

Shaffer's Amadeus: A Dramatic Re-Writing of History

Dr. Sabbar S.Sultan

sultan_ssr@yahoo.com

Al Isra University, Amman, Jordan

ملخص

البحث الحالي محاولة لاستجلاء دراما الكاتب المسرحي الإنجليزي المعاصر بيتر شيفر (ولد في العام 1926) مع تركيز خاص على مسرحية " اماديوس" (1981) وقراءته التاريخية للمناقشة التاريخية بين الموسيقار موزارت والموسيقار ساليري ودلالاتها الفنية والموضوعاتية، والغرض من وراء الدراسة هو تبيان المضامين النفسية والأخلاقية والفلسفية المنبثقة من الصراع الخفي بين الفنانين. يشدد الاستنتاج على حقيقة قوامها أن المسرحية تعتبر دراسة معمقة عن طبيعة الغيرة المهنية وجذورها فضلا عن مضاعفاتها المدمرة - بالإضافة إلى ذلك يتضح بأن الفن قد يكون سلاحا ذا حدين وميدانا محقوفا بالمخاطر الذي على ما فيه من امتيازات وإيجابيات ، فإنه قد يلحق الضرر والألم بضحاياه كما يتضح من خلال مواقف كل من ساليري وموزارت. كلمات مفتاحية: الفن، الإبداع، المنافسة، الشر، الطبيعة البشرية.

Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to explore the drama of the contemporary English dramatist Peter Shaffer (b. 1926) with a particular reference to his Amadeus (1981) and his historicist reading of the historical rivalry between the two composers (Mozart and Salieri) and its vast artistic and thematic implications.

The objective behind the study is to show the psychological, moral and psychological implements stemming from the tacit struggle between two composers.

The conclusion stresses the fact the Shaffer's play is a deep study of the nature of professional jealousy and its roots as well as its destructive repercussions. Moreover, it turns out that art can be a double - edged weapon and a precarious field that, for all its merits and privileges, may inflict pains and sufferings on its victim, as seen through the situations of both Salieri and Mozart.

Key words: art, creativity, rivalry, evil and human nature

Introduction:

The achievement of the contemporary English writer Peter Shaffer engages a prominent position in modern British theatre. This is mainly due to the various intellectual and artistic planes emanating from his plays. In his plays such as *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964) and *Equus* (1973), for instance, the author exerts immense efforts to come to grips with many universal questions like innate violence, the unpredictability of human nature, the subversive effects of the subconscious, man's predicament...etc. It is because of the vast range of topics present in Shaffer's drama and his superb skill in combining technical and thematic levels that his theater is rightly classified as belonging to the "total theater of Paul Claudel"¹ in its spectacular and panoramic perspective as well as its highly impressive and suggestive language. Although many of his scenes are mainly derived from historical events or actual anecdotes, particularly the plays already mentioned, there is always an unmistakable tendency in his theatre to fuse the historical with the factual, literal and metaphorical, the verifiable and wishful. Hence C.J.Giankaras's judgment of Shaffer's art² as lying in merging "the literal realism and the provocative abstract pictorial". In plays like *The Royal Hunt* or *Equus*, there is a great measure of physical violence and brutality, whereas the present play is permeated with stratagems, intrigues and barely concealed intents of annihilating the famous composer (Amadeus Mozart) of the title. This thematic line in Shaffer's drama inevitably brings in line with the theatre of Antonin Artaud, who hammered at the idea of cruelty and theorized for in his book, *The Theater and Its Double* (1938) Artaud's

¹ - M. Morgan. " Peter Shaffer, " 20th Century Drama . Ed. James Vinson (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 234.

² - C.J. Giankaras Peter Shaffer: A Casebook (London: Garland Publishing 1991) p. 4.

main postulate is that the theatre should pay attention to the ritual, mythical, irrational, and instinctive. As he puts it,

If the theater once again is to become a necessity, then it must give what crime, love, war, and insanity are made up of. Either we renew the central position and necessity of all art, sand in the lava of a volcanic outbreak, or we ought to stop painting, talking, writing whatever else we are doing.¹

Needless to say, Shaffer's dramatic world is not thoroughly Artaudian simply because he does not seek to abide literally to the iconoclastic and shocking doctrines of the theatre of cruelty. However, there is a more or less sinister and disquieting atmosphere of apprehension and misgiving besetting Shaffer's world. It is this salient feature of Shaffer's drama that many scholars and critics find his world so flexible that it can be subsumed under the rubric "absurd", simply because it is designed "to shock its audience into a full awareness of the horror of the human condition"². As evinced in the testimonies and views of those who have his theatre, Shaffer's oeuvre approaches the tenets of the epic theatre, the absurd, the ritualistic and the classical as one comes across such assessments that assign to him a niche in contemporary drama, "Shaffer has always distinguished himself as one of the premium playwrights of our day"³.

If Shaffer's theatre hinges on expanding the different manifestations of the human predicament and the mystifying and baffling circumstances enveloping his individuals like Amadeus Mozart or Pizzaro or Salieri, for that matter, the inevitable posteriori is that

¹ - A. Artaud. *The Theatre and Its Double* (London: Grove Press, 1938), p. 98.

