of Vienna, or the formal figures of the Emperor Joseph II of Austria and his brocaded courtiers. This wonderful upstage space, which was in effect an immense Rococo peep show, will be referred to throughout this text as the Light Box.

On stage, before the lights are lowered in the theatre, four objects are to be seen by the audience. To the left, on the wooden rectangle, stands a small table, bearing a cake-stand. In the centre, farther upstage and also on the wood, stands a wheelchair of the eighteenth century, with its back to us. To the right, on the reflecting plastic, stands a beautiful fortepiano in a marquetry case. Above the stage is suspended a large chandelier showing many globes of opaque glass.

As this is an acting edition, all directions will be given from the viewpoint of the actors.

Changes of time and place are indicated throughout by changes of light.

In reading the text it must be remembered that the action is wholly continuous. Its fluidity is ensured by the use of servants played by actors in eighteenth-century livery, whose role it is to move the furniture and carry on props with ease and correctness, while the action proceeds around them. Through a pleasant paradox of theatre their constant coming and going, bearing tables, chairs or cloaks, should render them virtually invisible, and certainly unremarkable. This will aid the play to be acted throughout in its proper manner; with the sprung line, gracefulness and energy for which Mozart is so especially celebrated. The play throughout must be fleet and flowing.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The *s which now and then divide the page indicate changes of Scene: but there is to be no interruption. The scenes must flow into one another without pause from the beginning to the end of the play. Salieri should not pause for furniture to be removed or replaced.

P.S.

For
Robert
with undying love

Other plays by Peter Shaffer
published by Samuel French Ltd

Black Comedy
Equus
Five Finger Exercise
The Gift of the Gorgon
Lettice and Lovage
The Private Ear
The Public Eye
The Royal Hunt of the Sun
White Liars

ACT I

Vienna

On stage, before the House Lights are lowered, four objects are to be seen by the Audience. R *of the wooden rectangle stands a table bearing a cake-stand.* C, *further upstage and also on the wood, stands a wheelchair of the eighteenth century, with its back to the Audience.* L, *on the reflecting plastic, stands a beautiful fortepiano in a marquetry case. Above the stage is suspended a large chandelier showing many globes of opaque glass. The curtains of the Light Box are open*

The House Lights go down

In the darkness the Citizens of Vienna, Salieri's Pastry Cook and the Valet enter and take up their positions in the Light Box. Salieri also enters and sits in the wheelchair

Savage whispers fill the theatre. We can distinguish nothing at first from this snake-like hissing save the word "SALIERI!" repeated here, there and everywhere around the theatre. Also the barely distinguishable word "ASSASSIN!"

The whispers overlap and increase in volume, slashing the air with wicked intensity. Then the Lights grow upstage to reveal the silhouettes of men and women dressed in the top hats and skirts of the early nineteenth century — Citizens of Vienna, all crowded together in the Light Box, and uttering their scandal

Whisperers Salieri! ... Salieri! ... Salieri!

Downstage in the wheelchair with his back to the Audience, sits an old man. We can just see, as the Lights grow a little brighter, the top of his head encased in an old Turkish-style dressing-turban, and perhaps a shawl wrapped around his shoulders

Salieri! ... Salieri! ... Salieri!

Two middle-aged gentlemen hurry on from either side, also wearing the long cloaks and tall hats of the period. These are the two Venticelli:

purveyors of fact, rumour and gossip throughout the play. They speak rapidly — in this first appearance extremely rapidly — so that the scene has the air of a fast and dreadful overture. Sometimes they speak to each other; sometimes to the Audience — but always with the urgency of men who have ever been first with the news

