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## Mozart & Salieri, Cain & Abel: A Cinematic Transformation of Genesis 4

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## Mozart & Salieri, Cain & Abel: A Cinematic Transformation of Genesis 4

### **Abstract**

The story of Amadeus becomes poetry and myth when one learns it is far from the official biography of Mozart. For in fact Salieri first became Mozart's lethal enemy in a poem by Pushkin, written 40 years after the great composer's death. Robbins clarifies many historical inaccuracies regarding both Mozart and Salieri in the film, but proposes that playwright Shaffer and screenwriter Milos Forman have made the story a "myth better than history," a masterpiece of drama which reveals deep truths about the human condition. The film confronts the viewer with the sheer givenness of human inequality, the pride that gives way to envy, and the sometimes relentless character of efforts that may be finally deemed mediocre. It is the mysterious story of Cain and Abel: one loved by God, the other for whom God had, inexplicably, "no regard."

*"A piece of writing is an offering. You bring it to the altar and hope it will be accepted. You pray at least that rejection will not throw you into a rage and turn you into a Cain."*

Saul Bellow (Bloom, 15)

Peter Shaffer, author of *Five Finger Exercise*, *Equus*, and *Amadeus*, is one of our most respected contemporary dramatists. Several of his plays have been adapted for film, including, of course, the Academy Award-winning *Amadeus*, directed by Milos Forman in 1984. Few viewers of that film realize that the inspiration for the diabolical character of Salieri, in both the play and the film, was not history, but rather a poem by Alexander Pushkin, written in 1830, nearly 40 years after Mozart's death (1756-1791). It is in that poem, that work of creative fancy, that Mozart and Salieri became enemies. In reality, Mozart and Salieri were not enemies; Salieri did not *kill* Mozart as the legend would have it. Shaffer capitalizes on Pushkin's ruse. The play and the film, then, include historical elements, but depart from history to explore more fundamental and universal human issues. In this article, I wish to explore not only the process by which Shaffer exercised "artistic license" with his material, but also to demonstrate how he subtly evokes and transforms the biblical story of Cain and Abel, the mythic account of the first sacrifice and the first fratricide. With such freedom, the playwright invites us to explore the themes of human giftedness and the innate *inequality* of human beings, the human as *homo faber* and *homo necans*, human ambition and mediocrity, sibling rivalry and envy, the tragedy of differentiation and its often

violent implications, election and the arbitrariness of preference, and, ultimately - *mystery*.

My analysis of this film takes a rather different tack from most others. To my knowledge, no other critic of the film has noted Shaffer's indebtedness to Pushkin. John Fulbright, a compelling interpreter of this film, argues that it is an allegory of the Incarnation, beginning with the title, "Amadeus," which, in Latin, means "love of God" or "lover of God." In this film, Mozart is, he argues, a *Christ figure*, and the ravishing music he composes a trope for the nature of God's love for human beings made manifest. Salieri, says Fulbright, symbolizes Jesus' human antagonists, as well as the disciples who desert Christ, but who are ultimately redeemed by their own sufferings (Fulbright, 1-2). There is Incarnational language in this film and, in the end, it *may* lend itself to a christological interpretation. I am not fully convinced, however, that the story behind the screen is "In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." It is, to be sure, an "In the beginning ..." film. But this palimpsest reveals a background narrative not of John 1.1, but Genesis 1.1. And in this film, we see, just beneath the surface, the haunting lines from Genesis 4: "And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard." It is a film about God *and* human self-confrontation raised to a mythic level - just as we find in the Cain and Abel myth.

## Synopsis

On a November night in 1823, a distracted old man calls from his window an appalling confession to the city of Vienna: "Forgive me, Mozart! Forgive your assassin!" Moments later, he attempts suicide and is rushed through the snowy streets to the general infirmary, a grim building containing all manner of sick and desperate patients (Milos Forman's way of quoting his earlier cinematic milestone, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* - but I digress). Some weeks later, confined to a private room, he is visited by the hospital chaplain, one Father Vogler. While obviously contemptuous of the young priest, the old man is drawn into confessing to him. His story, told throughout one, wrenching night, forms the substance of the film *Amadeus*.