² - Martin Esslin, (ed.) *Absurd Drama* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 17.

³ - C.J. Giankaras, "Drama into Film: The Shaffer Situation", *Modern Drama*. Vol. 28, No. 1, 1985, p. 83.

Shaffer has affinities with the writers of the absurd and their recurrent presentation of the tragicomic situations in their works. Indeed Amadeus has this unmistakable sense of black comedy, if we recall Amadeus's freewheeling actions and funny gestures. This world is known for its curious blend of the symbolic, clownish, naturalistic and cultural touches. Above all, it gives much room for investigating the psychological dimensions of its bewildered characters and their inner psychological drives and motives. As in the abstract theatre, the recipient's role is crucial in complementing the picture present in these texts. Such inner drives and inhibited desires "can have unpleasant consequences, such as the tendency to violence when restricted," as viewed by one of his critics.¹

What has already been stated is no more than a preliminary and even tentative view of a theatrical world that draws upon a host of dramatic trends, both ancient and modern, classical and modernistic. This multiplicity of thematic and technical innovation bestows upon Shaffer's drama a special and distinct flavor, richness and multifacetedness. Amadeus is based on the rivalry and tacit or expressed conflict between two composers Vienna in the 18th century. They are Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1797) and Antonio Salieri (1750-1819). Such is the effect of this unhappy relation that no sooner one of their names is mentioned than other automatically arises. Indeed the levels of art, jealousy, and evil are inextricably woven in this historical situation. No doubt Shaffer is giving us his own rendition or account of this touchy matter. In other words, the play (and later the film directed by Milos Forman) is a fictional account of the struggle for supremacy between two famous figures in the world of music. Shaffer's

¹- S.C.W Abboston, Thematic Guide to Modern Drama (Westport: Greenwood press, 2003), p. 137.

account is marked by its idiosyncratic touch. For instance, the main event in the play is, of course, the poisoning of Mozart by Salieri as seen in his assertive statement of poisoning Mozart by "arsenic" (p.103). This is not fully substantiated throughout the play as Shaffer's interest does not lie in giving factual situation. Rather he is concerned with giving his own open-ended account of a situation that would imply many universal and timeless sides in human experience.

No doubt there are those who stultify and refute such accusations and see that the whole charge of poisoning is basically groundless and mere hearsay as one of his scholars asserts.¹ This point is worth elaboration as it deals with the issues that have been controversial for a long time and probably will remain so in the foreseeable future. One of the implications of this topic is the freedom of the artist and the extent of subjectivity or objectivity in handling historical works and the perspective adopted throughout. Russia's great poet, Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) presents a similar view to Shaffer's in dealing with this ticklish question of the Salieri-Mozart rivalry and its ramifications. Pushkin's dramatization of the relationship or conflict takes the form of 'quasi-Milonic terms'². In this opera (1830), Pushkin asserts the deliberate murder of Mozart by the more experienced and villainous Salieri. The reason(s) of this hideous and unexpected act can be traced through the striking differences between the two composers and their concepts of the artistic process. Salieri prides himself in his meticulous craftsmanship,

Full early I renounced all idle pleasure

-
- ¹- H. C. Robbins, "Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart", Lexicon Universal Encyclopedic (NY: Lexicon Publishers, 1994), p. 628.
 - ²- P. Hernadi, *Interpreting Events: Tragicomedies of History and The Modern Stage* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), p. 201.

*And to all sciences but that of music,
I made myself a stranger....
Hard is the first step
I weathered the first storms....
Music I
Dissected like a corpse. (p.123)*

At the beginning Salieri cherishes a good moral immunity concerning inflicting harm on such an unexpected rival,

Who dares to say that proud Salieri ever

Was subject to the most despised vices,

Impotent envy, writhing, weak, downtrodden.(p.120)

Suddenly, as if coming from the blue, the figure of Mozart looms in these unhealthy horizons. As a person, he represents the opposite of Salieri - inspiration and exceptional gift. As the danger Mozart unknowingly poses for his rival is serious and imminent, the corresponding reaction is equally powerful. It is the devilish idea of annihilating Mozart physically. In Pushkin's poetic work, Mozart's danger is not merely confined to Salieri, but it transcends its province to cover all those involved in the act of composing and playing music,

*I can no more resist the Fates
To which I am appointed; it is my task
To stop him. If I do not, all of us,
The priests, the celebrants of music, perish. (p.123)*

Salieri, then, appears as a character one comes across in the plays of Fate where his helplessness before the overreaching power of envy is conspicuous. His situation is aptly summed up in the following critical assessment,

Salieri, overcome by the glory of Mozart's music, poisons him because he feels he is called by destiny to defend some musicians who

have to work for that inspiration which comes to Mozart without effort.¹

The validity of Pushkin's poetic testimony can be foregrounded if we take into consideration his years of exile (1820-8), estrangement and ceaseless suffering that eventually entitle him to be called 'The Prisoner of the Caucasus'². Given this terrible side in Pushkin's experience, the question that needs to be posed here is: how can he indict a fellow-artist (Salieri) with a charge which hardly crosses the minds of artists? Especially is this true when we recall Pushkin's dictum about artistic integrity and disinterestedness,

Walk a free road wherever a free road leads you...do not expect your honorable endeavors to be revealed. The rewards lie within yourself. You yourself are your own highest tribunal.³

Such righteous yardsticks as the ones specified by the Russian great poet hold true to Mozart and eventually drive Pushkin to espouse his cause and castigate his foe.

