

Excessive Ambition And Its Consequences In Peter Shaffer's Amadeus*

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Abstract

Even though Mozart is better recognized in cultures, literature, and history, what he had experienced and shared with Salieri cannot be neglected since their relationship plays a vital role in Mozart's life. Though Mozart is the character that allows this play to be written, Peter Shaffer focuses on Salieri, the composer of the palace and puts him on the very center of the play. On contrary to many works that were written about Mozart, Peter Shaffer tries to give light to the relationship of two prominent musicians in the history by concentrating on Salieri. In this paper, the play of Peter Shaffer, *Amadeus*, will be analyzed under the light of the narcissistic approach. Psychological terms and definitions will also be mentioned in the article considering that both of the musicians had psychological problems. Along with this, some information and reminders will be given about classical music, economy and social conditions of the 18th century.

Keywords: *Jealousy and Intolerance, Narcissism, Inequity, Obsession, Hatred.*

* Research Article - Submit Date: 10.10.2019, Acceptance Date: 15.11.2019

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Peter Shaffer'in Amadeus'unda Aşırı Hırs ve Bunun Sonuçları

Öz

Kültürlerde, edebiyatta ve tarihte, Mozart daha fazla tanınmış bir isim olsa da Salieri ile yaşadıkları şeyler Mozart'ın hayatında büyük bir rol oynadığı için, aralarındaki ilişki göz ardı edilemez. Bu oyunun yazılması her ne kadar Mozart ile mümkün olsa da Peter Shaffer oyunda, sarayın bestecisi olan Salieri'ye odaklanmış ve onu oyunun merkezine koymuştur. Mozart hakkında yazılmış birçok eserin aksine, Peter Shaffer, Salieri'ye odaklanarak tarihteki iki ünlü müzisyenin ilişkisine ışık tutmaya çalışmıştır. Bu yazıda, Peter Shaffer'in *Amadeus* oyunu, narsistik yaklaşımıyla incelenecektir. Her iki müzisyenin de psikolojik sorunu olduğundan dolayı, çalışmada bazı psikolojik terimlere ve tanımlamalara yer verilecektir. Buna ek olarak, 18. Yüzyıldaki klasik müzik, ekonomi ve sosyal koşullar hakkında bazı hatırlatmalar yapılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kıskançlık ve Tahammülsüzlük, Narsizm, Eşitsizlik, Takıntı, Kin

Introduction

When it comes to music, the name Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is one of the most significant figures in history. Since his death in 1791 at the age of 35, his life has been a subject to many works in both literature and art. Peter Shaffer wrote his famous play *Amadeus* in 1979 and the play was adapted to a movie in 1984, which received enormous attention and eight Oscars. One of the reasons for such a success is that Peter Shaffer mostly focuses on Salieri, the composer of the royal palace, not on Mozart in the play. He doesn't tell a story about Mozart's life but rather, he reflects an inner challenge of Salieri, which Mozart caused. In that way, the play embraces a new shape in which Mozart's life and his downfall are also tacitly shown throughout the play.

What causes Salieri to feel jealous and have a hatred against Mozart is because of Salieri's self-devotion to music and praying to God don't make him any better than Mozart. As Mozart is a prodigy with autism, his awareness and dexterity for music are more concentrated and sharper than Salieri's talent. This actually accounts for the differences of both musicians

in terms of quality and fame. But, Salieri questions this unfairness whenever he prays to God. He is quite aware that Mozart is way more talented and his music charms even himself. He gets closer and closer to the ultimate borders of selfishness.

When he first looks at Mozart's librettos, he shows us how he is in the interest of Mozart's talent and how perfect he is. "Displace one note and there would be diminishment. Displace one phrase and the structure would fall. The truth was clear. That Serenade had been no accident. I was staring through the cage of those meticulous ink strokes at an Absolute Beauty!" (Act 1, pp. 54)