The old man is Antonio Salieri, once the most famous musician in Vienna. A small-town, Italian lad from Legnago, he worked his way up to becoming court composer to Emperor Joseph II, brother of Marie Antoinette and lover, in a limited way, of music. Throughout his early life, Salieri had been possessed by one driving desire: to serve God through music. As a boy he made a sacrifice, a solemn vow to God in church, offering his chastity, his unremitting industry, and his deepest humility to God - if God would, in God's turn, grant him musical excellence as a composer. Yet Salieri wanted more; he longed, too, for immortal fame for music's

exercise, what Robert Jay Lifton has termed "symbolic immortality" (Lifton, 1987, 1993 *passim*).

At first, it seems to Salieri that his offering has been accepted. He goes to Vienna and quickly becomes the most highly regarded musician in that city of musicians. In 1781, however, a young man arrives, namely Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who changes everything forever. Even at the age of six, Mozart was already famous as a prodigy, dragged around Europe by his dominating father, Leopold, who showed off his musical tricks for the amusement of the aristocracy. Prior to coming to Vienna, Mozart had been a sort of nomadic itinerant, an outsider, one who had grazed foreign pastures to his heart's content. Now at twenty-six, he is far more than a performing monkey. He has become a composer eager to show off his real ability, desirous of a settled position and acceptability. Salieri hears that he is to give a concert of his recent musical compositions at the residence of his own employer, the Archbishop of Salzburg, and hurries there to hear it. That recital transforms his life.

Before the concert starts, the court composer strolls through the throng of fashionable guests, striving to guess which one might be Mozart. His eye is suddenly distracted by trays of pastries being carried by servants to the buffet. He follows them, hoping to steal a little private refreshment (he is possessed by an Italian sweet tooth), but instead encounters a giggling couple playing together on

the floor like children, and rather dirty-minded children at that. Concealed from view, he is obliged to listen to an infantile, scatological game played by a boy/man who is wildly attracted to a girl/woman. Salieri is scandalized by what he hears - and then utterly astonished when, as the music begins gently to waft from the great salon, the boy springs up in alarm and cries, "My music!" and dashes from the room. "*This is Mozart?*" he wonders. This giggling, naughty figure? And worse: the music Salieri hears - the ethereal *Adagio* from the *Wind Serenade for Thirteen Instruments in E-Flat* - is the most beautiful music he has ever heard! God is apparently not showing his accustomed regard; God is now favoring a younger, sniggering, unattractive, ill-mannered, filthy-mouthed show-off.

From this moment, Salieri's relation with God begins to deteriorate. In the ensuing weeks, he meets Mozart in person, and the young man proceeds, unwittingly, to insult him in a variety of ways. Improvising at the keyboard, he transforms the dull, uninspired *March of Welcome* that Salieri had composed for his reception at court into a brilliant tune, *Non piu andrai*, later to be made world-famous in the opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and in a set of variations for piano. Then, Mozart seduces Salieri's prize vocal pupil, Katerina Cavalieri, and woos her to sing the lead in an opera specially commissioned by the benevolent Emperor Joseph, viz., *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. When His Majesty decides to show

an additional mark of favor to Mozart by proposing him as a teacher of music to his royal niece, Salieri is determined to block the appointment.

Constanze, Wolfgang's wife, appears secretly at Salieri's house to plead for her husband, bearing with her manuscripts of his music as evidence of his ability. Salieri, serpent, himself an orally-fixated snake in the grass, seduces her with sweets - and she falls for it. While she is further encoiled in his sweet-talking wiles, he studies the scores. They form an incredible miscellany and epitome of work: the slow movement of the *Concerto for Flue and Harp*, the last movement of the *Concerto for Two Pianos*, an excerpt from *Symphony #29*, the *Kyrie* from the *Mass in C Minor* [I should note that Forman and Shaffer make extensive and effective use of the Mozart repertoire, since the camera can sustain visual interest while underlining the ravishing aural experience - a feat almost impossible to pull off on the stage]. Incredibly, these original and first drafts of the music show no corrections of any kind; it is just as if Mozart had taken down dictation from God!