This is not always the case, if the historic struggle between the two is put in a wider historic context. There have been voices which attribute Mozart's discontent and distress in his dealing with Salieri to Mozart's own failures to take his responsibilities seriously. It is reported that Mozart has sought to be the musical teacher of the Princess of Wurttemberg and Salieri has been selected instead.⁴ Moreover, there is evidence of cooperation between the two men at a certain time. For instance when Salieri has been appointed "Kapellmeister in 1788, he

¹ - T. Wolff (ed) Pushkin on literature (London : Methuen, 1971) p. 193.

² - M. Greenleaf, Pushkin and Romantic Fashion (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994) p. 2.

³ - T. Wolff , op.cit, p. 193.

⁴ - S. Manyards, "Mozart: A life", Harper Perennial, Feb. 14, p. 21.

revived Mozart's 'Figaro' instead of bringing out a new opera of his" ¹. The only possible rationale for this castigation of Salieri, according to this argument, lies in the fact that there was a great change in the intellectual life of Germany in the 19th century and the revival of nationalism. The Venetian Salieri has been overlooked or slighted because "he is not German while Mozart is Austrian" ,as one of the critics of this issue argues. ²

However, the authenticity of the historical material present in the play is beyond the scope of the present paper. What matters, however, is that Amadeus is a creative work of art and as such we should make allowances for any modification necessitated by the exigencies of the creative work. The only thing that can be said in this regard is that common sense decrees that anyone engaging in a prominent position in any field would not be happy to realize that a competent and talented rival is there in the scene. The evidence given by Pushkin and Shaffer could suffice to refute the claim that intellectual and racial bias is the reason behind this unfavorable and even sinister presentation of Salieri.

The Main Argument and Results

As already shown in the brief introduction to Shaffer's dramatic world as manifested in Amadeus, what we are concerned with here is seeing Shaffer's play as a multi-leveled text that can foster in our minds all types of perceptions, intellectual and artistic. In a subject of this sort where there is a plethora of factual and imaginary material, it is expected that scholarly and popular literatures get intermixed ³ and there is much room for hearsay and exaggeration. Thus the present

¹ - J. Horwitz, "For Mozart's Archival : Italian Renaissance", The New York Times, Dec.28,2004, pp. 11-12.

² - Ibid. p. 12 .

³ - R. Angermuller, Mozart Bibliography to 1970 (Verlag: Kassel Barenreiter, 1976), p.78.

concern will be laid on the coherence of the material presented and its ability to radiate with various meanings and suggestions. This relative view of a historic situation is useful in appreciating an artistic rendition of history and seeing or perceiving its potentiality to provide the reader or recipient with a host of views and judgments. Although the title of the play is about Amadeus Mozart, that Austrian genius in music, its main corpus of is about Salieri's position, reactions and attitudes and above all his gnawing sense of guilt. Indeed the play as whole is an exploration or analysis of Salieri's inner psyche and the reasons behind his troubled conscience concerning his murder of Mozart. This by itself represents a very interesting topic: the failure or impossibility to stop music or art though it has no tangible presence. Indeed the play is charged with Mozart's fine pieces of music to comment indirectly about the uselessness and even impossibility of silencing such an exceptional genius. In more than half of the space of the play, Mozart appears as no more than a figment in Salieri's strained mind, as he appears as an aging man hardly able to sustain the outcomes of a terribly hideous act.

As in the case of Shaffer's other plays, Mozart combines polar and contradictory traits in one work. On the one hand, Mozart is the inspired musician whose music few dare to compete with. On the other, he appears to be the infantile and naïve child who fails to win the admiration of the powerful. Rather he succeeds in arousing their disapproval and condemnation. The explanation of this bewildering and bizarre phenomenon of Mozart's case lies in common view held about him that his artistic achievement is some thing that has nothing to with

exercise or even personal effort, so that everything happens 'with the blink of the eye'.¹

As he exerts no effort in composing his musical masterpieces, the grudge of his foes (Salieri being at the forefront) gets keener and more painful. This particular side of the conflict sums up one of the themes of the play: inborn creativity or talent vs. hard and Mozart does appear in the play and is given the chance to present his own views about his art and those of Salieri. But he does not engage the same space. Of course, the reason is evident enough. He does not have the worries and pangs of repentance that inflict Salieri and rob him of his inner peace. The play's concern is not with the action, inasmuch as the reaction of the mediocre artist whose image of himself is in total opposition of what actually is. In other words, Salieri lives in a continuous state of self-deception and megalomania that has been drastically shattered by Mozart's presence. Hence the irresistible urge to revenge, or rather, to wipe out all remnant of his physical presence.

Salieri's image as an artist actually runs counter to the traditional image found in the novelistic and dramatic texts written in this trend. Usually the artist appears to be the alien, individual who stands in a strained relation with his milieu. In most cases, he is the victim of a harsh and ruthless predicament. A passing look at the works of Henry James, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Hardy, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, John Fowles, Iris Murdoch, Anthony Burgess... etc. reinforces this impression. Suffice it to mention here that the artist in the works of these writers and many others appears guileless, naive and persecuted. In contrast to all these,

¹ - W. Millers, "What is Musical Genius?", *Genius: The History of An Idea*. Ed. Penelope Murray (Oxford: OUP, 1989), p. 181.

