

An Analysis of Salieri in Amadeus from Freudian Personality Theory: Id, Ego, Superego

Juan Wang

Oxbridge College, Kunming University of Science and Technology, Kunming, China

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Abstract: Salieri is antagonist in Shaffer's *Amadeus*, who is accused himself of poisoning Mozart. In this paper, this character will be analyzed from Freudian theory: id, ego, superego. Based on Freudian theory about the structure of the mind (id, ego, superego), the paper analyzes Salieri in order to show the reasonable arrangement of Salieri's destiny written by Shaffer. Only when the rivalry of id, ego and superego comes to a balance, can the three develop into an integrated personality.

1. Introduction

Shaffer is English dramatist, playwright, novelist and critic, who is best known for his popular dramas *Amadeus* (1979). Shaffer's most successful dramas are based in myth and explore the psychological motivations of his characters. Shaffer's exploration of the human psyche culminates in *Amadeus*, a drama of jealousy and revenge which he describes as "a fantasia on events in Mozart's life."

In *Amadeus*, Salieri, a successful court composer of moderate ability, contemplates with bitter irony why his pious devotion to God has been ignored, while the vulgar, self-centered Mozart is blessed with genius. Realizing that God chose to reward him by allowing him to recognize the power of Mozart's music, the composer takes his ultimate revenge on God and humankind by poisoning his rival. *Amadeus* won a Tony Award in 1981.

Salieri is antagonist in Shaffer's *Amadeus*, who is accused himself of poisoning Mozart. In this paper, this character will be analyzed from Freudian theory: id, ego, superego. Based on Freudian theory about the structure of the mind (id, ego, superego), the paper analyzes Salieri in order to show the reasonable arrangement of Salieri's destiny written by Shaffer. Only when the rivalry of id, ego and superego comes to a balance, can the three develop into an integrated personality. In this way, we can have an objective and all round understanding of this image.

2. Literature Review

2.1 International Study

Does Shaffer spend so much time with Salieri because Mozart eludes his understanding, too? His Salieri talks of Mozart as if he were a later version of Jesus. Salieri murders Mozart by sadistically driving him crazy.^[1]

Salieri challenges God's wisdom. Salieri in the closing moments glides among the mad as their patron saint. Mankind, left to its own devices and raving in its own mediocrity and rationality, holds no future. Salieri and the asylum he represents have banished hope.^[2]

Salieri is a remarkable character: implausible in so many ways, impossible even, but a music that teaches us to hear. In the play, Salieri is master of the show. He is undying Death, taunting the audience for being "Ghosts of the Future."^[3]

2.2 Comments on Limitations of the Previous Studies

In international studies, critics analyze the character of Salieri from different aspects, especially his role in the play. But no critic explicitly analyzes the character from Freudian Theory: Id, Ego,

Superego.

In domestic study, no critic pays attention to this play and this character.

2.3 Research Question

In this paper, this character will be analyzed from Freudian Theory: Id, Ego, Superego. Based on Freudian theory about the structure of the mind (Id, Ego, Superego), the paper analyzes Salieri in order to show the reasonable arrangement of Salieri's destiny written by Shaffer.

3. Theoretical Framework and Critical Approach-Freudian Theory: Id, Ego, Superego

The personality theories (Id, Ego, Superego), which were presented by Freud in 1923, held that the primary structural elements of the mind and personality were three mental forces-the id, ego and superego. The mission of id is to follow the pleasure principle to meet the instinctive needs. The pleasure principle is to release instinctive impulse and suppressed desires to meet the pleasure. Freud thought that the id was the essence of human beings, and it was the most basis of composing the personality structure.

The communication between the people and surroundings forms a new psychological system called the ego. The mission of the ego are not only to meet the needs among the reality, the id and the superego at the same time, but also to coordination them. The ego follows the reality principle, whose duties are adaptation and submission. The purpose of the reality principle is to delay and stopping tenseness, until the needs are satisfied and found.

The most top leader of the personality, the superego represents conscience, social criterion and self-ideal. It is according to act the good principal that its function is to supervise the id and to limit the instinct of the ego. Following the ideal principle it seems to be the judicial department to make the ideals and conscience come true. The id can be pondered as the indulgent lust; the ego can be recognized as sense and cautiousness, and superego can be considered as conscience, sense of morality and honor. The ego is like a servant, and service the id, the superego and the reality. The ego is the center of the personality structures. The ego not only adjusts the id and reality. But also prevent against the harm or avoiding conflicting between id and social morality.^[4]

4. Analysis

Salieri is characterized as both in awe of and insanely resentful towards Mozart, going so far as to renounce God for blessing his adversary. Salieri's later hospitalization is portrayed as a stay in a mental hospital, where he announces himself as "the Patron Saint of mediocrity".^[5]

4.1 Salieri's Id Rejects God and Vows to Destroy Mozart

The id implements the pleasure principle, and thinks that Salieri should immediately take his ultimate revenge on God and humankind by poisoning his rival without any other considering anything else.

