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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EXPLORATION OF *GENIUS* IN TOM STOPPARD'S
ARCADIA AND PETER SHAFFER'S *AMADEUS*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the essay was to analyze the following research question "In what ways is the notion of the genius explored in the plays '*Arcadia*' by Tom Stoppard and '*Amadeus*' by Peter Shaffer?"

The 'notion of genius' and 'genius as an attribute' are the two subtle ways in which this is explored in the text. By syntactically commenting on the setting of the two narratives and characterisation of their respective characters, I have made my case that suggests that *Arcadia* explores genius as an intrinsic trait, while *Amadeus*, as an attribute. In order to support my argument, I read certain journals, reviews and other plays of both playwrights to be acquainted with their style of writing.

I explored this thesis through the construct of 'emotion', 'intellect', 'classicism', 'romanticism', 'order' and 'randomness'. These oppositions allow the text to intensify the contrast that they attempt to establish while establishing a genius. The concept of 'artistic genius' and 'relevance in history' is something that is also touched upon to circumambulate a thematic understanding. Moreover, I contrasted the scientific discourse and theatricality providing a metaphorical dimension in either play. I went on to extrapolate how the death of a genius in either of the texts leads to a cathartic moment for the readers. Hence, in Greek thought, we have Life-Art but here we deduce the thought to Art-Life in exploring this genius and questioning the paradigm of *real*.

I concluded through my analysis that Thomasina's 'genius' in *Arcadia* is derived through her theories, and is in sharp contrast to the 'genius' of Mozart, which is highlighted by Salieri to the readers.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is often perceived to be reflective of a universal human predicament that is able to transcend the barriers of time. The central conflict that lies at the heart of the human experience is that we know and cognise the conflict between what 'is' and what 'should be'. All of humanity's efforts towards various aspects of life can be summed up in this central conflict, as we attempt to bridge the gap between the real and the ideal. In Literature, establishing the contrast between two opposing forces often represents this conflict. Be it either between the extraordinary and the mundane in Stoppard's '*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*' and

'*Arcadia*' or between the mediocre and the genius in Shaffer's *Amadeus*, this established contrast enables the reader to extract the meaning that the author intends to attach to his work.

Works of Literature that I have studied in depth and others that I am acquainted with have challenged me significantly, for they have made me question that which I already seem to know. Often, society bears witness to a few significant individuals who are able to impact it to the extent that they are able to reconstruct and divert the course of history. Such individuals are who we call 'genius'.

In literature too, the notion of a *genius* is explored to depict the struggle of mankind to attain the ideal. In other words, while it is true that *geniuses* may come and go, the idea of *genius* is central to the human experience that is not to leave it sometime soon. Therefore, *genius* is characterized by its innate capability to escape the ultimate consumer of life — time. In other words, geniuses play an active role in the construction of social reality, or society. It was for this reason that I felt that an exploration in the definition of a genius in Stoppard's and Shaffer's works was necessary.

This essay shall explore the ways *genius* is explored in the works of Shaffer's *Amadeus* and Stoppard's *Arcadia*. By establishing the various dramatic methods through which this contrast is established, this essay shall also explore how different elements of style, such as dramatization establish the notion of what makes *genius*.

I shall attempt to answer this question in two parts. Firstly, I shall examine the general thematic focus of the two works, and how it is established through the situation of the protagonist(s). In the second part, I will examine how these themes establish a relationship with the audience to help establish the notion of a *genius*. While many secondary sources can be found for the works of Shaffer, who is rather popular in his appeal, they are far scarcer when it comes to the work of Stoppard. However, I have referred to various scholarly texts and sources in order to obtain a clearer understanding of the works.

It is for the reasons aforementioned that I felt that an exploration of this particular theme was necessary within these two works. A comparative analysis of *genius* allows us to understand the context in which these works were written, understand why the authors chose these particular themes as opposed to others, and establish how they have explored these themes in their works.

Literary criticisms of Stoppard and Shaffer, and primary sources such as Tom Stoppard's interviews and conversations have supported this research.