Shaffer's Salieri appears as the incarnation of evil and destructive forces. Indeed his character brings to mind echoes and recollections of the Morloviaan Faustus or Milton's Satan and Shakespeare's Iago in his nightmarish, Othello. As such, Shaffer's tour de force is a powerful and impressive analysis of the reasons and consequences of the irrational surrender to obsessive hatred and jealousy which eventually turns out to be annihilating to both parties, victim and persecutor. The striking thing about this relationship is that it is one-sided: Salieri's only. In his moments of euphoria and spiritual elation, Mozart could never bring his mind to think of Salieri as base as that. Herein lies the moral aspect of the play in its being a stern caution, a warning that art is not simply a time-consuming activity. Rather it is a painstaking question that entails a lifelong devotion to it and ceaseless sacrifices, not getting involved in inflicting pain on fellow-artists or lacerating one's wounds or debacles. Such distracting interests are often done at the expense of real and astounding artistic achievement. Art, its rewards and buffets, the suffering before its altar, especially by its devoted practitioners are some of the aspects of Shaffer's drama which it undertakes to pinpoint. Accordingly, one is right to view the drama as a successful combination of intellectual, sensuous, philosophical and psychological drama simultaneously as its structure is open-ended and "carries many suggestions and overtones".¹

The technique of the play is apt and successful in that the actual start shows Salieri as an old man on a wheelchair haunted by obsessive nightmares of his past. The only name he keeps reiterating is expectedly Mozart's. As Shaffer puts it in his introductory note, the time is fluid and actually oscillating between the remote past and

¹ - M. Materlink, *The Modern Drama: Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Bernard F. Dukore (NY: Holt, Reinehart and Winston Inc.,1974) p. 733.

contemporary life, "In reading the text it must be remembered that the action is usually continuous. Its fluidity is ensured by the use of servants played by actors in the eighteenth-century livery" (p.6). If the action takes us back to Vienna of the eighteenth-century, it is interspersed by many appeals to modern or future audiences to read the anecdotes of this event properly. In other words, the dramatic discourse in this play combines history and historicity, dramatic illusion and Brechtian alienation, the enddistancing of the audience and forcing it to think afresh of this pivotal, relation and its implications. The whole play can be seen as an envisioning or interpretation, or to be more precise, a reading of the past from a relativistic, pluralist contemporary perspective. In retrospect and a succession of flashlights, the leitmotif of rivalry and desires of revenge is gradually unfurled. As in the case of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus*, the technique of doubling eventually leads to a state of self-encounter and self-recognition. Only at this time (1823), after years of burying the whole issue of Mozart in his heart does Salieri realize that he has been fighting against phantoms and hallucinations since music, as already indicated, is uncontrollable and ephemeral. Interestingly, as if the author meant to evoke the disquieting and destabilizing past and the excavation of the woe-begotten memory, the audience listens to Salieri's voice of self-mortification and self-lacerating while Mozart's music of joy and life-celebration fill the place. It is the opposition between life and death, good and evil. Such theatrical gestures are more expressive than words, though they do play a crucial role in typifying Salieri's tragedy. This duality of creativity and mediocrity, life-sustaining forces and the dark recesses of evil are at the heart of Shaffer's drama. The play begins with imperceptible and collective shouts of condemnation against the aging

Salieri. The technical situations and swift dialogues exchanged pinpoint this issue,

Darkness

Savage whispers fill the theatre. We can distinguish nothing at first from the smoke like - hissing save the word Salieri! Repeated here, there and everywhere around the theatre. Also, the barely distinguishable word Assassin!

Whispers: Salieri! Salieri! Salieri!

Downstage in the wheelchair, with his back to us, sits an old man. We can just see, as the light grows, a little bright, the top of his head enclosed in old cap, perhaps the shawl wrapped around the shoulders.

Salieri! Salieri! Salieri! (p.9)

This mixture of voices, gestures and theatrical effects has only one task to establish: setting the thematic side of the play in advance. Salieri, though the persecutor of Mozart as he admits, is eventually rendered as the victim of his own doing, his petty desires and unjustified whimsical attitudes. Such endless shouts have to be located in their wider context as no more than the deep -rooted psychological lashes that mortify the old artist in his years of decline and humiliation. In psychological terms, the play hints at the possibility that the two artists constitute a sort of a symbiotic relation where each is influenced proportionately by the other. To borrow the Freudian formula, they represent the pattern of id and ego, since each sees the other as playing havoc on his life and at the same time can not rid himself of the menacing other. They are complimentary to each other. As the incarnation of diabolic evil, Salieri impersonates the Christian symbolic act of integration of Mozart's body when he "tears off a corner of Mozart's Requiem" and imitates the Christian mass. It is in this

symbolic act, that Shaffer shows that Mozart turns into the Savior's body which Salieri eventually destroys. As if repeating Hamlet's words to Polonius after killing him, ("Heaven hath pleased it so/To punish me with this, and this with me"(III,iv,174-5), the whole thing appears as an act of fatality, "I eat what God gives me. Dose after dose. For all of life. His poison. We are both poisoned. I with you. You with me"(p.96)

