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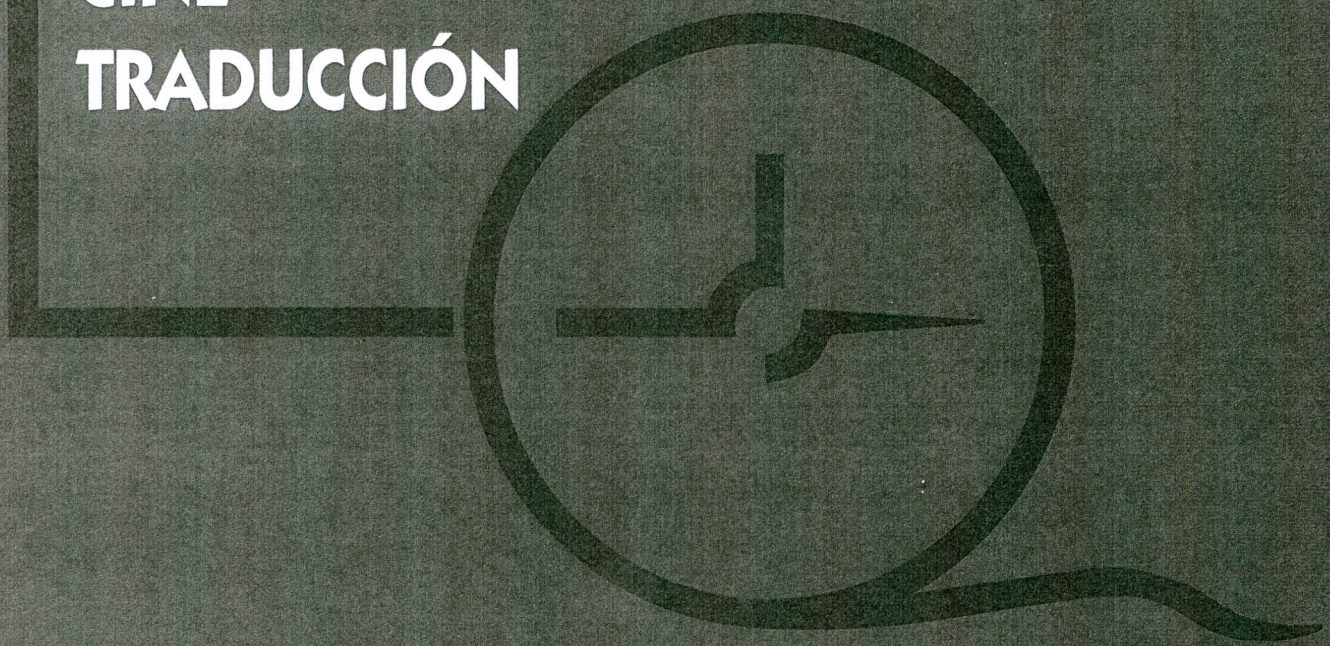

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SALIERI SPEAKS: PETER SHAFFER'S TWO VERSIONS OF *AMADEUS*

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British playwright Peter Shaffer has written his highly successful *Amadeus* twice. The first time was for the theater in 1979, when he produced an award-winning drama about mediocrity. The second time was in 1984, when, together with director Milos Forman, he adapted his own play to film. This paper centers on the changes that were made necessary in the translation of the drama to the movies, specifically the changes wrought in the narrator. While maintaining to a large extent the basic plot-line and characterization in both versions, Shaffer changes the narrative frame of the story, the narrator's manner of telling his tale. This change produces contrasting effects that invite a discussion on filmic narration as differentiated from the narration in a play, as well as a brief analysis of audience reception.

It is interesting to note that most of Shaffer's plays have been brought to the screen: *Five Finger Exercise*, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *The Private Ear* and *The Public Eye*, *Sleuth* (written in collaboration with his twin brother Anthony) and *Equus* have, at one point or another, been transformed into films. The end results were not satisfactory to the playwright, and the disappointment he had suffered caused him to be hesitant about Milos Forman's suggestion to film *Amadeus*.

