

Appearance vs. reality in peter shaffer's amadeus

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

When Mozart was dying; he claimed he's been poisoned; some said he accused a man some said that man was Salieri; but no one believed it" (Shaffer 14)

No one believed it. This is the underlying subtext of the entire play *Amadeus* by Peter Shaffer. The playwright plays upon the irony between the outward appearance of reputed Court musician versus the inward reality that characterizes the life of Antonio Salieri, the protagonist of the play.

Outwardly, it is Salieri who is successful and is able to earn a decent livelihood but the inner realization of his mediocrity torments him. Yet this outwardly respectable man has plotted his rival's death with fiendish cunning. The play is gripping as it opens with Salieri as an old man – a man who is finally ready to admit to his heinous crime of poisoning a composer whose compositions were touched with the element of the divine. An old man on a wheelchair, wheezing his way through his words, as he pulls the viewer back into the historical past to reveal his motivation for his crime, trying to convince a future audience why the crime had to be committed (Shaffer 21). A man who tried to mock God; only God would not be mocked, as evidenced in Salieri's anguished cries of "Forgive me Amadeus." (Shaffer)

The structure of the play is based upon conflicts – Salieri's mediocrity versus Mozart's genius, Salieri's sobriety and respectability versus Mozart's mad obscenity and passion (Huber and Zapf 299-313). It is Salieri who adores music and is able to appreciate it; who earnestly seeks genius and who prays to God to bless him with the gift of composition. But God chooses as his vessel, Mozart - whom Salieri refers to as that "spiteful, sniggering, conceited, infantine Mozart" (Shaffer), while he himself remains the "patron saint of mediocrity". Salieri's first encounter with Mozart reveals his genius

<https://assignbuster.com/appearance-vs-reality-in-peter-shaffers-amadeus/>

and he describes the music to the audience – lost in its beauty. The exquisite talent sends him raging over to God, bitter and angry, seething with jealousy, his earnest devotion transformed in a flash into a murderous rage that makes him burn the cross he has worshipped for so long. The jealousy cuts so deep and is so pervasive that Salieri now considers God as his enemy and pledges to kill his “ chosen vessel” – Amadeus.

Salieri tries to reason with his audience, he tells them what a godly life he had led, while the “ obscene child” (BBC, 2000) was awash in all the seven deadly sins and Salieri is forced to stand by helplessly and realize that life is seldom fair (Ferjutz 2005). The plays travels back through a fascinating monologue interspersed with scenes that take place in the background as the old man in the wheelchair reveals the demonic depths of his plot to kill Amadeus by preying upon his Achilles heel – his father. The play presents Mozart’s complex psychological relationship with his father – one that is a mixture of rebellion and shame, fear and desperation in the awareness of his father’s disappointment with his lack of worldly success which is symbolized in the silly games he plays with his wife;

“ MOZART (insistent: like a child) Come on do it. Do it Lets do it. Poppy!

(They play a private game, gradually doing it faster, on their knees.)

CONSTANZE Poppy. MOZART (changing it) Pappy. CONSTANZE (copying)

Pappy. MOZART Pappa-pappa-pappa-pappa! CONSTANZE Pappa-pappa-

pappa-pappa-pappa! (They rub noses.)TOGETHER Pappa-pappa-pappa-

pappa! Pappa-pappa-pappa-pappa! (Shafer 49-50; 9293)

Salieri plays the role of the detached observer and reveals to the audience how he had seized upon the means to strike terror into the heart of the young composer, which builds in its diabolic intensity as he forces Mozart to

<https://assignbuster.com/appearance-vs-reality-in-peter-shaffers-amadeus/>

write his own requiem, planning to pass it off as his own. But Mozart dies before it is completed and even at the end of his life, Salieri struggles to gain the fame that has long evaded him, trying desperately to get some of Mozart's eternal appeal to rub off on him through his dramatic revelations about his murder. Only to fail. Again.

Works cited:

Ferjutz, Kelly. (2005). Too many words? A review of the play. [Online] Available

<http://www.mvdaily.com/articles/2005/10/amadeus1.htm>

Huber Werner and Zapf, Hubert. (1984) " On the structure of Peter's Shaffer's

Amadeus" Modern Drama, Vol. XXVII, No. 3, September, 1984, pp.

299-313

Shaffer, Peter(2001). Amadeus: A play by Peter Shaffer . Harper Perennial

" Shaffer: Acclaimed Amadeus Playwright" BBC News. Entertainment.

December

30, 2000. [Online] Available at [http://news.bbc.co.](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1093196.stm)

[uk/1/hi/entertainment/1093196.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1093196.stm)