Salieri reads on, overwhelmed; he is maddened by their perfection. It dawns on him: Mozart has been chosen to be God's instrument. By comparison, Salieri is confronted with, for the first time apparently, his own mediocrity, despite his longing to serve and his professed devotion to the Creator. In anger, in fury, he turns to God. He implores: "Why implant the desire to serve and then withhold the talent to do it? Why bestow Your divine genius on Mozart, who is neither good nor

chaste?" His musical offering rejected, Salieri vows to ruin God's "Incarnation" - Mozart - as far as he is able. At this point the viewer is well aware that he/she is "east of Eden."

The rest of the film is concerned with this vow. Relentlessly, Salieri plots to destroy Mozart. When *The Marriage of Figaro* comes to be produced, he does everything in his power - largely through the Italian faction at court - to ruin it. Inevitably, Mozart begins to sink into poverty and sickness. Finally the court composer discovers a real weakness in his victim's character, through which he can weaken him not only economically, but physically and mentally as well. Mozart's father, Leopold, has visited Vienna and has stayed with his son and daughter-in-law, of whom he violently disapproves. The visit - despite attempts to cheer it up with parties and masquerades - is disastrous, and the old man leaves for Salzburg in bitterness. Shortly thereafter, he dies without being reconciled to his son. Mozart is badly stricken. Salieri perceives, at a performance of Mozart's most recent opera, *Don Giovanni*, that in the dreadful figure of the accusing statue, the "stone guest," Mozart has Freud-ingly conjured up his father to accuse him, publicly, on stage. Guilt is deeply ingrained in the son's soul, ready to be used against him by an enemy, "crouching at the door."

As the life of Mozart grows more and more desperate, as he lapses further into sickness and drunkenness, he turns from the court (which has turned on him)

to produce entertainment for ordinary Austrian people in the popular theatre of Emanuel Schikaneder. Salieri, his tormented persecutor and would-be murderer, suddenly decides he wants Mozart alive, at least for the moment. His lust for immortality finally suggests to him a new and more pathetic wickedness. He appeals to the sick and dying Mozart as "his younger brother" in the lofty guild of composers, he adopts him as his younger, fraternal partner. With the language of fictive kinship, committed to his war with his Maker, Salieri finally hits on the one stratagem which, in his eyes, could enable him to win artistic immortality once and for all; he will be his brother's keeper, for a while, but only until he gets what he wants - symbolic immortality at the cost of Mozart's waning toil. Salieri's aim is not Mozart's immediate destruction; he must first entice him to a certain "field" of musical endeavor, i.e., the composition of a great requiem, a Mass for the dead. His hope is that the *Requiem* he assists Mozart with in his dying days will redound to his own (Salieri's) praise - because he intends to pass it off *as his own*, since no one, save Salieri, will have known of its existence [He does not know that Constanze is well aware of and deeply troubled by Mozart's preoccupation with it].

The climax of the old man's confession concerns the working out of this stratagem - and the inevitable outcome of such an absurd challenge to divinity. God replies to Salieri, and "marks" him in a way he never expected. Salieri does not live to hear Mozart's *Requiem* attributed to him or performed as his own. Rather, he

lives to hear Mozart's music becoming more and more famous, even "classical." It "cries out from the ground" - while the echo of his own *oeuvre* becomes fainter and fainter. In the burial scene, as lime dust swirls over the open grave, the music of Mozart's *Lacrimosa dies illa* from the *Requiem* becomes almost deafening. As Salieri wanders the halls of insanity, he bears not so much the mark of infamy or ignominy as that of non-recognition, of complete obscurity. He is neither killed nor can he even kill himself. Rather, he ages in a "land of Nod[nod], away from the presence of the Lord," without benefit of the Church or its sacraments.

### **Setting the Historical Record Straight**

"Poor Johann Chrysostom Wolfgang Theophilus Mozart - *Amadeus* to you" (Walsh, 51). *Amadeus*, meaning "beloved of God," was the Latinized name Mozart chose for himself as an adult to replace "Theophilus" so that people wouldn't miss the point. Ever since his glamorously miserable death at the age of 35 in 1791, pop culture has been trying to turn him into the first romantic martyr. The myth of the unappreciated genius who fought a losing and ultimately fatal battle against a fickle public and a Viennese court rife with intrigue took root shortly after Mozart died, and has proven stubbornly resistant to correction ever since.

