

# A divine rivalry

Art & Culture



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

As each sweet note floated from the orchestra, Antonio Salieri felt his heart breaking. The composition was perfect; each note was flawlessly arranged and perfectly layered upon each other.

The mastery Amadeus possessed was something, Salieri could not have achieved in a thousand lifetimes. From its title, it would appear that Peter Shaffer's play Amadeus is about the gifted composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, yet the story is truly that of Antonio Salieri, court composer to the empire of Austria, the most successful young musician in the city of musicians.

When Salieri first hears Mozart's music, it sets him on a different path than the one he intended. He says, "I had heard the voice of God-and that it issued from a creature whose own voice I had also heard-and it was the voice of an obscene child." (19)

It is his jealousy of Mozart's gift and his feelings of mediocrity that lead to both men's downfall. A comparison of both characters will illustrate that despite Salieri's attempt to live a virtuous life; his desire to destroy Mozart in a divine war prevailed over his devotion to God and his music.

Comparing several aspects of the two men's lives, their devotion, careers, the role of women, and the public versus private nature of their actions, and the madness that consumes them both will demonstrate the similarities that existed between the rivals.

Both Salieri and Mozart are men of devotion. The link is their music. Salieri believes that music is "God's art" (7) and uses his gift to serve God. Salieri

had promised to lead a chaste life in order to honor God and he feels God betrays him by blessing Mozart with such talent.

Throughout his life, he has done his best to remain virtuous and yet in his mind God has shown him that he is mediocre and has bestowed a gift upon a man he feels is morally inferior.

In Act I, Scene 12 he declares his war on God, saying “ From this time on we are enemies.” Mozart’s life of devotion was also to music. He shares his feelings on music and the divine with Salieri, “ I bet you that’s how God hears the world. Millions of sounds ascending at once and mixing in His ear to become an unending music, unimaginable to us.” (57)

However, Mozart’s devotion isn’t purely celestial. He is also extremely devoted to his father. He served his father’s wishes, even waiting to be married. It is Salieri who convinces him to ignore them and marries Constanze. When Leopold dies, Salieri counsels the grieving Mozart who feels as if his lifestyle was a betrayal against his father. Mozart says, “ He watched me for all my life and I betrayed him.” (69)

Salieri seizes this moment, convincing Mozart he has his best interest at heart and telling Mozart he will help him find work while undermining him at every attempt. Now having won his trust, Salieri convinces him that he should write his vaudeville The Magic Flute based on his association with The Freemasons.

Knowing this is Mozart’s last tie to society, he realizes how this will ultimately ruin the man. His shattered faith leads him to such a drastic choice and Mozart is helpless in his plot.

Appearance plays a role in both Salieri's and Mozart's life. Salieri initially lived less extravagantly, whereas Mozart flaunted his wealth and success often living above his means. Once Salieri reigns himself to his jealousy, he too becomes consumed in flaunting his wealth denying his taste for "plain things." Schaffer comments on Mozart's appearance throughout the play.

Through the stage directions, he tells us Mozart was a small, pallid, large-eyed man in a showy wig and a showy set of clothes." As Salieri's story progresses, Mozart's clothing becomes more and more garish in Salieri's eye. As Mozart's life slowly unravels, his clothing becomes shabby and less important. Throughout the play Salieri has condemned Mozart for what he will ultimately become.