While Salieri is deeply influenced by Mozart's talent, he cannot help foster the feeling of hatred against him. These feelings drag Salieri into a situation in which he questions what makes Mozart so original and why he isn't as able as him. While fostering these feelings, he is also fostering his selfishness, which begins to make him even a Narcist. "Narcissism is defined as the libidinal investment of the self. In the ego-psychology frame of reference, the self is regarded as a substructure of the system ego reflecting the integration of all the component self-images or self-representations that develop throughout the individual's interactions with other human beings(objects)" (Otto F. Kernberg, *Aggressivity, Narcissism, and Self-Destructiveness in the Psychotherapeutic Relationship*, pp. 45). Salieri, in fact, begins to develop this sub-conscious sentiment right after he hears about Mozart. Day by day, he gets more and more indulged with growing hate towards Mozart and selfishness towards himself. He defends himself by blaming God for his unfair endowment to Mozart. He begins to feel a rivalry between himself and Mozart on whose side God settles. We see the very first Narcisstic utterances of Salieri in the opening scene of second act: "I had the power. God needed Mozart to let himself into the world. And Mozart needed me to get him worldly advancement. So it would be a battle to the end-and Mozart was the battleground. (Act 2, pp. 58) Here, Salieri tries to make himself believe the lie that he makes up. He creates a scenario in his mind and then he begins to believe it. He exaggerates this scenario and relates what he can image on behalf of himself. This is one of the psychological disorders that Salieri might have, which is called as 'Pathological Lying'.

“Pathological lying is falsification entirely disproportionate to any discernible end in view, engaged in by a person who, at the time of observation, cannot definitely be declared insane, feeble-minded, or epileptic. Such lying rarely, if ever, centers about a single event; although exhibited in very occasional cases for a short time, it manifests itself most frequently by far over a period of years, or even a life” (Healy and Healy, *Pathological Lying, Accusation, and Swindling*, pp. 1).

Salieri's questioning of inequity and its effects on Mozart

Salieri puts what he makes up in his mind on the center of his life and begins ruining both from what he takes pleasure, Music, and his future successes. Though Salieri prays to God most of the time, he thinks there is no response from Him. Having seen that, Salieri quits believing the fairness of God and even he quits believing the God himself. That the relationship of Salieri with his dad is so problematic and distant is clear. The source of his hatred that he feels for Mozart and his self-destruction is related to this problematic relationship. Because Salieri is jealous of Mozart whose father is proud of is his son. He wants to have the same relationship with his dad but he fails doing this because of his father's indifference to Salieri's wishes and talents. Namely, Salieri is somehow neglected and refused and maybe 'cannot be understood'. Thus, his biggest motivation that shapes his character and his aims in his life is that what he wants to say is to clearly be understood and accepted through his music. Along with psychological factors, the social status of Mozart and Salieri play a crucial role upon what two composers experience. In *Amadeus*, it can easily be seen that Mozart's life is getting more and more miserable regarding his economic situation. As he needs money more, his reputation gets worse, which creates a vicious circle.

He gets into such a bad situation that he cannot afford to supply his wife and his son's needs. It can easily be seen that talent was not enough at that time to get by. Social and economic statuses of musicians in the 18th century determine both their professional and private life. In the play, Salieri uses his money as a medium to make Mozart dependent on himself. Although Mozart never witnesses a vicious or wicked minded treatment of Salieri, what actually happens is out of the borders of his consciousness. Salieri does not implicitly give money to Mozart but under the mask of his father. Considering these, Salieri has more firm social and economic

power, which functions in favor of him while he is trying to win the battle that he wants to win. However, he never gets the fame and appreciation that he has been seeking for.

In the 18th century, when the interest to music began to be drastically on demand, some cities in Europe took the attention of musicians and composers ranging from novices to Professional ones. Vienna was perhaps the city that all of these musicians wanted to live in for the pursuit of having fame and money. “Vienna continued to fascinate young, ambitious musicians, attracting them to perform and to compose there, and convincing many of them to settle there”. (Zaslaw, *The classical era from the 1740s to the end of the 18th century*, pp. 126). That explains why Mozart insists on staying in Vienna and gets the reputation that he is looking for in the play. Until he lost his mind insanity, Mozart had this fame, though. He was earning money and reputation but it was not a constant one in reality. “He must have welcomed the opportunity to earn cash and gain access to the high nobility without having to go through the difficult and time-consuming process of organizing his own concerts, and without having to give up his freedom to make music where and when he pleased.” (Zaslaw, pp. 130). “History showed that although Mozart experienced only moderate success during his short lifetime, his exceptional genius soon afterwards grew to overshadow the pale abilities of Salieri. And what must have been galling to Salieri” (Gianakaris, *A Playwright Looks at Mozart: Peter Shaffer’s ‘Amadeus*, pp. 39). Peter Shaffer reflects the periods that Mozart has sufficient amount of money as a short period in order to make us aware how grave actually his situation is. Therefore, Mozart has a role that is undermined by poverty most of the time. Salieri also has this reputation, maybe earlier than Mozart because his penetration to Vienna music and royal society is quite stronger than many musicians. “As music director for Joseph II, Salieri, perhaps more than any other musician, influenced the course of Viennese musical theatre during the next generation.” (Zaslaw, pp 133). Mozart is kind of free in terms of social pressure. He has a character that is not oppressed by social norms. So, his music is also free and innovative accordingly, letting alone the fact that his splendid talent makes his music unique and idiosyncratic. He is aware of his talent, which gives him power and self-esteem to create his original compositions. However, Salieri’s power for composing comes from his excessive ambition and his envy towards Mozart. The source for his ambitions to be accepted is because