Venticello 1 I don't believe it.
Venticello 2 I don't believe it.
Venticello 1 I don't believe it!
Venticello 2 I don't believe it!
Whisperers *Salieri!*
Venticello 1 They say.
Venticello 2 I hear.
Venticello 1 I hear.
Venticello 2 They say.
Venticello 1 / **Venticello 2** (*together*) *I don't believe it.*
Whisperers *Salieri!*
Venticello 1 The whole city is talking.
Venticello 2 You hear it all over.
Venticello 1 The cafés.
Venticello 2 The Opera.
Venticello 1 The Prater.
Venticello 2 The gutter.
Venticello 1 They say even Metternich repeats it.
Venticello 2 They say even Beethoven, his old pupil!
Venticello 1 But why now?
Venticello 2 After so long?
Venticello 1 Thirty-two years!
Venticello 1 / **Venticello 2** (*together*) *I don't believe it.*
Whisperers SALIERI!
Venticello 1 They say he shouts it out all day!
Venticello 2 I hear he cries it out all night!
Venticello 1 Stays in his apartments.
Venticello 2 Never goes out.
Venticello 1 Not for a year now.
Venticello 2 Longer. Longer.
Venticello 1 Must be seventy.
Venticello 2 Older. Older.
Venticello 1 Antonio Salieri —
Venticello 2 The famous musician —
Venticello 1 Shouting it aloud!

Venticello 2 Crying it aloud!
Venticello 1 Impossible.
Venticello 2 Incredible.
Venticello 1 I don't believe it!
Venticello 2 I don't believe it!
Whisperers SALIERI!
Venticello 1 I know who *started* the tale!
Venticello 2 *I* know who started the tale!

Two old men — one thin and dry, one very fat — detach themselves from the crowd at the back and walk downstage, on either side: Salieri's Valet and Pastry Cook

Venticello 1 (*indicating him*) The old man's Valet!
Venticello 2 (*indicating him*) The old man's Cook!
Venticello 1 The Valet hears him shouting!
Venticello 2 The Cook hears him crying!
Venticello 1 What a story!
Venticello 2 What a scandal!

The Venticelli move quickly upstage, one on either side, and each collects a silent informant. Venticello 1 walks down eagerly with the Valet; Venticello 2 walks down eagerly with the Cook

Venticello 1 (*to the Valet*) What does he say, your master?
Venticello 2 (*to the Cook*) What *exactly* does he say, the Kapellmeister?
Venticello 1 Alone in his house.
Venticello 2 All day and all night.
Venticello 1 What sins does he shout?
Venticello 2 The old fellow ——
Venticello 1 The recluse ——
Venticello 2 What horrors have you heard?
Venticello 1 / **Venticello 2** (*together*) *Tell us! Tell us! Tell us at once! What does he cry? What does he cry? What does he cry?*

The Valet and the Cook gesture towards Salieri

Salieri (*in a great cry*) MOZART!!!

Silence

Venticello 1 (*whispering*) Mozart!
Venticello 2 (*whispering*) Mozart!

Salieri *Perdonami, Mozart! Il tuo assassino ti chiede perdono!*
Venticello 1 (*in disbelief*) Pardon, Mozart!
Venticello 2 (*in disbelief*) Pardon your assassin!
Venticello 1
Venticello 2 } (*together*) *God preserve us!*
Salieri *Pietà, Mozart. Mozart, pietà!*
Venticello 1 Mercy, Mozart!
Venticello 2 Mozart, have mercy!
Venticello 1 He speaks in Italian when excited!
Venticello 2 German when not!
Venticello 1 *Perdonami, Mozart!*
Venticello 2 Pardon your assassin!

The Valet and the Cook walk to either side of the stage, and stand still. Pause. The Venticelli cross themselves, deeply shocked

Venticello 1 There was talk once before, you know.
Venticello 2 Thirty-two years ago.
Venticello 1 When Mozart was dying.
Venticello 2 He claimed he'd been poisoned.
Venticello 1 Some said he accused a man.
Venticello 2 Some said that man was Salieri.
Venticello 1 But no-one believed it.
Venticello 2 They *knew* what he died of!
Venticello 1 Syphilis, surely.
Venticello 2 Like everybody else.