Shaffer's evolution as a dramatist explains his doubts as to the filming of his plays. In 1965, with the writing of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Shaffer abandoned the conventions of naturalism and experimented with a technique he called "total theatre," "the means to which are disciplined by a certain aesthetic - an experience that was entirely and only theatrical."[1] This was achieved through the use of music, mime, and masks in movement designed to create the essential nature of the action, by using the actors as scenery and occasionally turning the scenery into an actor. This technique based on symbol and suggestion was repeated successfully in the highly stylized *Equus*, where Shaffer used his incisive theatrical insight to present to the audience the world of the disturbed Alan Strang and the psychiatrist sent to cure him. The horses in the drama are created by men wearing track suits of chestnut velvet, masks of silver wire and leather, and four-inch high hooves set on metal horse-shoes. These costumes, complementing and complemented by mime, permitted men to play horses in a manner that was enormously effective. *Amadeus*, though less formally stylized than the earlier plays, was conceived by the playwright - in terms of its heightened lan-

guage and use of operatic devices - to specifically exploit the conventions of the stage. Shaffer understands that the restrictions of the theater make possible the creation of worlds through a kind of language you will respond to nowhere else. It is a place where the audience becomes an active participant in the exercise of the playwright's imagination, and where artifice, instead of being exhausting, is liberating.[2] Shaffer has stated what he believes the purpose of the playwright is, pointing out a basic difference between the drama and the film:

> He is creating a text for live people to display to other live people. He is facing the real with the real - not facing the dozy eye of a movie public jaded with the unreal, repeatable shadows of cinema players. He is... exercising the imaginative muscle of his audience... People go to the theatre for many reasons, but mainly, I think, to be surprised *by* things and *into* things: by beauty into beauty, by rite into reality.[3]

Though Shaffer did not accept the notion that a successful play had to be automatically turned into a film and convinced that his plays had been diminished in translation to the screen, Milos Forman believed that "there must be a way to make any play into a film" -given a good storyline and good characters.[4] Forman argued that the transformation of a play into a film required more than just copying the scenes; the play would serve solely as source material for a cinematic vision, taking the basic story, characters and spirit of the play and then creating a new work of art. The fact that *Amadeus* was so stylized - so theatrical - would remove the temptation to merely film the play. The screenwriter would then be forced to demolish the original and totally reimagine it as a film, using what the art of film had to offer, disassociating himself from the techniques of playwriting.[5]

Because *Amadeus* embedded within its texture so many theatrical approaches and devices, the risks in any film conversion were great. The differences in aesthetic premises underlying the drama and the film come to the fore when this question is considered. Each medium seeks to take fullest advantage of its own unique strengths and differing values may lead to competition between two diverse approaches for representing the drama scene. The film is primarily (not exclusively) a visual medium; theater is primarily (not exclusively) verbal, and therefore largely metaphorical. Motion pictures emphasize "motion" and "pictures": excelling at creating a visual reality: it is most effective in the presentation of realistic images. The drama, on the contrary, fulfills its potential when creating a fictionalized stage metaphorically, through language and the verbal conjuring of worlds.[6] A play communicates primarily through its dialogues, spoken by actors from the stage, their voices projecting through the theater. Therefore, the skill of the dramatist lies in writing 'projectable' theatrical dialogue, written 'up,' pitched beyond normal speech, in order to become effective as spoken by actors and actresses. The style of a film is established by very different means.

The scale of projection is different and speech becomes a part of total behavior, gestures and facial as well as verbal expression.

Translating this play into film involved several important changes while permitting the creation of truly magnificent scenes. In the first place, the film version expands what was essentially a hate triangle (Salieri, God, Mozart) to show the audience more about Mozart's world and the Viennese society of the 18th century. Such further details, Forman has pointed out, are virtually required by film: given the mobility of the camera and the possibilities of editing, the screen tends to use up information more quickly than the stage; and so "what works wonderfully on stage would be just a telegram on film - paradoxically it means you have to tell the story more slowly."[7]

Thus in the movie, the character of Mozart is given a more prominent position in the action, he is rounder and we are permitted to enter his world and his imagination. Forman strove to paint a portrait of Mozart that would further the balance between him and Salieri. In the film, Mozart is portrayed as a more ordinary, childish man; his marriage and his relations with his father are given added detail. Mozart's father Leopold is more of a solid presence, to give psychological credence to why Salieri will torture Mozart after the old man's death. After Leopold dies, Salieri is shocked to see that Mozart has embodied his feelings of guilt in *Don Giovanni*. At once the only person in Vienna who truly appreciates Mozart's music and his mortal enemy, Salieri resolves on a plan to destroy him utterly: disguised in a cloak and mask that conjures up his dead father to the tortured composer, Salieri commissions a *Requiem Mass* which he intends to claim as his own after Mozart's death.