of his constantly growing 'complexes'. In order to satisfy his complexes, he cannot even focus on his own works or his successes. His narcissistic inner thoughts grab him so much that he is not even aware of to where he is dragged by his psychological disorder. In order to understand his mindset, definition of 'complex' should be made. "A complex is the *image* of a certain psychic situation which is strongly accentuated emotionally and is, moreover, incompatible with the habitual attitude of consciousness."

Salieri hides his lack of 'father-care' in his subconscious, which creates his own will that is managed by this sub-conscious. In the later periods of his life, the object in his sub-conscious changes: The figure of 'dad' leaves its place to figure of 'God'. Salieri who wants to glorify God with his music begs God to endow what he is wishing for. Every night, he prays for the sake of this wish while he practices a lot to become a better composer. But he gets nothing in return. The inability that Salieri has in comparison to Mozart results in his feeling of failure which changes into a neurosis in time. Without understanding why he is rejected by God, he can't make himself glorify in his music. As a result of this process, his self-defense mechanism begins to emerge and he prefers defying God. He tries to soothe his hate that he feels for God by ruining Mozart, who has many things that he doesn't possess. This subsequently leads to moral and psychological downfall. From this moment on, for Salieri, the only way to defeat God is to kill Mozart. The dark side of his soul grabs him. All of these factors result in 'introversion' of Salieri. Karl Gustav Jung defines introversion as such "Introversion means a turning inwards of the libido(q.v.), whereby a negative relation of subject to object is expressed. Interest does not move towards the object, but recedes towards the subject." (Jung, *Psychological Types*, pp. 567). Salieri does not regard himself as the composer of the best any more after these things.

"Why? What is my fault? Until this day I have pursued virtue with rigor. I have labored long hours to relieve my fellow men. I have worked and worked the talent you allowed me. You know how hard I've worked!-solely. That in the end, in the practice of the art which alone makes the world comprehensible to me, I might hear Your Voice! And now I do hear it- and it says only one name: MOZART! Spiteful, sniggering, conceited, infantine Mozart!- who has never worked one minute to help another man!"(Act I, 56)

Here, Salieri associates Mozart's music with God's voice. He is now aware that his deeds for God's sake are in vain. He thinks that God is on the side of Mozart let alone his being a fair God. Maybe this situation can explain why Peter Shaffer prefers using the name of 'Amadeus' rather than 'Mozart' for his play title. Because 'Amadeus' means 'Beloved of God'. Salieri becomes so exasperated with God's unfairness that he begins seeing God as an enemy. "From this time we are enemies, You and I! I'll not accept it from You- Do you hear? They say God is not mocked. I tell you, Man is not mocked!" (Act I, 56) Salieri rebels against his inner self-acceptance as what he undergoes are out of his hand and his reason. He chooses to blame God and ignores His entity from his soul. "Salieri recognizes that his pact with God has been a mockery.

Adding to Salieri's anguish is the awareness that Mozart has received God's precious genius unsought and unpaid" (Gianakaris, *C.J: A Playwright Looks at Mozart: Peter Sheffer's Amadeus*, pp. 46).

Salieri's blaming God for this uneven circumstance is maybe because of his lack of pure belief in God. "That Salieri's view of God is limited becomes more apparent as the play develops" (Jones, *Peter Shaffer's Continued Quest for God in "Amadeus"*, pp 147). While Salieri is getting strayed from who he was before, at the same time, through Mozart, he faces with his frustration of his being deceived by God. He is not even utterly sure about God's equity.