The play has been rightly classified as a tragicomedy. The tragic side, curiously enough, is not about Mozart although his death and its aftermath constitute the core of the play.. What is more tragic, however, is the repercussion, the grave consequence of Mozart's murder and the ceaseless pains Salieri has been subjected to. He is keenly aware that he is the topic of debate and speculations among fellow-artists or the spectators. His servants have the following to say about the continuous rumours and hearsay,

Venticello 1: Impossible:
 Venticello2: Incredible.
 Venticello: I don't believe it!
 Venticello2: I don't believe it!
 Whispers: Salieri!

.....
Venticello 1 and Venticello 2: Tell us! Tell us at once! What does he cry? What does he cry?

What does he cry?

(Valet and look gesture towards Salieri)

Salieri in as great cry Mozart!!!(Silence)

Salieri: Peronami,Mozart!Il tow assassino ti Chiede perdono!

Salieri: Pieta !Mozart,Mozart,Pieta!(pp.11-12)

From this initial scene, the theme of the play is set and the nature of the dramatic performance is specified, since the whole theatrical show is marked by stasis and lack of action. In action, the play exerts a

very little effort. Instead, the mind is set free to roam those hidden spots in Salieri's conscious. Indeed the dramatic action is minimized and the memory takes the supremacy. Gradually we get the impression that this is a play of voice, sound and music par excellence. The whole setting is full of indiscernible and boisterous sounds that commingle in one chorus condemning Salieri's brutal act. As Mozart puts in his comment on the human situation as simply an endless choric voice "Millions of souls ascending at once and mixing in His ear to become an ending music, unimaginable"(p.66).

The structure of the play is cyclic in that the initial scene reflecting Salieri's physical and psychological weaknesses leads to the same scene where the finale is present, even in A Dostoyevskyan tone,

Salieri: So I remained in Vienna—City of Musicians—reverend by all. And slowly I understood the nature of God's punishment! What had I begged for in that church and abbey? Was it not fame? Fame for excellence... Well now, I had fame! I was so bricked upon fame! Embalmed in fame! Buried in fame—but for work I knew to be absolutely worthless. This was my sentence... and finally when my nose had been rubbed in fame to vomiting—it would be taken away from me. Every scarp.(p.101)

How I really did murder Mozart—with arsenic—out of envy.(p.102)

Between these essentially similar situations or, to be more exact, the different manifestations of the same situation, Shaffer unfurls those rare moments of spiritual joy brought about by music for both practitioners and recipients. The play celebrates the merits and demerits of art, of music, and it undertakes to reveal the price to be paid for this pleasure and fame.

Apart from this explicit theme of sin or crime and punishment, Amadeus tackles other equally significant topics. Among these is the exuberant and sustaining role of art in life and community. This issue Salieri undertakes to elaborate in one of his important speeches. It is an apology for art and its invigorating role in man's life amidst a great measure of mistrust and depreciation,

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-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 cultivate men's average lives. We took unremarkable men: usual bankers, run-o-the mill priests, ordinary soldiers and statesmen and wives - and sacramentalized their mediocrity. The savor of their days remains behind because of us, our music still remembered while their politics were long forgotten... Tell me, before you call us servants, who served whom? And who, I wonder, in your generations, will immortalize? (p.19)

The irony in this eloquent and moving speech, however, is the fact this sustaining and energizing side of art and creativity in human life can have a serious backlash if not given its proper vent. It may inflict pains and sufferings on its practitioners, if not properly handled. Salieri's situation is a case in point.

In terms of age and experience, Salieri is six years older and is doomed to outlast Mozart. However, Salieri is mediocre, as the play is art pains to show. He lacks those divine moments of inspiration that Mozart is endowed with. In his early years when he has been the sole master of music in his age, he could congratulate himself for his stoic spirit and self-made reputation,

I wanted Fame. Not to deceive you. I wanted to blaze, like a comet, across the firmament of Europe. Yet only in a special way. Music. Absolute music, a note of music is either right or wrong. (p.16)

Such is his initial success and fastidious efforts that Salieri wins at last the favor of Emperor Joseph II,

Shortly afterwards I met the Emperor, who favored me – and was to advance my career beyond all expectations! Clearly my bargain has been accepted. (p.17)

Though basically a mediocre composer (and perhaps this is why Shaffer has to write about his historic rivalry, since his main concern is on the striking contrast between creativity and mediocrity), Salieri entertains the feeling that his dreams have become true. It is at this critical moment in Salieri's life that his foil or opposite appears in the musical scene of Vienna. Hence Salieri's predicament ensues which is going to create reactions of initial ignoring, slighting and eventually deciding to choke this exceptional phenomenon in the history of music (Mozart). He is not of the type to give up desperately before his rival as easily as that. Hence his tragedy starts and its manifestations and variations the play undertakes to clarify. The real seeds of Salieri's jealousy begins when the Royal Chamberlin (Baron Von Strack) commissions Mozart to write an opera in German because Emperor Joseph prefers German to Italian), since German is emblematic of the patriotic spirit as "The idea of a National Opera is dear to his Majesty's heart'. He desires to hear pieces in good plain German"(p.21). This new and unexpected turn of events changes Salieri's life up-side-down and for the first time he realizes that he is not the only one in the musical scene,