It began in 1830, with a verse drama by Alexander Pushkin entitled, *Mozart and Salieri*. It is what might be deemed a grand *a-theodicy*: it does not attempt to

justify God's ways to humankind, rather it baldly asserts God's *injustice*. Period. The work begins with this opening stanza: "Men say there is no justice on the earth/But neither is there justice in heaven." Poetically and creatively Pushkin goes on to render, out of whole cloth, a maniacal Salieri as the vehicle for this a-theodicy:

By vigorous and tense persistency,  
At last, within the boundless realm of music  
I reached a lofty place. At last fame deigned  
To smile on me; and in the hearts of men  
I found an echo to my own creation.  
Then I was happy, and enjoyed in peace  
My labors, my success, my fame - nor less  
The labors and successes of my friends,  
My fellow-workers in the art divine.  
No! Never did I know the sting of envy,  
Oh, never! Neither when Piccinni triumphed  
In capturing the ears of skittish Paris,  
Nor the first time there broke upon my sense  
Iphigenia's opening harmonies.  
Who dares to say that even proud Salieri  
Could stoop to envy, like a loathsome snake  
Trampled upon by men, yet still alive  
And impotently gnawing sand and dust?  
No one! ... But now - myself I say it - now  
I do know envy! Yes, Salieri envies,  
Deeply, in anguish envies. O ye Heavens!  
Where, where is justice, when the sacred gift,  
When deathless genius comes not to reward  
Perfervid love and utter self-denial,  
And toils and strivings and beseeching prayers,  
But puts her halo round a lack-wit's skull,  
A frivolous idler's brow? O Mozart, Mozart! (Yarmolinsky, 428-30)

I said earlier that Pushkin's Salieri and, thus, Shaffer's, was rendered out of whole cloth (Sadie, 680-752). So, too, their portrayals of Mozart. Far from being

unappreciated, Mozart was regarded in his own lifetime as one of the foremost keyboard players (then, as now, star performers were more famous than active composers) and, when younger, as a leading violinist. Mozart was a prolific composer; he left behind more than a thousand compositions. But he was not a *facile* composer. He did not produce correction-free, first drafts of his work. While his music may sound as if it were piped into his ear from heaven, the surviving autographs give evidence of a man who had to wrestle mightily with his muse in order to receive a blessing.

His keyboard works and his ability to improvise, then, won him early recognition. Mozart won success, too, as an opera composer in Milan, Prague and, yes, the allegedly hostile Vienna. *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* were so wildly successful in Prague that their reception led to a commission of another opera, *Clemenza di Tito*, on the occasion of Leopold II's coronation as king of Bohemia. By all accounts, *The Magic Flute* was the equivalent of a smash Broadway hit in Vienna. Esteemed by the royal establishment of Emperor Joseph II, *not* frowned upon, Mozart succeeded Gluck (the darling of Vienna) as court Kammermusicus. Indeed, Mozart probably made more money than any musician up to that time, and he spent it freely in pursuit of a lifestyle befitting his recognized accomplishments. In 18<sup>th</sup>-century Vienna, musicians were still considered servants, albeit talented ones who lent luster to the court. Mozart, however, sought

to *live* royally. That he died broke was due more to his extravagant, fiscally improvident nature than to lack of work or ability to earn an income. A visit to what is now billed as "Mozart's House" in Vienna will reveal that he had nine different dwellings during his stint in that city - each of increasing grandeur.

He had a rather different family life than that portrayed in the film. Constanze bore him not a single child, but six, two surviving to adulthood. Franz Xaver followed in his father's footsteps and became a famous musician and respected composer in his own right. Karl Thomas rose in the ranks of government, acquiring a substantial fortune. The ongoing royalties he received from the performances of *The Marriage of Figaro* after his mother's death enabled him to purchase a fabulous villa and estate on Lake Como.