Genius

It is true that the notion of genius transcends the grasp of time, however it is necessary to consider the immediate societal context of genius in order to understand how this has been established. For instance Einstein was a genius in his times, but any human being today, in the context of the hunter-gatherer would be considered to be a genius. The idea of genius that exists today, and one that is largely acceptable has its origins in the late 18th century, In Kant's third critique — The Critique of Judgement. Kant says, "the exemplary originality of the natural endowments of an individual in the free employment of his cognitive faculties"¹.

Genius, therefore, is ascribed to be innate to an individual's ability to do something. Genius thus must be understood in its essence, which is that it inspires imitation. Kant therefore understood *genius* as its ability to understand ideas in their pure form, or independently arrive at the same from the first principles. The idea of '*Genius*' from the Romantic understanding of the world emerged contemporaneously with the idea of the 'self'. The artistic genius possess qualities that are able to transcend the human experience so much so that it is almost divine in its appeal. The conventionally known geniuses, say Newton, all fit this conceptual understanding of genius.

Peter Shaffer's play *Amadeus* has a significant role in developing a character's emotional ecstasy and intellect. Shaffer explored a particular understanding of genius as he reiterates the notion of extreme talent to be able to embrace a form of pure art. While it may seem that Mozart tends to blur the line between a performer and a genius, one can with certainty suggest that he was the latter.

¹ Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, Page 181.

As readers we are constantly faced with the falsity of a genius in *Amadeus*. Is Mozart's genius a divine acquisition having its own contingent and contingent appeal to it? Mozart is a genius in his form of musical art whereas, when it comes to the social values, he is clueless about his limits. There is a constant conflict between legitimacy of the genius in Shaffer's *Amadeus*. The play uses the conflict between the two ideas of a performer and a genius to put these ideas across.

However, Stoppard's play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* has its own individuated theatrical aims, conceptually derived from a relationship to these Shakespearean-Hamletesque theatrical precepts. Stoppardian plays hold up the mirror to nature, exploring the relationship between the real and the imaginary in action and providing a meta-comment on the structure, representation and action of dramatic art. By taking the more peripheral characters, Stoppard's multi-faceted play set in Elizabethan times and re-theatricalizing it so as to emphasize the artifice eyes of the real. Just as a vestige of the real, was complex in the Renaissance, in Stoppardian times, he has shattered the architecture of theatrical division and mimetic presuppositions and flipped them. It is the characters that are too aware, in an enfranchised way, of their being-as-playing a role that is too confined. Hence trivia, improve invention in a way that recomposes the diegetic nature of dramatic representation. I think the question is not 'which is more real' but 'is there any real'? that allows Stoppard the formal inventiveness of his dramatic structure but also some really inventive, theatricality and verbal wit. Even in the play like *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, these characters seem to be more real when engaged in the fictive role Shakespeare created for actors to play. *Arcadia* dramatizes a meeting point between pure language and pure thoughts falling within the Aristotelian framework². Sidley Park being the place for action is the essential language of signs, of love and of erroneous discourses therefore can be juxtaposed with the place where the scientific discoveries can be made³.

The paradigmatic relatedness between scientific discourse and theatrically gives *Arcadia* the metaphorical dimension. A chance meeting between the bright young girl and 'Fermat's Marginalia' creates a vision of History⁴. The reported death of witty Thomasina immediately after the waltz scene is also a Cathartic moment for the readers.

Context

In *Amadeus*, the emperor commented on Mozart's '*Entfuhrung*' as to containing 'too many notes' implies that the singspiel was a work of a human than of a divine entity. Kivy maintains that even reductionist account of genius were to be devised which would not even diminish our wonder of artistic creation. Is the genius the absolute due to its complete state? Therefore the thought would be reduced to finitude when we start defining it. The Longinian genius had a deep impression on the British enlightenment and the concept of 'genius and the sublime'⁵.