At the opening of the tale, Salieri is an old man, having long outlived his fame, and is convinced he is the assassin of Mozart (by poison). He then speaks directly to the audience, promising to explain himself. The play then flashes back to the eighteenth century, at a time when Salieri has not met Mozart in person, but has heard of him and his music. He adores Mozart's compositions, and is thrilled at the chance to meet Mozart in person, during a salon at which some of Mozart's compositions will be played. When he finally does catch sight of Mozart, however, he is deeply disappointed to find that Mozart's personality does not match the grace or charm of his compositions: Mozart is crawling around on his hands and knees, engaging in sexual talk with Constanze Weber whom Mozart would later marry. Salieri cannot reconcile Mozart's boorish behavior with the massive genius that God has inexplicably bestowed upon him.

Salieri seems assured of the blessings and support of his spiritual father when at thirty-one; he becomes a prolific composer to the Hapsburg court of Emperor Joseph II. Soon, however, when he hears the "voice of God"^[6] in Mozart's exquisite and superior compositions, he feels betrayed and

questions why God has rejected him and has chosen instead to glorify “an obscene child.” The first time he hears Mozart, Salieri confesses, “tonight at an inn somewhere in this city stands 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.”^[7] Noting his affinity with Adam, God’s first child, Salieri expresses a sense of emptiness resulting from feelings of abandonment.

Engaging in a bout of intense sibling rivalry with God’s new favorite composer, Salieri complains: “You have chosen Mozart to be Your sole conduct. And my only reward--my sublime privilege--is to be the sole man alive in this time who shall clearly recognize Your Incarnation. . . . Everyday I sat to work I prayed . . . make this one good in my ears. Just this one . . . but would He, ever? I heard my music calmed in convention, not one breath of spirit to lift it off the shallows. And I heard his--month after month . . . the spirit singing through it, unstoppable, to my ears alone.”^{[7]P646} Indeed, Salieri, who has been a devout Catholic all his life, cannot believe that God would choose Mozart over him for such a gift.

Salieri’s envy of Mozart turned into a quarrel with God. He, Salieri, asked nothing more than to sever God with music, yet God chose to make him a mediocrity and to speak instead through the work of an eccentric, bumbling, and loutish boy.^{[6]P93-96} So Salieri rejects God and vow to destroy Mozart in order to revenge himself on God.

4.2 Salieri’s Superego is in Awe Toward Mozart

The superego measures everything with standard of conscious and morality, and act according to ideal principle. The superego thinks that Salieri should abide religious demand and be in awe toward Mozart.

On the one hand, Salieri talks of Mozart as if he were a later version of Jesus, so he is in awe toward Mozart. When Salieri has not met Mozart in person, but has heard of him and his music. He adores Mozart's compositions, and is thrilled at the chance to meet Mozart in person. When Salieri hears Mozart’s music, he appears to be entering paradisi and hell at the same time ---he looks ecstatic yet stricken. Salieri talks of Mozart as if he were a later version of Jesus--- literally the incarnation of God’s voice--- and the movie supports this grandiose, melodramatic, and creepy idea. Jesus returns, carrying the word, and again he’s betrayed. But in an odd way, the view of Mozart does more to belittle than glorify him, for if Mozart speaks with the voice of God, he is no longer the author of his own talent, and his painful education at his father’s hands and endless hard work mean nothing. Mozart destroys the peace of self-confident mediocrities, but actually the notion of the composer as God’s dummy--- a sort of divine Charlie McCarthy --- is consoling to mediocrities.^[8]

On the other hand, Salieri is the perfect critic of Mozart and he is the only one who knows how good it is, alone with the art. When Salieri hears Mozart’s music, he appears to be entering paradise and hell at the same time ---he looks ecstatic yet stricken. It is Shaffer’s conceit that only one of Mozart’s Viennese contemporaries, Slieri actually “heard” Mozart --- that Slieri alone had a modern conception of Mozart’s qualities.

4.3 Salieri’s Ego Cannot Adjust the Contradiction between the Id and the Superego

The id and the superego conflict sharply in Salieri’s inner being. At last, the ego cannot adjust the contradiction between the id and the superego, and can not to reach coordination. So eventually Salieri was mad and attempting suicide although he is survived. However, he continues to be suffered from the conflict between the id and the superego until death.