Salieri: I ran home and buried my fear in work. More commitments to help musicians! More notes and anthems to

God's glory... As for Mozart, I avoided meeting him - and set out my Little Winds for whatever scenes of his could be found. (p.27)

Concerning the actual work of his rival, Salieri is intent on slighting and downgrading any achievement whatsoever,

The same. Conventional. Even boring. The productions of a precocious youngster - Leopold Mozart's swanly son.- nothing more. That Serenade was obviously an exception in his work: the sort of accident which might visit any composer on a lucky day! (p.28)

What has been expounded about Salieri's presence and pathetic obsessions in a play at least nominally devoted to Amadeus Mozart as its title promises is adequate to explain the tragic outcomes of an immoral and outrageous act. Now it is time to deal with the other side of this drama and in fact it is its glaring victim. The first thing that can be said here is that Mozart, leaving aside his artistic feats, has nothing admirable or decent in his character. He shows no social conformity of any sort. Perhaps this is his Achilles' heel as he has never thought of Salieri as a threat or potential obstacle in his way and professional life. The only few casual references to Salieri are common in such situations where two individuals work in the same field and practice the same activity. Salieri, as viewed by Amadeus Mozart, is no more than an amateurish composer "a musical idiot"(p.40).Conversely, he prides himself in his extraordinary achievement, "Do you know I am better than any musician in Vienna?"(p.42)This boasting is, after all, justified in Mozart's case. At any rate, apart from this passing reference, Salieri has only a minor role to play in Mozart's life as represented by Shaffer's play. This is line with Shaffer's viewpoint about this historic struggle. Obviously Mozart is so engrossed in his world of art and erotics that he is not free to think of such people or take them too seriously. His egoism and self-engrossment impede him from seeing and fearing

others who might pose a serious threat to him. Any passing look at Mozart's life in historic books and biographies is enough to enhance and verify his claims that he is the best in his field. He is reported to be composing at the age of five, playing in public at six, and publishing when he is seven years old.¹ What differentiates Mozart's music from others (whether from the past or his contemporaries) is that his composition takes the form of a dream-like state. He is quoted to be saying that his music is similar to "a beautiful statue".² Salieri, needless to add, has been ignorant of this side of Mozart's music, or at least, has convinced himself about the mediocrity of his rival's music. Yet this self-deception is not doomed to last long. His epiphany soon occurs when he is face to face with the real flashes of genius. This catastrophic moment does not merely put and end to his self-complacency, but also motivates him to wage war against Divine justice. Reading Mozart's original manuscripts (brought to him by Mozart's naïve wife as a token for this would-be intercession for Mozart's case), Salieri realizes that this is utterly stunning and incredible. It is at that unfortunate and ill-starred moment that he realizes his Faust-like fate, "like a man caught in a tumbling and violent sea". He confides in the contemporary audience about his most intimate secret and fear,

Capisco, I know my fate... Tonight at an inn somewhere in this city a giggling child who can put on paper, without actually setting down his billiard cue, casual notes which turn my most considered ones into lifeless scratches. Grazie, Signore!...until this day I have pursued my fellow men. I have worked and worked the talent. You allowed me...Solely in the end, in the

¹- E. M. Burns, *Western Civilization: Their History and their Culture* (NY: WW Norton & Co, 1963), p. 576.

²- A. Walker, *An Anatomy of Musical Criticism* (NY: Chilton Book, 1966) p. 84.

practice of the art which alone makes the world comprehensible to me, I might hear your voice! And now do I hear it-and it says "only one name: Mozart!...Spiteful, sniggering, conceited, infantile Mozart!"(p.55)

These accusations Salieri indiscriminately levels at his rival are not simply the outcome of an injured pride or frustrated artistic drives. Mozart's actions and gestures do run in the infantile direction Salieri refers to. Examples abound here. In his relationship with his girlfriend (later his wife), Costanze, the audience is entertained by the extremely funny scene he keeps performing with maximum spontaneity. His first words to her are "miaouw!", while the wife is forced to complete the picture by imitating the squeak of mice!(p.24)His language and acts are filthy and childish, but innocent. The following is just an example culled from many similar ones,

I am going to bite you in half with my fang-wang! My little Stanzerl-wanzerl- brazer! (She laughs delightedly, lying prone beneath him.)

You're trembling! I think you're frightened of puss-wuss! I think you' scared to death! (Intimately.) I think you're going to shit yourself (p.25).

Mozart's immaturity is felt throughout the ceaseless obscenities in dealing with his wife (pp.23-25).