And, of course, there are the circumstances surrounding Mozart's death and burial. Mozart did not die bereft of medical help, as the film has it; rather he expired while attended by two of Vienna's leading physicians, his wife Constanze, her sister, Sofie, and a household staff (the Mozarts never wanted for servants). Salieri was *not* there. Nor did Salieri poison Mozart. The composer did not succumb to alcoholism. He died of kidney failure, probably congenital. Mozart was indeed buried in an unmarked, mass grave, but that was due to a cabalistic Masonic custom - not poverty or neglect. A 1784 decree by Joseph II, who had Masonic sympathies, abolished most private funeral ceremonies, ordering the dead to sewn into sacks,

committed to mass graves, and covered with lime, rather than buried in coffins with elaborate Roman Catholic rites. Shortly before Mozart's death, the order was rescinded due to a bloody riot, but the spirit of the decree persisted among many, including Mozart's brethren in his own Masonic lodge. The composer of *The Magic Flute*, an opera replete with insider, Masonic references, probably specified the form of interment he preferred (Walsh, 52).

What I am trying to suggest is that Milos Forman's film and Peter Shaffer's original play *continue* the honorable tradition, begun by Pushkin, of spreading mis- and dis-information about Mozart. That tradition was extended to Mozart's successors: to Beethoven (well before *Immortal Beloved*), to Chopin (well before *Impromptu*), to Schubert and to Schumann. The list goes on and on. Forman and Shaffer have "mythologized" the Mozart legend. I have, in part, "de-mythologized" it. I have done so to point out just how un-historical, indeed, a-historical their treatment is, despite the costumes, the wigs, and the beautifully-photographed settings in Prague (*not* Vienna!). My hope is that, disabused of the notion that this film is the official, cinemagraphic biography of Wolfgang, its mythological elements will be truly appreciated.

So, I turn to the person of Salieri to perform the same sort of task. The very premise that Antonio Salieri (1750-1825) was the patron saint of mediocrity, flies in the face of the facts (Angermueller, 415-420). The man was no plodding

dilettante; on the contrary, he was an accomplished practical musician who spoke Latin, Italian, German and French fluently. He was Gluck's favored protégé. He became Court Composer at the age of 24, before Mozart was even on the horizon. Later, he was Kapellmeister. Salieri was a highly successful opera composer who, incidentally, introduced his own librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte, to Mozart, thus responsible, in part, for changing the course of operatic history. Interestingly enough, Salieri's greatest operatic successes were in Paris, *not* Vienna, and these at the very end of Mozart's life, not before.

He had an extraordinarily happy family life. He was neither chaste nor a philanderer. He married his wife at the age of 24, and they produced eight children. After 1790, at the relatively young age of 40, a year before Mozart's death, Salieri had already withdrawn from the active musical life he enjoyed at court, largely due to his profound grief over the death of his Emperor-patron (who did not have a tin ear), and turned his attention to his family and to teaching. Salieri's pedagogy was so highly sought after that his pupils included Czerny, Beethoven, Hummel, Schubert, Liszt - and even Mozart's own musical son, Franz Xaver (Walsh, 52).

His pension was large, as were his royalties, and he was able, thereby, to support struggling musicians and the cause of new music. He was a champion of innovative composers. He was also responsible for establishing a musical archive in Vienna. In 1804, he actually composed his own *Requiem Mass* to signal his final

retirement from public life. His funeral, which was held at court, drew a mob of mourners (Angermueller, 416).

Of course, the playwright Peter Shaffer himself owns up to those distortions of the historical record. In his commentary on his collaboration with Milos Forman in transposing the play from the stage to the silver screen, Shaffer notes:

From the start we agreed upon one thing: we were not making an objective Life of Wolfgang Mozart. This cannot be stressed too strongly. Obviously *Amadeus* on stage was never intended to be a documentary biography of the composer, and the film is even less of one. Certainly we have incorporated many real elements, new as well as true. The film shows the acerbic relationship between the fretful young genius and his haughty employer, Archbishop Colredo of Salzburg; the disastrous visit of Papa Leopold to his married son in Vienna; Wolfgang's playing of his piano concerti in the open air; his delight in dancing and billiards. But we are also blatantly claiming the grand license of the storyteller to embellish his tale with fictional ornament and, above all, to supply it with a climax whose sole justification need be that it enthralls his audience and emblazons his theme. I believe that we have created just such a climax for the film of *Amadeus* (Shaffer, 1984, 56).