Amadeus is set in Vienna under the court of Joseph the second, and established the character of Mozart, who is portrayed as the vulnerable child prodigy, with the genius experienced in the premonitions of his own death which was unfairly premature. Mozart therefore, is reflected as a conundrum, which is reflective of both, the qualities of a child-man and a creative genius. Mozart as a character excites the audience with his quick-witted humor and the knowledge of the elements of Baroque music with a sense of improvisation and creation. Mozart's thought of the romantic form of art and music were in sharp contrast with the physicality of the musical movement in Austria in his times.

One can see that the notion of genius in the play is explored in the Romantic understanding of the word as the contrast between the ordinary and the extraordinary is established through the characters of Salieri and Mozart. Shaffer's dramatization and craft as a dramatist is evident here for he assigns special significance to Salieri, who is the only one able to understand Mozart's work. By establishing this contrast between the

² Boireau, Nicole. *Drama On Drama*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. Print.

³ Boireau, Nicole. *Drama On Drama*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. Print.

⁴ Boireau, Nicole. *Drama On Drama*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. Print.

⁵ "New Essays On Musical Understanding By Peter Kivy, Oxford University Press, 2001, Pp. X + 236.". *Philosophy* 77.2 (2002): 283-296. Web.

individual who is able to create — Mozart — and the individual who can interpret — Salieri — Shaffer asserts the notion that genius is merely a trait that is contextual and is attached to an individual or his body of work. This, emerges the meta question that does genius exist if no one is able to interpret or recognise it? Shaffer therefore explores the understanding of genius as attribute, which is assigned, to an individual rather than something that is self-possessed.

The classical text *Mimesis* by Eric Auerbach talks of the idea of unities in *Arcadia*. Stoppard is doing something elliptical in creating a transition from the real to illusion as it gets out of the dichotomy of saying art-reality. Art-life is reorganized as the mimetic genesis (conventionality Life-Art) of his theatricality unpacked in terms of staging, dramatic action and dialogue. The arguments of the critics as secondary texts have boasted my argument and reviews such as Anne Barton in the New York review of Books on Stoppard's *Arcadia*. Thereby the critical analysis of primary sources elicit how language, culture and content impact on the construction of memory. Kivy believes that the critical understanding of the nature of musical genius oscillates between two poles. 'A musical genius can be possessed by divine inspiration perhaps even by God' with regard to *Amadeus*. Secondly it would be able to attain the divine stature. As philosopher Peter Kivy would put it: "The emergence of philosophical aesthetics in the eighteenth century had little to shape the conceptions of a musical genius." Also, Antiquity gave us two notions of creative genius due to the rise in the English Aesthetic philosophy⁶.

The *genius*, thus, is explored as an attribution rather than anything self-possessed or a divine instinct. Genius is the individuation of greatness, therefore can only be singular in examination also to an extent of having its sociological traits. The canon of such traits are a collation of greatness and if admitted-now or later-a genius. Also, the singularity of the genius can be invoked by escaping mediocrity. For instance, 'Hegel in philosophy', 'Wagner in Music' and 'Dickens in Literature'. Exhibiting the genius in the conviction of its possession is another trait of a genius as portrayed in the book, *Wittgenstein-The Duty of Genius* by Ray Monk⁷. The different cultural setting of either plays with regard to the characteristic genius create a distinct tempo than certain quotidian norms and conceptions. In *Amadeus* the contrasting characterization between Mozart and Salieri is brought by a significant change in the intellect by letting the rationale play out. Whereas in *Arcadia*, this contrast is built through a shift in time frames. There are constant breaks in the stream of thought in *Arcadia* as Thomasina interrupts her lessons by questioning the concept of carnal embrace and how time frames shift between one another. Historical relativism and evidences thus, characterize the trait of a genius. The paradigmatic shift in time frame is symbolic of the change in emotions and intellect. The classical and Romantic is played out by T. S. Eliot and theorized by T. E. Hulme in creating the variety and following its categorizations being part of the structural constitution of the genius.

