

Good example of
essay on the
patronage system as
it is depicted in the
1984 film ...

[Art & Culture](#), [Artists](#)



After the enlightenment and the return to high culture in Europe musicians worked under what was known as the patronage system. This meant that they were indentured servants to noblemen who provided them with financial stability. Noblemen would keep a court composer, and they in turn would provide them with a place to live, food to eat and financial stability. This was the pro of the system. The con of the system is that they weighed in on artistic decisions and in the process compromised the artistic integrity of composers at the time. The 1984 film *Amadeus* takes place in Vienna takes place during the height of this system and gives the viewer insight into how this system played out for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Written by Peter Shaffer and directed by Milos Forman, it tells the story through the eyes of court composer Antonio Salieri, who while considering Mozart a genius, is so jealous of his genius that the film starts with him making an attempt at his own life. This essay focuses on how the patronage system is depicted in the film, and how Mozart rebelled against it.

Nowadays, you will find few people who do not believe Mozart to be a genius. With this understanding, he was not writing music simply for the security it provided, but because he had to create, it was in his DNA to create innovative music. But this did not always fit well with the status quo. One of his ongoing frustrations was having to take criticism from people who were musically inferior to him simply because of their rank in society. There is a scene after Mozart debuts his *Operah* for Emperor Joseph where he tells him that he thought there were too many notes in his Opera. He tells Mozart, "Occasionally it seems to have . . . too many notes." Mozart tells him that he does not understand and tell him, "There are just as many notes as I

require, no more no less." The emperor says, " There are just so many notes that an ear can hear in the course of an evening." Mozart is left rather unhinged from this encounter, and it is an example of someone who is not inclined towards music making edits to one of the world's greatest musical geniuses because of the patronage system.

Embedded in the plot is Mozart's reluctance to submit to the status quo.

After he is married the emperor wants him to be the teacher of his niece, but Mozart is reluctant to submit copies of his work to a committee of Italians. He does not believe they have the understanding of music that he does. " You are not the only composer in Vienna," he is told. " No," he responds, " But I am the best." His newly wed wife asks him what they are supposed to do, since Mozart's pride prevents him from submitting his music and therefore becoming the teacher to the royal princess. " One royal pupil and people will come flocking," his wife tells him. " They'll come anyways," he counters. " No they won't," she says, understanding more than Mozart how the politics of the day operate.

His wife then goes behind Mozart's back in order to submit copies of his music. The court composer is astounded that these first drafts contained no corrections—they came out already composed in Mozart's head. Initially the court composer wanted to dismiss Mozart as a fluke when he heard a piece of his in the Arch Bishops presence, but seeing these original drafts, he had to conclude that that " sound [he had heard] had been no accident. Few people have the musical prowess to even recognize Mozart's genius. One of these is the court composer, but he does not help Mozart due to his jealousy of him. The court composer blames God for his lack of talent. He prays to

God that he will be able to compose even a single piece of music as unique and brilliant of Mozart, and ultimately decides that God is the enemy for not instilling in him a commensurate musical ability. During this time period, talent was seen as a gift from God, so the court composer is led to believe that God must love Mozart more. For he believes that God has cursed him with being able to recognize Mozart's talent, without giving him the ability to compete with it.

Because Mozart does not fit the mold of the status quo, he struggles financially to get by in Vienna. His inability to work the system as it is prevents him from getting pupils and he deals with his share of financial problems.

The patronage system had its conventions and Mozart, as an artist, was one who wanted to break free of the conventions of the past. He wanted to take music into new directions. When it is found out that he was writing an opera for a banned French play "The Marriage of Figaro" he is called in to talk to the emperor, because he has censored this play for fear that it could be politically decisive between the classes. The emperor's court asks him why he is wasting his talent on such trash when he could be writing on more elevated themes.

"I can't rewrite what's perfect," Mozart tells the court composer, whom he doesn't know is working behind the scenes against him. The court composer's jealousy leads him to thwart Mozart while Mozart considers him a friend and confidant. Censorship is the antithesis of the artist. This is what those in high positions, such as the emperor did not understand. For them it was as easy as saying, rewrite it, because in the patronage system, the

musical artists worked for them. But Mozart worked for his own muses, and there was a disconnect between his own inspiration and the status quo of Vienna. "It's not fair that a man like that should have power over our work," Mozart tells the court composer, who pretends to listen intently while secretly plotting against him. The composer recognizes the brilliance of the opera, but because the emperor yawned, this led to it being critically not acclaimed. Because of the monarch system, people for fear of their posts and status needed to adhere to the whims of the elite, and they affected everyone else's opinions. Because of this, there was very little objectivity in evaluating works of art such as Mozart's play. He uses his influence to assure that Don Giovanni was only played five times in Vienna, but he went in secret to every one of these performances, worshipping in secret this music. Mozart, because of his talent, had a sense of self-entitlement. This is not uncommon in gifted individuals. He sums this up when he tells the baron, "I am endowed with talent, you with money." He pleads with him, but is told, "sorry, no." Mozart sinks to eventually do vaudeville performances.

There are different ways to evaluate the patronage system and its effect on Mozart. In one sense, it created him. In another sense, it destroyed him. The enlightenment wealth and interest of the elite in the arts put Opera in a prominent place in society. It involved a complicated society with an appreciation for the arts that brought symphony, stage and performance together in the opera. Without this system Mozart would have never had the opportunity to compose the music that he did. This opened up the culture for the opera and allowed Mozart to apply and be recognized. Yet the patronage system also, as depicted in the film also ended up being the undoing of

Mozart in its attempt to control him and direct his music in a way that adhered to the conventions of the society. He was always financially on unsteady ground. He wanted just to focus on his music and his art, but there were other concerns, such as supporting himself, that led him to debt and a difficult financial situation. In the film, the demerits of the system are depicted. From an artistic standpoint, there were drawbacks for the artists. But from a societal standpoint, the patronage system can be credited with creating some of the most enduring operas, music and symphonies that came to be.