Shaffer goes on to comment:

To me there is something pure about Salieri's pursuit of an eternal Absolute through music, just as there is something irredeemably impure about his simultaneous pursuit of eternal fame. The yoking of these two clearly-opposed drives led us finally to devise a climax totally different from that of the play: a night-long encounter between the physically dying Mozart and the spiritually ravenous Salieri, motivated entirely by the latter's crazed lust to snatch a piece

of divinity for himself. Such a scene never took place in fact. However, our concern at this point was not with facts but with the undeniable laws of drama. It is where - holding fast to the thread of our protagonist's mania - we were finally led. Some people may find this new climax hard to accept. Others may rejoice in it as a horribly logical end to the legend. To me it seems the most appropriate finish to our black fantasia. Even on stage I had to create a final confrontation quite outside the historical record (Shaffer, 1984, 56-57).

That is a playwright and a screenwriter who clearly understands his craft. Here is a writer who knows the power of drama to make us grapple with profoundly human issues, the tensions and contradictions that rend our lives. What Peter Shaffer is saying is, ultimately, *fiction* is better than *fact*. As a scholar of religious studies, I would put it differently: *myth* is better than history. That is, of course, a lesson Eliade taught us a long time ago (Eliade, *passim*).

### **Mythic Evocation: Mozart & Salieri, Cain & Abel**

Shaffer's play, *Amadeus*, and Forman's movie of the same name - and I consider each work to be a masterpiece in its own right - both evoke the myth of Genesis 4, of Cain and Abel, as powerfully as any midrash ever written. I hope that my own synopsis of the film's plot, with my intentional "biblicizing" language has made that apparent. I am not the first to notice this. Ricardo J. Quinones, Josephine Olp Weeks Professor of Comparative Literature at Claremont, has devoted a whole chapter to this film in his masterful study, *The Changes of Cain: Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel Literature*.

Those of us in religious studies call the Cain and Abel story a *myth*. We do so not because it is *untrue*, but to signal that it is a human story that is *most* true. It is a story that enjoys pride of place. There have been many efforts to define, precisely, what we are trying to convey when we use the word *myth* in contradistinction to the way it is used popularly. I, personally, still prefer the definition honed by Alan Watts, and kept alive in the literary criticism of Philip Wheelright and the biblical criticism of Norman Perrin: "A myth is a *complex* of stories - some fact, some fiction - which for various reasons humans regard as demonstrations of the meaning of the universe and human existence" (Perrin, 215). As such, a myth is evoked by symbols that tap into its core meaning, as Jean Dalby Clift argues in her richly suggestive study, *Core Images of the Self*. I hope you can appreciate, almost immediately, why that definition is so appealing, and why it is so heuristically useful for analyzing a complex work such as *Amadeus*. The symbolic language of this film richly evokes the themes of sibling rivalry, of jealousy, of envy, of the tragedy of differentiation, of violence, of election, of the arbitrariness of preference and mystery that run throughout the Cain and Abel myth.

In the history of biblical interpretation, the myth of Cain and Abel has been read in a number of ways. The most basic, naïve reading is to look at it as a myth that provides an etiology of the first murder, the first fratricide. Violence begets violence, boundaries are increasingly transgressed, and the destruction of the flood

become the inevitable consequence. As Quinones notes: "The Cain theme is centripetal, marked by inwardness, emotional tension, and secret conflict, by moral struggle and the closing off of possibility. It looks forward to the continuity of evil, even to its aggravation, and to the grim consequences of action" (Quinones, 6).

For my colleague Frederick Greenspahn, in his very subtle and sophisticated monograph, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, it is the first instance in which the re-occurring theme of sibling rivalry and the preference for the younger sibling is sounded in the Hebrew Bible. That is a theme that must be analyzed and compared in narrative after biblical narrative.

Quinones talks about the penetrating and enduring psychic impact this theme of sibling rivalry has had. Intrinsicly the theme is devoted to presenting the stark and basic fact of *division*, division that is so unyielding as to become part of the essential matter of existence itself. The fraternal context of the Cain and Abel story, notes Quinones, means that division becomes more emotionally vibrant as *atragedy of differentiation*. Such differentiation is painfully realized at the moment of the *offering*, when one of the brothers has his essential nature endorsed over that of the other brother. The *arbitrariness of preference* thus compounds that tragedy of differentiation and brings home the fact of division in a way that is particular to the Cain and Abel theme. Quinones maintains:

Division, the tragedy of differentiation, the offering and the arbitrariness of preference have become distinguishing features of the Cain-Abel theme. But there are three other residual forces in the theme that are equally determining and that also deserve to be signaled ... They are *violence*, *envy*, and *mystery*. While serving to set off the Cain-Abel story from allied themes, their abiding presences, in conjunction with the other great issues just indicated, help explain why it is that Cain-Abel has superseded other stories of "rival brothers" within or without the Bible and has become such a predominant part of the Western imagination (Quinones, 9).