Peter Shaffer's character Mozart plays the welcome march with spontaneity of refinement of wit. Therefore there is a constant conflict between emotion and intellect. Either of the traits seem to triumph over each other by creating a contrast in the attitudes of the characters. Also, each characters transient growth leads to an emotional disguise in the play, as they seem to align with the propositions of love. The waltz scene is emblematic of such a phenomenal change from intellectual fervor to that of an emotional drive. Hannah's lets go off her intellectual and the rational partake by accepting to waltz with Gus. Septimus also turns into a hermit due to the loss of his ladylove thereby letting his emotional state take over his rational. Mozart on the other hand, writes his own Requiem mass in sheer love and lets his emotional state take over. Mozart's intellect is restricted by the emotional discourse of Salieri and the emperor who couldn't appreciate his form of art.

Classicism and Romanticism

In Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, the trope of classical and romantic thought is significant, and is constantly portrayed through the shift of time frames, where a coherent line of thought is established amongst

⁶ Osborne, Harold. *Aesthetics In The Modern World*. New York: Weybright and Talley, 1968. Print.

⁷ Monk, Ray. *Ludwig Wittgenstein*. New York: Free Press, 1990. Print.

characters that have contrasting points of view. For instance, Hannah wishes to have her gardens in a more “wild” and “natural manner” as opposed to an ordered one. Her opinion is not one that is shared by her peers Chloe and Bernard. A parallel argument that follows in the play was the argument between Noakes and Lady Croom over the geometrical Italian style vistas. The play is set in the time when Enlightenment is yielding to Romanticism, what Hannah describes as ‘the decline from thinking to feeling’⁸. Thomasina, keen on the new gothic fashion in gardening, longs for science to “reach beyond regularity”⁹. This conflict between the Romantic and Classical is one that is advanced through instances in the time frame of the past as well as when Thomasina is receiving from Septimus is that of the mid-eighteenth century Enlightenment, also known as the age of Reason: its regular forms and neatly fitting beliefs are sometimes described as ‘Classical’. Her question¹⁰ - “Is God a Newtonian?” - sums up the impression that the science of Isaac Newton has a deterministic attitude. In Enlightenment, everything might eventually prove capable of an explanation, within a rational God-given order. Thomasina is constantly questioning the ordered understanding of the world that she is being exposed to, via the laws of Newtonian Mechanics and through Septimus.

Stoppard therefore shifts the tense and the time frame, yet exposes a similar thematic conflict to explore the shared human experience.

A similar dichotomy is noticed between Septimus and Thomasina: Her questioning poses Septimus’s Newtonian vision of the universe. A parallel juxtaposition of Hannah’s search for a hermit also drives back towards the notion or romanticism as the age of feeling against the enlightenment of reasoning — “A mind in chaos suspected the genius-decline from thinking to reasoning.”¹¹

In *Amadeus*, this anxiety in Mozart creates angst. Mozart’s genius just doesn’t lie in the fact that he can perform but rather in the aesthetic thought that he can create music with his sharp-wit and spontaneity. His singularity of thought and creation stimulates his angst. For instance, one can see that the notion of genius in the play is explored in the Romantic understanding of the word as the contrast between the ordinary and the extraordinary is established through the characters of Salieri and Mozart. Shaffer’s dramatization and craft as a dramatist is evident here as he assigns special significance to Salieri, who is the only one able to understand Mozart’s work. By establishing this contrast between the individual who is able to create — Mozart — and the individual who can interpret — Salieri — Shaffer asserts the notion that genius is merely a trait that is contextual and is attached to an individual or his body of work. Shaffer, thus, highlights the necessity for *genius* to have an interpreter.

However, Thomasina is gets ahead, for “She finds ordinary geometry too regular and limited” and suggests “there must be an equation for a bluebell”¹². She goes on to call Septimus ‘faint heart’ when he responds suggesting that these equations are for God.

Order and Randomness

The Irreversibility of Time also acts as a trope in *Arcadia* as this is signified through the scientific theory of stirring the rice pudding and jam. There is a sense of finality embodied in the play as relationships burn, letters and candles burn, ultimately burning Thomasina to death itself. Moreover, her death is also representative of the irreversibility of action, another thematic focus of the play.