Theorists in the field of creativity in art and literature such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Arthur Koestler and Julia Kristeva have pointed out the inextricable relationship between what is sexual and creative. Almost in the same vein runs Shaffer's argument as the British dramatist identifies Salieri's mediocrity in sexual repression. This point is illustrated through Mozart's sexual prowess and perhaps this one reason behind the rumors that he died of a genetic disease,

"syphilis"(p.12), rather than poisoning. For all her love and admiration of his extroverted character and great genius, Constanze refers to his flamboyant sexuality and reckless behavior, "He had ... every simple female pupil"(p. 44). As such, Mozart's victory is both sexual and artistic, much to Salieri's continuous sense of defeat and smoldering anger. Boasting of this side in his character, Mozart states in exhibitionistic terms the differences between the two composers in this particular issue,

*Of course he (Salieri) does n't! He can't get it up, that's why!
Have you ever heard his music? That's the sound of someone who
can't get up!(pp. 44-5)*

Mozart's relationship with his own father, Leopold, and its twists and turns are an interesting topic that could illuminate some aspects of Mozart's inner psychological life and creativity. Wolfgang Amadeus's relation with his father is essentially Oedipal. Especially is this felt when Mozart tries to rationalize his relationship with his father. He feels at heart that he betrayed or (metaphorically) killed his father. When Amadeus hears about his father's actual death, his reaction is characteristic. For all the strict discipline and prohibitions the father has sought throughout all his life to impose on the reckless son, particularly in choosing his own wife , the composer's sense of guilt and ingratitude is unmistakable and unabated,

How will I go now? There's no one else. No one understands the wickedness around, I can't see it...He watched for me all my life - and I betrayed him. (Distressed) I married when he begged me not to. I left him alone. I danced and played billiards and fooled about ... Oh, God! (p.77).

This point brings Mozart's situation to have some affinities with Salieri's in that both of them have defied the norms and dictates of God.

No doubt Salieri's breaching of Divine laws is far worse as he virtually puts an end to Mozart's life. However, Mozart is not entirely free from blame either. As he acknowledges, all his acts are not in line with what his father wanted him to be. In other words both composers are doomed to suffer from a terrible sense of guilt, albeit for different reasons and in different degrees. Talking about the psychological life, Salieri manipulates this very weapon to bludgeon Mozart by. Salieri succeeds in a deliberate stratagem of tantalizing Mozart to the quick of his being till the latter collapses. In one of the watershed experiences in Mozart's life, Salieri impersonates the role of the Masked Figure who keeps titillating the poor composer about writing a requiem

*Salieri: I ... reached up beseechingly as the Figure of his dreams!
(Urging.) 'Come! -Come..' (He beckons to Mozart, insidiously.)
He stood swaying, as if he would be off in his death. (p.94)*

This obsessive haunting of Mozart is enough to bring him to a state of regression that automatically brings to mind Pinter's famous subjection of his artist (Stanley) at the hands of the ruthless MacCann and Goldberg in *The Birthday Party*. His recurrent calls for his father's help are indicative of his utter helplessness and a confirmation of Salieri's success in defeating him, Hold me close to you, Papa. Take me, Papa. Take me. Put down your arms, and I 'll hop into them. Just as we used to do.(p.96)

This scene of final defeat also has some affinities with and some echoes of the protagonist of *Equus*, who suffers from a profound psychological complexity. Shaffer's impressive use of ritual, historical and metaphysical remains his distinctive hallmark which brings Shaffer to a position different from other British contemporary writers of the

present age. As has been suggested¹, Shaffer is " a writer of epic scale at a time when the West end is once again full of plays about the small agonies of middle class domesticity". The Requiem Mass virtually becomes Mozart's own requiem because he is doomed to leave it unfinished. Mozart's life, for all its free-wheeling and carefree moments, is sprinkled with pain, defeat and pressures from a demanding and even suffocating environment. Salieri's inner defeat lies in his realization that his rebellion against God's choice or "Magic Flute", as he calls Mozart, is of no avail and that Mozart's actually eclipses his own music, though its producer has been buried for a long time. Mozart's predecessor, John Keats, has already given his dictum that a thing of beauty is a joy for ever. The exceptional joy Mozart's music has brought to its composer and its recipients, ironically, can only be intolerable and bitter for his rival. This is what can be gleaned from Shaffer's superb and memorable tragicomedy where the word and music run hand in hand, to bestow upon the entire work richness, subtlety, and suggestiveness.

Conclusion

It has become evident by now that Shaffer's Amadeus is not a text that tries to investigate or verify the validity of Mozart's death at the hands of his rival. This detective aspect is far from Shaffer's overriding interest. His concern lies elsewhere, in other psychological philosophical and artistic domains where he can pursue his recurrent and common topics about man and his inescapable predicament. Seen from this perspective, Shaffer's play is a close study of the nature of professional jealousy and its roots as well as its destructive repercussions. Since the play's structure depends on retrospect and

¹- S. Tresslor, 'Peter Shaffer', File on Shaffer. Ed. Virginia Cook and Malcolm Page (London: Methuen, 1987), p.7.