Another significant change between the published play and Shaffer's screenplay underlines this - there is a new deathbed scene for Mozart in which Salieri literally collaborates with the dying composer, hurriedly taking down dictation for the *Requiem Mass*. In this way, Salieri comes to share in some small way in the divine gifts he had believed by rights to be his: he may be considered to be elevated by this final collaboration, is perhaps even elevated by the sheer God-defying scale of this scheme to lead Mozart to his death and then claim the *Requiem Mass* as his own music to be played at Mozart's funeral, usurping "God's creature" while commemorating him.[8] This is rather different from the play, where the idea of commissioning the *Requiem*, on behalf of someone else ("a foolish man, one Count Walsegg, (who) had a longing to be thought a composer"), is just a ruse to torture Mozart.

In the second place, a change in language was also made necessary by the change of medium. Foreign phrases were deleted to make the dialogue more accessible, obscene language and expletives were also trimmed to suit the moviegoing public. But the biggest change in language involved Salieri's monologues. The stage version of *Amadeus* was characterized by lengthy speeches about God, Mozart, music and fate. Brilliant and effective as these solilo-

quies were on stage, they would have seemed unwieldy and pretentious on the screen and so Forman and Shaffer tried to replace them with "visual equivalents" - images that would convey the same facts and emotions.[9] For instance, a three-page soliloquy at the end of Act I - in which Salieri curses God for giving his voice to the "spiteful, sniggering, conceited, infantile Mozart" - has been replaced by a simple shot of the composer throwing a crucifix into a burning fireplace.

A third variation was that the filming of *Amadeus* permitted the incorporation of Mozart's compositions into the action. Shaffer, in preparing the screenplay, relied for his design on the fact that films are more amenable to the inclusion of music than the stage. By making them hear the music themselves, Shaffer hoped to make movie audiences understand what it was in Mozart's music that became Salieri's ideal as well as his torment. To that end, Shaffer wrote into his film script detailed instructions for vast quantities of Mozart selections on the soundtrack.[10] The music thus becomes an essential part of the characterization of the protagonists. The presentation of the scene that finally breaks Salieri is majestic. Constanze has brought Salieri sheets of Mozart's music to convince him to recommend her husband as tutor to the Princess Elizabeth. This could be one of the most boring scenes extant ("Salieri slowly picks out the themes on his piano, hums snatches of others, looks impressed") but the filmmaker's invention is beyond that. Salieri looks at this miscellany - the *Kyrie* from the *C-minor Mass*, the slow movement of the *Flute and Harp Concerto*, and more - and, as he does, the music plays in the background, creating a magnificent patchwork of melodies. The intermingling of music on other occasions underlines the possibilities of the film unimagined in a drama. The deathbed scene, for instance, as both musicians write the *Confutatis* section of the *Requiem*, intermingled with snatches of the music and shots of Constanze riding through the night to return to her husband, is perhaps one of the most magnificent and unforgettable in film history.

But the most significant change in the translation of the play to film are the subtle changes wrought in the framing narrative: in the manner Salieri tells his story. To explain this point clearly, I will show how the play and the film begin and end, as these are the essential framing elements. The play opens in Salieri's apartments, at dawn in November 1823.

> SALIERI: (*Calling to Audience.*)Vi Saluto! Ombri del Futoro! Antonio Salieri -a vostro servizio! (*A clock outside 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 until dawn? Just till dawn - till six o'clock!... (*He peers hard at the audience, trying to see it.*) Oh, won't you appear? I need you - desperately! This is

now the last night of my life. Those about to die implore you! What must I do to make you visible? To rise you up in the flesh to be my last, last audience?... Does it take an invocation? That's how it's always done in the 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 kepboard in the manner of a Recitativo Secco. During this the House Lights slowly come up 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!

Apear you -

The yet-to-be-born!

The yet-to-hate!

The yet-to-*kill*!

Appear - Posterity!