Pause

Venticello 1 (*slyly*) But what if Mozart was right?
Venticello 2 If he really *was* murdered?
Venticello 1 And by him. Our First Kapellmeister!
Venticello 2 Antonio Salieri!
Venticello 1 It can't possibly be true.
Venticello 2 It's not actually credible.
Venticello 1 Because *why*?
Venticello 2 Because *why*?
Venticello 1
Venticello 2 } (*together*) *Why on earth would he do it?*
Venticello 1 And why confess *now*?
Venticello 2 After thirty-two years!
Whisperers SALIERI!

Pause

Salieri *Mozart! Mozart! Perdonami! ... Il tuo assassino ti chiede perdono!*

Pause. They look at him, then at each other

Venticello 1 What do you think?
Venticello 2 What do you think?
Venticello 1 I don't believe it!
Venticello 2 *I* don't believe it!

Pause

Venticello 1 All the same ...
Venticello 2 Is it just possible?
Venticello 1
Venticello 2 } (*whispering together*) *Did he do it after all?*
Whisperers SALIERI!

The Venticelli exit

The Valet and the Cook remain on either side of the stage. Salieri swivels his wheelchair around and stares at us. We see a man of seventy in an old, stained dressing-gown with the old Turkish-style turban on his head. He rises and squints at the Audience, as if trying to see it

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Salieri's Apartments. November 1823. The small hours

Salieri (*calling to the Audience*) *Vi saluto! Ombri del Futuro! Antonio Salieri—a vostro servizio!*

A clock outside in the street strikes three

I can almost see you in your ranks — waiting for your turn to live. Ghosts of the Future! Be visible. I beg you. Be visible. Come to this dusty old room — this time, the smallest hours of dark November, eighteen hundred and twenty-three — and be my confessors! Will you not enter this place and stay with me till dawn? Just till dawn — smeary six o'clock!
Whisperers *Salieri! ... Salieri! ....*

The curtains of the Light Box slowly descend on the Citizens of Vienna. Faint images of long windows are projected on to the silk

The Citizens of Vienna exit

Salieri Can you hear them? Vienna is a City of Slander. Everyone tells tales here: even my servants. I keep only two now. (*He indicates them*) They've been with me ever since I came here, fifty years ago. The Keeper of the Razor; the Maker of the Cakes. One keeps me tidy, the other keeps me full. (*To them*) Leave me, both of you! Tonight I do not go to bed at all!

They react in surprise

Return here tomorrow morning at six precisely — to shave, to feed, your capricious master! (*He smiles at them both and claps his hands in dismissal*) *Via. Via, via, via! Grazie!*

They bow, bewildered, and leave the stage

(*Peering hard at the Audience, trying to see it*) *Now, won't you appear?* I need you — *desperately*! This is the last hour of my life. Those about to die implore you! ... What must I do to make you visible? Raise you up in the flesh to be my last, last audience? ... Does it take an Invocation? That's how it's always done in opera! Ah yes, of course: that's it. An *Invocation*. The only way. (*He rises*) Let me try to conjure you *now* — Ghosts of the distant Future — so I can see you.

He gets out of the wheelchair and huddles over to the fortepiano. He stands at the instrument and begins to sing in a high cracked voice, interrupting himself at the end of each sentence with figurations on the keyboard in the manner of a recitativo secco. During this the House Lights slowly come up some way to illuminate the Audience

(*Singing*) Ghosts of the Future!
Shades of Time to come!
So much more unavoidable than those of time gone by!
Appear with what sympathy incarnation may endow you!
Appear *You!*
The yet-to-be-born!
The yet-to-hate!
The yet-to-*kill*!
Appear ... Posterity!