For others, this is a myth that gives the inherent tensions between the urban dweller and the rural nomad a primordial grounding. That understanding of the myth has, of course, given rise to popular transformations as well: in the American musical theatre, the "farmers-versus-the-cowboys" theme made *Oklahoma* an instant and perduring favorite. "Manhattan-chic-versus-Hootersville-hick" continues to keep *Green Acres* playing in late-night syndication.

We must not forget, however, that the Cain and Abel myth is also a myth about *self-confrontation*. It causes human beings to ponder - again and again - the central biblical mystery of God's election, of God's choosing, of God's regard for one over the other - and for reasons not altogether perspicuous. By extension, the myth provokes self-confrontation as we ponder human finitude, human difference, human inequity, human giftedness. We ask: "Why me?" We *also* ask, "Why not me?"

Playwright Peter Shaffer has wrestled with those profound questions. They are at the heart of his play, but especially his *screenplay*. Peter Shaffer understood the adaptation of *Amadeus* to film as having precisely the same function as the original Cain and Abel myth. He writes, "The film version of *Amadeus* really sharpens the core question of self-confrontation: 'Am I Mozart or am I Salieri? Am I both?'" (Shaffer, 1984, 56-57)

Am I Mozart or am I Salieri? Am I Cain or am I Abel? Am I all of these? How will *we* deal with the startling realization with what the film and the play confront us? Like Salieri? Like Cain? How will we negotiate the sheer given-ness of both innate giftedness and inherent shortcoming, the success and failure that characterize human existence, the pride that gives way to envy, the hard effort deemed mediocre? Touchingly, Quinones presents the dilemma *Amadeus* poses, grounded as it is in the context of artistic endeavor and pursuit in this way:

Such arbitrariness of preference is a mystery that baffles the unsuspecting, who unaccountably find their own presentation diminished and unworthy. The collapse of the self into wantingness and vindictiveness is a perverse and yet understandable reaction. And this volatility of reaction is perhaps the most important relevancy of art for the Cain-Abel story. One's being is all the more wrapped up in an offering when the offering represents time, effort, talent, and values of the self. It is as if the interloper has taken what I was supposed to be. He has taken my "stuff:" he has taken myself. Thus abandoned, the self is left in a position of helplessness, and can only turn toward the favored one - the Amadeus - in order to recover by insidious, hostile, and, at times, physically violent means the being that was lost (Quinones, 168).

Such sentiments, I hope, are not lost of those of us who dwell - not in the art world - but in the groves of academe, both as students and professors. Our less-than-A+ papers, our rejected articles and book manuscripts, our dissertation proposals not approved, our applications for tenure denied, our theses not altogether convincing, our work not given the journal review we know we deserve ... Will we murder? Or will we turn against ourselves (see Schwartz).

By the final scene of the play version of *Amadeus*, and in the opening scene of the film, Salieri has done both: he delivers Mozart to the grave and attempts suicide by cutting his own throat. His last, myth-evoking words in the play are these:

*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.

*[He opens the razor]*

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: "Salieri: Patron Saint of Mediocrities?" and in the depth of your downcastness you can pray to me. And I will forgive you. *Vi saluto.* (Shaffer, 1980, 95)

The Hebrew Bible tells us, mythologically, that Cain himself lived to have offspring. Lamech is either the great-, great, great-grandson of Cain, or the great-, great, great-, great-grandson of Cain - it depends on how many times you count the name Enoch in the list. Either way, he, Lamech, descendent of Cain, is the father of Jubal. Jubal, Genesis says, "was the father of all those who play the lyre and the pipe," i.e., the progenitor of music. Ghostly then, Cain, too, is also there in the shadows with Salieri, with his offering of the fruit of the ground - rejected - his own mark clearly visible. He salutes us as well.

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