(*The light on the Audience reaches its maximum. It stays like this during all of the following.*)

(*Speaking again.*) There. It worked. I can see you! 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!"[11]

After this introduction, Salieri rises, removes the robe he has on and is converted into a younger version of himself. Thus he begins to tell us his story, beginning from the time he was a boy and had made a bargain with God. "Signore, let me be a Composer! Grant me the sufficient fame to enjoy it. In return I will live with virtue. I will be chaste. I will strive to better the lot of my fellows. And I will honor you with much music all the days of my life!"(19) His life was then dedicated to this end, until Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart arrived in Vienna. Listening to Mozart's divine music, Salieri becomes convinced that God has chosen to speak through Mozart and his life acquires a fatal purpose: to block God's voice by destroying his creature. After Mozart's death, Salieri realizes what is to be God's revenge: to watch himself become extinct while Mozart's music plays louder and louder. In a final, desperate attempt for fame, Salieri will commit suicide. At the end of the last act, Salieri addresses the audience one last time.

SALIERI: Dawn has come. I must release you. One moment's violence and it is over. You see, I cannot accept this. To be sucked into oblivion - not even my name remembered. Oh no. I did not live on this earth to be His joke for eternity. I have one trick left me: - see how he deals with this! (*Confidently, to Audience.*) All this week I have been shouting out about murder. You heard me yourselves - do you remember? "Mozart -pieta! Pardon your Assassin! Mozart!...Well, my friends, now they will all know for sure! They will learn of my dreadful death - and they will believe the lie forever! After today, whenever men speak Mozart's name with love, they will speak mine with loathing! As his name grows in the world so will mine - *I'm going to be immortal after all!* - And He is powerless to prevent it! (*He produces a razor from his pocket. Then he rises, opens it, and addresses the Audience most simply, gently and directly.*) *Amici cari.* I was born a pair of ears, and nothing else. It is only through hearing music that I know God exists. Only through writing music that I could worship. All around me men seek Liberty for Mankind. I sought only slavery for myself. To be owned - ordered - exhausted by an Absolute. Music. This was denied me - and with it all meaning. If I cannot be Mozart then I do not wish to be anything. Now I go to become a Ghost myself. I will stand in the shadows when you come here to this earth in your turns. And when you feel the dreadful bite of your failures - and hear the taunting of unachievable, uncaring God - I will whisper my name to you: "Antonio Salieri: Patron Saint of Mediocrities!" And in the depths of your downcastness you can pray to me. And I will forgive you. *Vi saluto.* (*He cuts his throat and falls backwards into the wheelchair.*)(112-114)

The film appears to open right where the play ends. Salieri is heard screaming about Mozart's murder and two servants burst into his room to find him on the floor, covered with blood after his attempted suicide. He is then taken to an insane asylum where a young priest, Father Volger, goes to see him. There, we see the old Salieri playing simple tunes on a piano. His first words, upon seeing the priest are: "Leave me alone." The priest answers: "Offer me your confession. I can offer you God's forgiveness." Salieri shows reluctance to speak, but after remembering bitterly: "Everybody liked me. I liked myself. Until *he* came," he soon begins to tell his tale. Thus the film is told in the framework of a memory, with the voice of Salieri guiding us through the details of his encounter with Mozart. The scenes of Salieri talking to a real priest about his sins allows Shaffer to break up the play's dramatic monologues and transform them into conversations. The film ends as an asylum orderly comes to take Salieri away, leaving the priest crushed. As Salieri leaves, he turns to the priest and whispers confidentially: "I will speak for you, Father. I speak for all mediocrities all over the world. I am their champion. I am their Patron Saint.... Mediocrities everywhere. I absolve you. I absolve you."

To understand the diverse effects produced by the play and the film, an analysis of the narrative techniques used is made necessary. Because a text implies a position for viewing, an analysis of narration calls for a study of the elements that structure the relations among narrator, character and spectator. The relations between the function of the narrator, the constitution of character, and the participation of the spectator, are integral parts of a general rhetoric. There are two levels that must be thus distinguished: that of "representation" (the level of structure through which the narrator presents the story to the spectator) and the level of "story" (the level of relations among characters.)[12]