Throughout much of the rest of the play, Salieri masquerades as Mozart's ally to his face while doing his utmost to destroy his reputation and any success his compositions may have. On more than one occasion it is only the direct intervention of the Emperor himself that allows Mozart to continue (interventions which Salieri opposes, and then is all too happy to take credit for when Mozart assumes it was he who intervened). Salieri also humiliates Mozart's wife when she comes to Salieri for aid, and smears Mozart's character with the Emperor and the court. A major theme in Amadeus is Mozart's repeated attempts to win over the aristocratic “public” with increasingly brilliant compositions, which are always frustrated either by Salieri or by the aristocracy’s own

inability to appreciate Mozart's genius.

A curious enemy, for Salieri triumphs both at court and in the opera house while Mozart, denied promotion by Salieri's machinations, dwindles into a squalid poverty that his concerts and his exiguous pay as Kapellmeister do little to alleviate. Salieri is not concerned with prosperity but talent. As Mozart struggles to finish his Requiem, (and who was the mysterious stranger who commissioned that?) Salieri haunts his lodgings in a black mask and leaves poisoned wine on the doorstep. Mozart goes to his pauper's burial and Salieri progresses to his guilt-ridden old age.^[9]

Psychologically, Leopold, Mozart's father has a great influence over his son. When Leopold dies, Mozart falls apart, exclaiming, "how will I go now? In the world."^{[7][P667]} Leopold reappears as the solemn ghost in Don Giovanni, as a projection of Mozart's feelings of guilt.

Salieri not only seems to see all, hear all, know all about Mozart's private life, and systematically tries to destroy his material existence; he actually reduces Mozart to the mental state of a child at the end, appearing in the mask of the nightmarish father-figure of Mozart's dreams, who takes his revenge on the rebellious son.

When Salieri reveals his true identity to Mozart at the end of the play, he reduces Mozart to a whimpering child. In response, Salieri characterizes their spiritual father as one who has abandoned both of them. He concludes, "We are both poisoned, Amadeus. I with you: you with me. . . . Ten years of my hate have poisoned you to death."^{[7][P706]} When Mozart falls to his knees and cries out to God, Salieri responds.

The play ends with Salieri attempting suicide in a last pathetic attempt to be remembered, leaving a false confession of having murdered Mozart with arsenic. He survives, however, and his confession is disbelieved by all, leaving him to wallow once again in mediocrity.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Main Statement

Based on Freudian theory about the structure of the mind (Id, Ego, Superego), the paper analyzes Salieri in order to show the reasonable arrangement of Salieri's destiny written by Shaffer. Only when the rivalry of id, ego and superego comes to a balance, can the three develop into an integrated personality.

But Salieri is not so. His id rejects God and vow to destroy Mozart in order to revenge himself on God. His superego is in awe toward Mozart. On the one hand, Salieri talks of Mozart as if he were a later version of Jesus, so he is in awe toward Mozart. On the other hand, Salieri is the perfect critic of Mozart and he is the only one who knows how good it is. His ego cannot adjust the contradiction between the id and the superego, and can not to reach coordination. So eventually Salieri was mad and attempting suicide although he is survived. However, he continues to be suffered from the conflict between the id and the superego until death.

5.2 Significance

In theory, the mission of id is to follow the pleasure principle to meet the instinctive needs. The superego represents conscience, social criterion and self-ideal. The communication between the people and surroundings forms a new psychological system called the ego. The mission of the ego are not only to meet the needs among the reality, the id and the superego at the same time, but also to coordination them. Only when the rivalry of id, ego and superego comes to a balance, can the three develop into an integrated personality.

In practice, if id, ego and superego can not come to a balance, the three develop can not become into an integrated personality and the person will have mental problem. It is Salieri who is the kind of the person. His ego cannot adjust the contradiction between the id and the superego, and can not to reach coordination. So eventually Salieri was mad.

5.3 Limitation

In this paper, the character of Salieri when he does not meet Mozart is not analyzed. Before he

does not meet Mozart, Salieri is a good son of God. Finding his relationship with his biological father lacking, Salieri began a spiritual quest that would result in his determination to glorify God through music. He exhibits an obvious lack of respect for his father who did not share his passion for music or his quest for fame. Salieri admits that his parents' goals were to call on God for assurance of their economic security and to "keep them forever preserved in mediocrity."^{[7]P636} Their son's requirements, however, were very different. From an early age, he wanted to gain fame as a composer and so strikes a bargain with his spiritual father, whom he feels has the power to grant him his wish.

5.4 Suggestion for Future Study

In future, we should pay more attention to the change of Salieri's character. We should explore Salieri's character from Freudian Theory: Id, Ego, and Superego. In this way, we can have an objective and all round understanding of this image.

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