flashback, it is expected that the role of memory and recalling of the past is pretty central. Indeed the whole action of the play is no more than an excavation, a recalling and reliving of a horrible experience that never gives Salieri a moment of peace. Mozart's shimmering images keep haunting Salieri's mind and molest him. It is in this situation that the audience or the reader is inevitably reminded of Lady Macbeth's pathetic situation as she encounters the hallucinations and terrible ghosts of the guilt-ridden mind. It is clear that Salieri is entrapped in his little world of crime and its harmful effects on the individual's mental and psychological life. The author brings us to the most intimate details in Salieri's mind as he evokes those hectic moments in his life. Mozart or Amadeus of the title appears as simply a figment in Salieri's shattered mind. Of course Mozart does appear physically, but always evoked and perceived through Salieri's perturbed mind. In all these memories and dimly-perceived images, Salieri reveals the inadmissible evidence of his complicity or direct responsibility in Mozart's catastrophic end. As such, the play is a keen study of the woebegone heart as it gropes its way in the dark and labyrinthine paths of crime and its destabilizing effects. This is an indirect way of saying that the play traces the terrible consequences of the crime, any crime, let alone that of a great musician. In all these, Salieri appears as a Faustian figure who succumbs in a moment of despair to the meanest desires in human nature. In other words, the play probes Salieri's moral and psychological life as it is put to test in his devilish and irrational rivalry with Mozart. Salieri's epiphany is equally tragic: all his efforts to choke and extinguish Mozart's genius in music are of no avail as the latter's music remains inaccessible and indestructible.

When the play turns to presenting Mozart's character, Shaffer stresses the fact that Mozart represents the foil or the opposite of Salieri

in all respects. Mozart is the spontaneous, innocent and conceited figure that is quite convinced about his genius and matchless skill. 'The Magic Flute' which he composes is an apt metaphor for qualifying his own character. His disposition, gestures, characteristic discourse and idiosyncrasy are all channeled to typify his freakish character. There is a characteristic trait in his dealings with his own father which shows that he has his own lot of pain and discomfort, albeit for different reasons. The different moral, psychological, philosophical and religious planes of Shaffer's play have bestowed richness and variety on the text and given it universal dimensions. Shaffer is endowed with striking ability to pick an anecdote from history and charge it with profound and broad human sense. In terms of structure Mozart's brief presence in the play offsets the tragic sense prevalent. Everything around him abounds with jokes and freewheeling spirit. The comic side of the play lies in this particular presence of Mozart and his infantile gestures. These two sides of the play render it close to life in all its concurrent combination of what is tragic and comic. Shaffer is not content with showing Mozart's premature death and the hardships in his final days (in terms of domestic life or profession), but he is also intent upon showing the other side of Salieri in the last days predating his death. Shaffer chooses a very flexible framework in that the events are narrated and enacted or interspersed by bursts of anger, repentance, self-loathing and recurrent appeals to the audience for recognition and forgiving. It is this interesting juxtaposition between actions and remembering that eventually gives the audience glimpses of watching and perceiving Salieri's inner struggles. The topic the play successfully crystallizes is that fame or glory is of no import when it comes to man's peace of mind. The play in general dissects and shows the different concentric levels of the play - psychological, moral, artistic and

religious. The final impression the play leaves on the audience is that art is a double-edged weapon and a precarious field that, for all its merits and privileges, may inflict pains and sufferings and its victims as seen through the situations of both Salieri and Mozart.

References

- Abbston, S. C.W. Thematic Guide to Modern Drama. Westport: Greenwood Press 2003.
- Angermuller, R. Mozart Bibliography to 1970. Verlag: Kassel Barenreiter, 1976.
- Artaud, A. The Theatre and Its Double. London: Grove Press, 1938.
- Burns, E. M. Western Civilizations: Their History and Their Culture NY: WW.Norton&Co., 1963.
- Esslin, M. (ed.) Absurd Drama. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965.
- Gianakris, C.G.' Drama into Film: The Shaffer Situation.' Modern Drama, Vol. 28, No.1, 1985, pp. 83-93. (ed.), Peter Shaffer: A Casebook. London: Garland Publishing, 1991.
- Greenleaf, M. Pushkin and Romantic Fashion. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Hernadi, P. Interpreting Events: Tragicomedies of History and the Modern Stage. Ithaca: Corenell University Press, 1985.
- Horowitz, J. 'For Mozart's Archival: Italian Renaissance', The New York Times, Dec. 28, 2004: pp. 11-12.
- Manyards, S.' Mozart : A Life', Harper Perennial, Feb. 14, p.21.
- Materlink, M. The Modern Drama: Dramatic Theory and Criticism. Ed. Bernard F. Dukore. NY: Holt, Reinehart and Winston Inc., 1974, pp. 732-41.
- Millers, W. ' What is Musical Genius ?', Genius: The History of An Idea. Ed. Penelope Murray. Oxford: Oxford University, Press, 1989.
- Morgan, M. 'Peter Shaffer', 20th Century Drama. Ed. James Vinson, London: Macmillan, 1983, pp. 243-44.
- Pushkin, A. Selected Works in Two Volumes, Vol. One: Poetry. Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1974.
- Robbins, H.C. ' Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart', Lexicon Universal Encyclopedia. NY: Lexicon Publishers, 1994, pp. 628-29
- Shaffer, P. Amadeus. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981.
- Tresslor, S. 'Peter Shaffer', File on Shaffer. Ed. Virginia Cook and Malcolm Page. London: Methuen, 1987, pp. 7-18.
- Walker, A. An Anatomy of Musical Criticism. NY: Chilton Book, 1966,
- Wolff, T. (ed.) - Pushkin on Literature. London: Methuen, 1971.