The House Lights reach their maximum and stay like this during all of the following

(*Speaking again*) There. It worked. I can see you! ... That is the result of proper training. I was taught Invocation by Gluck, who was a true master at it. He had to be. In his day that was what people went to the Opera for:

the raising of gods, and ghosts! Nowadays, since Rossini became the rage, they prefer to watch the escapades of hairdressers.

Pause

Scusate. Invocation is an exhausting business! I need refreshment. (*He sits again in his wheelchair, moves himself over to the cake-stand, selects a cake and eats it*) It's a little repellent, I admit, but actually, the first sin I have to confess to you is gluttony. Sticky gluttony at that. Infantine, *Italian* gluttony! The truth is that all my life I have never been able to conquer a lust for the sweetmeats of Northern Italy, where I was born. From the ages of three to seventy-three, my entire career has been conducted to the taste of almonds sprinkled with sifted sugar. (*Lustfully*) Veronese biscuits! Milanese macaroons! Snow dumplings with pistachio sauce! ... Do not judge me too harshly for this. All men harbour patriotic feelings of some kind ... My parents were provincial subjects of the Austrian Empire. A Lombardy merchant and his Lombardy wife. Their notion of place was the tiny town of Legnago — which I could not wait to leave. Although devout Catholics, their notion of God was really a superior Hapsburg emperor, inhabiting a heaven only slightly farther off than Vienna. All they required of Him was to protect commerce, and keep them forever preserved in *mediocrity* ... My own requirements were very different.

Pause

I wanted *Fame*. Not to deceive you. I wanted to blaze, like a comet, across the firmament of Europe. Yet only in one especial way. Music. Absolute music! ... A note of music is either right or wrong *absolutely*! Not even time can alter that: music is God's art. (*Excited by the recollection*) Already when I was ten a spray of sounded notes would make me dizzy almost to falling! By twelve, I was stumbling about the fields of Lombardy humming my arias and anthems to the Lord. My one desire was to join all the composers who had celebrated His glory through the long Italian past! ... Every Sunday I saw Him in church, painted on the flaking wall. I don't mean Christ. The Christs of Lombardy are simpering sillies with lambkins in their arms. 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 irreversible. "You give me so — I'll give you so! No more. No less!" (*He eats a sweet biscuit in his excitement*) The night before I left Legnago forever, I went to see Him, and made a bargain with Him myself! I was a sober sixteen, filled with a desperate sense of *right*. I knelt before the God of Bargains, and I prayed through the mouldering plaster with all my soul.

He kneels

"*Signore*, let me be a composer! Grant me sufficient fame to enjoy it. In return I will live with virtue. I will strive to better the lot of my fellows. And I will honour You with much music all the days of my life!" As I said *Amen*, I saw His eyes flare. (*As "God"*) "*Bene*. Go forth, Antonio. Serve Me and mankind, and you will be blessed!" ... "*Grazie*!" I called back. "I am Your servant for life!" (*He gets to his feet again*) The very next day, a family friend suddenly appeared — out of the blue — took me off to Vienna and paid for me to study music! Shortly afterwards I met the Emperor, who favoured me. Clearly my bargain had been accepted!

Pause

The same year I left Lombardy, a young prodigy was touring Europe. A miraculous virtuoso aged ten years. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Pause. He smiles at the Audience

And now! Gracious ladies! Obliging gentlemen! I present to you — for one performance only — my last composition, entitled *The Death of Mozart — or, Did I Do It?* ... Dedicated to posterity, on this, the last night of my life!