In the play, Salieri manages to achieve these two levels: he has a relationship with the audience, they are almost made accomplices to his crime, and with the other characters. In the film, he does not seek to, nor can he, establish that relationship with the audience. The price that film has had to pay for the enrichment of setting and characterization was the severance of the actor from his audience. It is created apart from its future public because it has to be made up from a mosaic of hundreds of photographic setups.[13]

The representational level is of utmost importance in the dramatization of *Amadeus*. Salieri's point of view emerges as the central structuring and integrating function that determines and coordinates the diverse levels of the action and arbitrates the relation of the spectator to the drama being unfolded. The specific features of the role of the narrator in the drama *Amadeus* permit the figure of Salieri to dominate the stage and literally present the play to the audience. After invoking them, Salieri constantly refers to the audience, several times in each act. He never leaves the stage and all his actions, as well as his innermost thoughts are brought to the audience's attention: we are aware of his motivations from the very beginning. The audience's conception of the other characters and the dramatic situations are filtered through Salieri's consciousness. The narration thus consists of the telling of the story and a commentary on it. Salieri presents and interprets events through a succession of views of and views on characters, articulating his point of view.

Moreover, this structure permits the development and presentation of an important literary form: the dramatic monologue. Patrick Murray points out in his book on literary criticism that the motives which cause the characters to speak arise only partly as a response to the situation: the rest can be seen as an explanation for the character's philosophy, his ambition, or his failure, or perhaps as an expression of his obsessions, desires or fears.[14] Robert Langbaum has also pointed out that one major distinguishing feature of the dramatic monologue is the reader's sympathetic relation to the poem. Because we are forced to experience the dramatic event through the speaker's viewpoint, we necessarily see the event in such a way as to form some sort of sympathetic understanding with him. Langbaum's point is that by our viewing the events as the speaker perceives them, a tension is created between our sympathy with him and our moral

judgement of him.[15] As the spectators are captivated by Salieri's intelligence, aristocratic manners, and appreciation for beauty, a tension develops as certain sympathy is felt for his anguish. At the same time, moral judgement regarding his treatment of Mozart comes into play. Thus, though the audience may be horrified by Salieri's motives and actions, the fact that they have become implicated in the dramatic situation forces an understanding and even acceptance of what has happened.

The narrative frame of the play does more than tell the story: it places the eye of the spectator in the fictional space, to make his presence essential to the structure. This establishes the sense of the spectator "in" the play, part of the dramatic action unfolding. We are in the room with Salieri - he has called us, he need us and he sees us. Furthermore, as meaning for the spectator is mediated through the meaning the events are shown to have for the central character, we see ourselves almost implicated in the crime. In the play, the audience sees and is involved in the story because of an emotional participation and identification with the figure of Salieri. This commitment is the point around which the structure of values are formed.

The level of representation in the film is second in importance to that of the story. The film is directed in all its structures of presentation towards Salieri's construction of a commentary on the story and towards placing the spectator at a certain angle to it. He is not asked to enter the story and be a witness, rather he is made to overhear a confession. Salieri's motives thus are radically changed. He no longer seems to want posterity to know his story, as he recounts it to someone who cannot repeat what he has heard. Consequently, the place of the audience in his relation to the narrator is established by, though not limited to, identifications with characters and the views they have of each other. The audience is not asked to identify with Salieri necessarily and the development of the figure of Mozart makes him a ready object of spectator identification. It is difficult to identify with the priest who is hearing Salieri's confession, except perhaps in one particular moment. At one point, the priest is made to listen to several of Salieri's compositions, which result unfamiliar to both him and the audience. When Salieri plays a few notes of one of Mozart's pieces, Father Volger, as well as the audience, reacts with happy recognition, humming the rest of the notes.

The spectator's place is a construction of the film which is ultimately the product of the narrator's disposition towards the tale. In *Amadeus*, Salieri, though present through his voice on off during most of the film, is not the constant, overwhelming presence he is in the play. We are shown episodes of Mozart's life that Salieri would not have been privy to. Such a structure defines how the film is to be received. The effect of the narrator's strategy of placement of the spectator from moment to moment is his introduction into what may be called the primary order of the text. That is, the presentational structures which

shape the action both convey a point of view and define the course of the action. In the play, Salieri is a desperate man who speaks to the "Ghosts of the Future" he has conjured before him. In the film, he is the inmate of an insane asylum who speaks to a priest. The position then given to the spectator is, in the play, that of a vital part of the action. Those who watch the film are outsiders, forced to be content with overhearing. The film removes one level of proximity: the story is not being told to us, we should not even be listening. These different situations are fundamental to the exposition of the basic ideas. In the play, we do not doubt as to Salieri's sanity - we know that he is consumed by hate and envy. The film's presentation makes us doubt even the truth of his confession. He has been judged insane -is his story an invention? The fact that there exists a doubt as to whether Salieri is in his right mind has a profound effect on the audience's attitude towards what they see recounted. The story may be listened to with curiosity and excitement, but suspension of disbelief may not even be necessary.