Comedy juxtaposes the misfits and muddles of our life’s gap between our reality and ideal. Stoppard’s works is often seen as - “All head no heart”. Here, it is beautifully intertwined by intellectual puzzlement with frustrations, as Valentine puts it, “the attraction Newton left out”¹³. The predictability of everything being approached with a rational method as the Enlightenment principle was challenged by the romantic ideals and

⁸ Stoppard, Tom. *Plays Five*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999. Print.- Pg 37.

⁹ Stoppard, Tom. *Plays Five*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999. Print.- Pg 36

¹⁰ Stoppard, Tom. *Plays Five*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999. Print.- Pg 6

¹¹ Stoppard, Tom. *Plays Five*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999. Print.

¹² Stoppard, Tom - P 49.

¹³ Hunter, Jim. Tom Stoppard. London [u.a.]: Faber and Faber, 2000. Print.

sensual, personal emotions. Septimus is sensed with danger thereby reverts to an absurd answer and by disturbing the young genius with her unproved Fermat's Last theorem¹⁴.

The unpredictable and the predetermined seem to create a sense of chaos in the structure and thoughts of the playwright. In this illusion of moving away from the 'Gothic', in departing from the Enlightenment was otherwise way ahead than their times. This construct also is integral to create the genius of Thomasina¹⁵. The randomness of the theories are in sharp contrast with the gradual fading of the world in terms of architecture and the natural landscape. The only constant throughout the play is the tortoise, which is prominent throughout the play in this course of shift in time. The tortoise is also symbolic of Order in the play as it seems to be the only link between Hanna's search of the hermit, the present and Septimus' life, the past.

Valentine dismisses the theory of the hermit who was pursuing the French mathematical theory as to the world being run down. Valentine comprehends that research to the second law of Thermodynamics, which was a vague concept in Septimus's times¹⁶. Also, Chloe's theory of the victory of the chaos over Determinism is about "people falling in love with the wrong others"¹⁷. Thomasina's complaint against the form of regular geometry taught to her is confined whereas her genius lies in revealing and dismantling the irregular and random shapes such as a leaf¹⁸. Her modern relative Valentine believes that randomness, disorder or chaos is significant to the reality as order and that far from infinitely reversible¹⁹.

The chaos theory²⁰ in Valentine's perception is a blend of "classical symmetry (the snowflake)" and "the romantic blur (the snowstorm)"; and this theme is recurrent as, "human beings will always need to accept the duality between the rational and the emotional".

Emotion and Intellect

Peter Shaffer's play *Amadeus* has a significant role in developing a character's emotional ecstasy and intellect. Shaffer builds a sense of momentary solitude in *Amadeus* with regard to the then popular belief in music. Shaffer explored a particular understanding of genius as he reiterates the notion of extreme talent to be able to embrace a form of pure art. While it may seem that Mozart tends to blur the line between a performer and a genius, one can with certainty suggest that he was the latter, for he possesses the capacity for creation. His ability to create complex musical pieces that only the likes of Salieri can understand are testament to this.

Thomasina describes Cleopatra as making 'noodles for sex' because Cleopatra was weakened by love and therefore let her emotions overcome her intellect or her intuition. Hannah Jarvis's refusal towards warmth or emotion to denying Bernard's propositions, laughing at Valentine's proposal keeps her intuition and thought of regard but by the end of the play, she lets her emotions triumph over her rational in accepting a dance of waltz with Gus. Thomasina's unconscious emotional drive overcomes her intellect by diverting her role as a young prodigy towards the mystery of either composition. Septimus reveals a sense of finality by highlighting the sadness and emptiness of an academic life leading him to live a life of a hermit-"When we have found all the mysteries and lost all the meaning, we will be alone, on an empty shore." Septimus' implications of the mysterious dolma is that the mysteries shall be solved someday whereas knowing his own fate, embraces and kisses Thomasina by indulging in the mystery of attraction and love. To an extent the relating fulfillment progressed the intellectual bent by overcoming the intuitive caricature. The characters in *Arcadia* seem to realize the unfulfilling nature of the intellect leading them to embrace the emotional side of the human behavior.