He bows deeply, undoing as he does so the buttons of his old dressing-gown. When he straightens himself, divesting himself of this drab outer garment and his head-covering, he is a man in the prime of life, wearing an elegant black frock-coat and knee-breeches appropriate to a successful Court Composer of the 1780s. See the Notes on page 97. The House Lights go down on the Audience

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Transformation to the Eighteenth Century

Music sounds softly in the background: a serene piece for strings, by Salieri

The blue curtains of the Light Box rise and part to show the Emperor Joseph II and his Court bathed in golden light, against a golden background of mirrors and an immense golden fireplace. His Majesty is seated, holding a rolled paper, listening to the music. Also listening are Count von Strack; Count Orsini-Rosenberg; Baron van Swieten; and an anonymous Priest, dressed in a soutane

At the same time downstage of this, two Servants enter swiftly. One takes from Salieri his old man's clothes; the other carries a chair, places it UR, *and leaves pushing off the wheelchair*

An old long-wigged courtier, Kapellmeister Bonno, enters and takes his place at the keyboard

Salieri (*in a young man's voice: vigorous and confident*) The place throughout is Vienna. The year — to begin with — seventeen eighty-one. The age still that of the Enlightenment: that clear time before the guillotine fell in France and cut all our lives in half. I am thirty-one! Already a prolific composer to the Austrian Court. I own a respectable house and a respectable wife — Teresa.

Teresa enters R; *a padded, placid lady who seats herself uprightly in the upstage chair*

I do not mock her, I assure you. I required only one quality in a domestic companion: — lack of fire. And in that omission Teresa was conspicuous. I also had a prize pupil: Katherina Cavalieri.

Katherina, a beautiful girl of twenty, swirls on L

The music becomes vocal: faintly we hear a soprano singing a baroque concert aria. Like Teresa's, Katherina's part is mute — but she stands by the fortepiano and energetically mimes her rapturous singing. At the keyboard old Bonno accompanies her appreciatively

She was later to become the best singer of her age. But at that time she was mainly a bubbling student with merry eyes and a sweet, eatable mouth.

The music fades during the following

I was very much in love with Katherina — or at least in lust. But because of my vow to God, I was entirely faithful to my wife. I had never laid a finger upon the girl — except occasionally to depress her diaphragm in the way of teaching her to sing.

The music has gone completely

My ambition burned with an unquenchable flame. Its chief goal was the post of First Royal Kapellmeister, then held by Guiseppe Bonno — (*indicating him*) — seventy years old, and apparently immortal.

All on stage, save Salieri, suddenly freeze. He speaks very directly to the Audience

You, when you come, will be told that we musicians of the eighteenth century were no better than servants: the willing slaves of the well-born and well-to-do. This is quite true. It is also quite false. Yes, we were servants. But we were *learned* servants! And we used our learning to celebrate men's average lives.

A grander eighteenth-century music sounds. The Emperor remains seated, but the other four men in the Light Box — von Strack, Orsini-Rosenberg, van Swieten and the Priest — come slowly out on to the main stage and process imposingly down it, and around it, and up it again to return to their places

The Priest goes off, as do Teresa on her side and Katherina on hers. Bonno also leaves

(*Over this*) We took unremarkable men: usual officials, run-of-the-mill bishops, ordinary generals and statesmen and wives — and sacramentalized their mediocrity. We smoothed their noons with strings *divisi*. We pierced their nights with *chittarini*! We gave them processions for their strutting — serenades for their rutting — high horns for their hunting, and drums for their wars! Trumpets sounded when they entered the world, and trombones groaned when they left it! The savour of their days remains behind because of *us*, our music still remembered while their politics are long forgotten.

The Emperor hands his rolled paper to von Strack and goes off

In the Light Box are left standing, like three icons, Orsini-Rosenberg, plump and supercilious, aged sixty; von Strack, stiff and proper, aged fifty-five; van Swieten, cultivated and serious, aged fifty. The Lights go down on them a little

Tell me, before you call us servants, who served whom? And who I wonder, in your generations, will immortalize *you*?

The two Venticelli come on quickly downstage, from either side. They now appear younger also, and are dressed well, in the style of the late eighteenth century. Their manner is more confidential than before

Venticello 1 (*to Salieri*) Sir!
Venticello 2 (*to Salieri*) Sir!
Venticello 1 Sir. Sir.
Venticello 2 Sir. Sir. Sir.

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