The variations Shaffer worked on his play are thus more profound than a first glance may tell us. Aside from the obvious scenic changes, the alterations in the framing narrative and the adaptation to the medium of film have resulted in a finished product that, in my opinion and that of others, suffers in comparison to the play. C. J. Gianakaris, one of the principal scholars of Shaffer's dramas, believes that:

> The more literal medium of the cinema ends up actually simplifying the story's conflict. The price for breadth and scope is focus and complexity of thought. When rehabilitating the character of Mozart, even modestly compared to the stage version, the movie leaves him more an annoying, whinnying prodigal than tragic figure whose own actions betray his career time after time. Concomitantly, as the center of the movie shifts away from Salieri and his spiritual conundrum concerning art and godhead, the storyline is simplified yet further. For the movie, the main plot action becomes a straight-line tale of HOW DID SALIERI RUIN MOZART? The intrigue quotient is diminished when motives are set forth in such bold outline.[16]

To manifest man's craving for some ultimate ideal in his life, Shaffer originally fashioned a Salieri who alone would recognize the divinity in the music pouring from Mozart's pen. Shaffer expands on this point when writing: "What I wanted to emerge clearly from the play is the obsession of a man, Salieri...with finding an absolute in music."[17] When, in the film, he shifts this emphasis from Salieri's obsessive relationship with God and Mozart to a picture of Mozart's ruin in 18th century Vienna, he removed what precisely was the play's strongest point. This difference, according to Michael Billington, is crucial: "In the theater, even if we couldn't go along with Salieri's desire to avenge himself on God by striking at Mozart, we were implicated in his jealousy and shared his medio-

crity. In the cinema we simply become interested spectators of a curious love-hate relationship."[18] The magnificence of a play about a man trying to kill God and drowning in mediocrity has been transformed into a portrayal of the sufferings of a musical genius. Though Shaffer refused to call the movie just an adaptation, considering it rather a "parallel work" to the original play, the parallels are to be found only at the most simple storyline.

NOTES

[1] Peter Shaffer. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. New York: Stein and Day, 1964. p. vii.

[2] Vincent Canby. "Stage and Screen Go Their Separate Ways," *New York Times*. September 30, 1984. Sec. 2, p.1.

[3] Peter Shaffer. "To See the Soul of A Man..." *The New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1965. Sec. 2. p. 3.

[4] Michiko Kakutani, "How *Amadeus* was translated from Play to Film" *The New York Times*. September 16, 1984. Sec. 2, p. 2.

[5] Ibid.

[6] C.J. Gianakaris. "Drama into Film: The Shaffer Situation." *Modern Drama*, 28 (1985): 86.

[7] Kakutani, 2.

[8] Richard Combs. "Amadeus."*Monthly Film Bulletin*, 1 (1985): 14.

[9] Kakutani, 2.

[10] Giannakaris, 92.

[11] Peter Shaffer. *Amadeus*. London: Samuel French, Inc. 1980. pp. 15-19. All subsequent quotes from this edition will be referred to by the page number.

[12] Nick Browne. *The Rhetoric of Film Narration*. Michigan: UMI Research Papers, 1982. p. xii.

[13] Roger Manvell. *Theater and Film*. New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1979. p. 27.

[14] Partick Murray. *Literary Criticism: A Glossary of Major Terms*. New York: Longman, 1978. p. 50.

[15] Robert Langbaum. *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition*. New York: Random House, 1957. p. 78.

[16] Gianakaris, 96.

[17] Peter Shaffer. "Paying Homage to Mozart." *New York Times Magazine*. September 2, 1984. p. 22.

[18] Michael Billington. "Amadeus" *The Guardian*, January, 17, 1985. p. 17.