"Dimly the stars shone on the empty Street. I was suddenly frightened. It seemed to me I had heard a 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!" (Act I, 27) Salieri's ambition and his passion are about to turn into hatred and even downfall of his inner happiness. In order to get rid of this problem, he even thinks about murdering Mozart. He tries to soothe his inner conflict by eradicating the whole reason for his vicious deeds. Salieri is not only jealous of Mozart's divine talent but also his opportunities when he was a kid. Mozart's father tried to make Mozart known all around Austria whereas Salieri was ignored by his father. Salieri is sure that there is no divine justice that he can rely on. At the end of act I, Salieri is reflected as a non-religious person who has even hatred against God.

Salieri intends to use his hatred to destroy Mozart. Now that God gives no punishment to him, Salieri is aware of his power to make Mozart fall down as he is of the opinion that he doesn't deserve what he is endowed. "On the dreadful Night of the Manuscripts, my life acquired a terrible and thrilling purpose. The blocking of God in one of his purest manifestations. I had to power." (Act 2, 58) It might be understood from his remarks that Salieri is, in fact, tries to ease his curiosity of whether God will react to his deeds or not, which seemingly remains without any clear answer. When Salieri wants Mozart to feel fearful for death, he also takes the pleasure of Mozart's emotional and psychological downfall. He gets the control of Mozart when he shows himself in disguise of Figure and tells Mozart that he has to write a requiem for his own death.

Salieri questions the reason behind his fading fame whereas Mozart is known all around the country. He gives the answer to this question at the end of the play. After thirty-two years he finds another way for being remembered when he realizes that he has almost no chance to be as famous as Mozart. The way is to be known notorious for the murder of Mozart. "I did not live on earth to be His joke for Eternity. I will be remembered! O will be remembered! - if not in fame, then infamy. One moment more and I win the battle with Him. Watch and see!" (Act 2, 102) Salieri takes his revenge from God by torturing Mozart by intimidating him for death. In fact, at the beginning of his questioning himself about if he really wants to kill Mozart or not. But through the middle of the act 1, we can see the first sparks of idea to kill Mozart.

"Was it then- so early- that I began to have thoughts of murder? . . . Of course not: at least not in life. In Art it was a different matter. I decided I would compose a huge tragic opera: something to astonish the World! -and I knew my theme. I would set the Legend of Danaïus, who for a monstrous crime was chained to a rock for eternity- his head repeatedly struck by lightning! Wickedly in my head I saw Mozart in that position. In reality the man was in no danger at all...Not yet. (Act 1, pp .35)

What he is obsessed with is that his reputation is getting lost day by day even though he composed qualified operas while the music of Mozart is wandering all around the streets. Salieri cannot accept this. Although he takes his revenge, this doesn't give him the reputation that he looks for.

But, through the last scenes, he understands that even after thirty-two years, he is still filled with the relief of what he did to Mozart and reached to the reputation. “What had I begged for in that church as a boy? Was it not name? Fame for excellence? Well, now I had fame-quite simply- the most famous musician in Europe!” (Act 2, 101) The relief of Salieri can be understood from these remarks. But he understands the punishment of God now. Even though he takes his revenge for the iniquity of God, his perennial wish, to be remembered with his exquisite music, gets lost on the air. “For the rest of time whenever a man says Mozart with love, the will say Salieri with loathing!” (Act 2, 103) He is remembered of course, but not with his music. He is even aware of this fact. He is satisfied with what he did but frustrated with what he became. He could neither achieve being a famous composer known for his music or killing Mozart’s music. “He sees the degree in which his obsessive envy of genius has affected his life, bringing him to an asylum for madness and attempted suicide” (Townsend, “*AMADEUS’ as Dramatic Monologue*”, pp 219). Salieri destroys his own life with his hatred against God and Mozart. He says that he won the battle, but he is the one who loses.

Conclusion

Peter Shaffer, by depicting inner conflicts of Salieri, vividly shows that with jealousy and envy, one can turn into what he wouldn’t expect himself to be. Salieri gets lost in his ambition dragged by his growing narcissistic attitude. He gets lost in his own lie. By putting inner conflicts of Salieri, Peter Shaffer tries to give the message that envy, hatred and excessive ambition will not be of use for an individual. Rather, these feelings will bring about downfalls, remorse, and frustration. Amadeus shows us that taking revenge from someone for the sake of punishing him does not reach to any purpose. On the contrary, it might harm one’s life and deeds. By taking advantage of the power, status, and penetration, Salieri is able to take control of Mozart in the play. But his outrageous actions prepare his own downfall. Both of the great musicians ruin their Professional lives. Peter Shaffer splendidly reflects into whom people can turn under psychological disorders and unbalanced and uncontrolled manners.

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