¹⁴ Hunter, Jim. Tom Stoppard. London [u.a.]: Faber and Faber, 2000. Print.

¹⁵ Stoppard, Tom. - Pg 63.

¹⁶ Stoppard, Tom - Pg 87.

¹⁷ Hunter, Jim. Tom Stoppard. London [u.a.]: Faber and Faber, 2000. Print

¹⁸ Stoppard, Tom - Pg 49.

¹⁹ Stoppard, Tom - Pg 157.

²⁰ Hunter, Jim. Tom Stoppard. London [u.a.]: Faber and Faber, 2000. Print

Academic knowledge somehow equates to sexual prowess in *Arcadia*. A drop from thinking to emotion is seen by Hannah as 'false emotion' and 'cheap thrill' coherent to the play.

Salieri conveys Mozart's genius to the readers therefore it provides a different version of genius. It is god-fearing and a divine entity as understood by Salieri. No one could understand the genius of Mozart's art other than Salieri and encompassing the requiem mass, the final piece of artistic work has its own definite thought. The genius is an attribute therefore Septimus by the end of the play let's his personal emotional side of the attribute let go because he realizes that the universal truth shall be discovered by anyone but his transformation to a romantic cannot be disclosed or given away in the long term. Septimus embraces the other-side of this attribute. It marks a transition from a rationalist to the romanticist.

By the end of the investigation, we come to realize that all the dichotomous themes are brought together concerning the contradictions seem to co-exist in the framework of time and space- Romanticism and classicism, intuition and logic, thought and feeling creating an order amid the chaotic structural setting of the play.

Arcadia and *Amadeus* seem to portray certain instances of psychological realism concerning fundamental questions of existence and mortality. Also, unpredictability and randomness of love cannot be altered in either of the plays²¹.

Conclusion

Arcadia and *Amadeus* seem to portray certain instances of 'psychological realism' concerning fundamental questions of 'existence and mortality'. Also, 'unpredictability and randomness of love cannot be altered' in both the plays.

Salieri plays an integral role in defining the notion of genius in Mozart. In *Arcadia*, on the other hand, 'genius' is established as an attribute, therefore, Septimus by the end of the play allows his personal, emotional side of the attribute to let go, because he realizes that the universal truth could be discovered by anyone, but his transformation to a romantic cannot be disclosed or given away in the long term. Thus he establishes that truth is a universal experience that can be attained regardless of the means employed. Emotions and his transformation to a Romantic however, is a personal experience that only he is privy to. Therefore, Septimus is able to explore his transformation from a Rationalist to a Romantic as he allows his emotions to control him.

Even in *Arcadia*, there is an 'I' — 'I' being Death. Thomasina understands this meaning and goes on to dismiss the gloomy talk. Thomasina's genius or foresight is central to the vision of time presented by *Arcadia*. But what is interesting about the play's anachronisms is not only that the fictional Thomasina discovers entropy forty odd years before "Clausius", but that Byron's poem "Darkness," quoted after a scientific explanation of the second law of thermodynamics, suddenly seems anachronistic, as if Byron had intuited the second law. A transformation is also noticed in *Arcadia*, over time in Thomasina from a teenager curious about 'carnal embrace' and also about the thought of a "hermit" whereas on her seventeenth birthday, she is seen as someone who embraces the complex theories as well let's her rational attribute to be overtaken by her emotional instinct.

In *Arcadia*, 'genius' is portrayed as an attribute possessed by Thomasina and Hannah who understand complex theories. However in *Amadeus*, the genius is explored through Mozart who intrinsically possesses the capacity for creation. While *Arcadia* explores genius to be trait of a character, and something that is intrinsically possessed by an individual, *Amadeus* uses secondary characters to highlight that an interpreter is imperative to understand genius.

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