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"TO SEE THE SOUL OF A MAN": THE FIVE MAJOR PLAYS OF PETER SHAFFER

by

William S. Tepper

A thesis submitted to the Faculty
of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Masters
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For my mother

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the five major plays of Peter Shaffer: Five Finger Exercise, The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Shrivings, Equus and Amadeus.

These plays all possess a consistent theme - the discovery and eventual destruction of a god. This discovery is manifested through the creation of two diametrically opposed male figures, one of whom is artistically, spiritually or emotionally superior to the other. This superior figure is Peter Shaffer's embodiment of life's idealism.

Through the individual examination of each play, it becomes apparent that Shaffer is concerned with the strong sense of dualism between man's repressive and expressive qualities. Criticism, pertaining to the original stage productions of these plays, is offered in order to establish how successfully this theme was realized on the stage.

The thesis concludes that the Shaffer canon of drama possesses qualities that are uniquely its own, and that these plays, along with their common theme, display a wide range of theatrical imagination. In The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus, Shaffer has best realized his intentions, and it is in these plays that language, theme, character, plot and theatricality come together most successfully.

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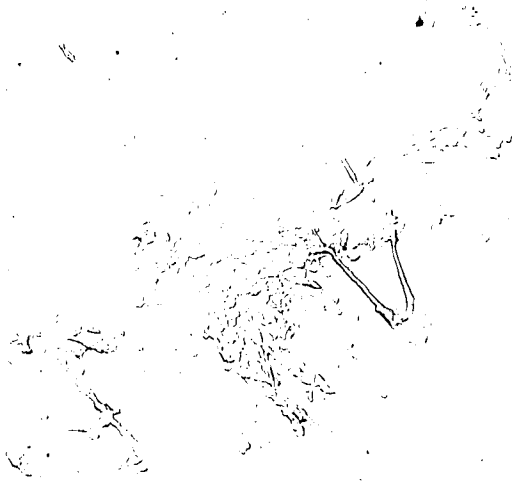

There is now, in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out.

- Martin Dysart in Equus

INTRODUCTION

At the conclusion of Peter Shaffer's play Equus, Martin Dysart, a child psychiatrist, cures seventeen-year-old Alan Strang from the nightmares and memories of a terrible crime committed against six horses. But in curing Alan, Dysart deliberately destroys the boy's most vital element: the passion for life that sustains the human spirit. At the same time, Dysart knowingly extinguishes this most precious part of himself. The dramatic power of Equus lies in the fascinating relationship between Dysart and Alan, and in the way the audience comes to comprehend and empathize with the two men. Through imaginative theatrical means, the audience learns why Alan stabbed out the eyes of the horses, and of the nature of his obsessive devotion for his god named Equus. For the first time in his life, Dysart recognizes in another person the most intense desire to know passion and, for the brief period of his confrontation with Alan, comes to experience it himself. The theme of Equus, as of Peter Shaffer's four other major plays: Five Finger Exercise, The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Shrivings and Amadeus, is the search for, and destruction of a god. This theme, which is expressed most lucidly in Equus, is realized in each play through the emotional and spiritual symbiosis between two men who are otherwise fundamental opposites.

In each of the five plays, a confrontation develops between two male figures. In various ways, Clive Harrington in Five Finger Exercise, Francisco Pizarro in The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Gideon Petrie in Shrivings, Martin Dysart in Equus and Antonio Salieri in Amadeus exemplify the orderly, placid and spiritually and emotionally repressed

man. In his own way, each of these men is a perpetrator of order, and a perpetrator of his society's established attitudes, norms and instincts however unhappy he may be with them. Into their lives appears another man who is the opposite spiritually and emotionally. This second man is the embodiment of passion and spirit. This second man becomes the object of his opposite's admiration, envy, and maliciousness. In the face of these passionate persons - Walter Langer in Five Finger Exercise, Atahuallpa in The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Mark Askelon in Shrivings, Alan Strang in Equus and Wolfgang Mozart in Amadeus - Clive, Pizarro, Gideon, Dysart and Salieri come to realize their own spiritual and emotional shortcomings. The men of passion are all dynamic, life-enhancing forces. They are all unique men who serve as Shaffer's dramatic metaphor for idealism. By the end of each play, Shaffer's repressed men are compelled by the emotionally-restrictive norms of their environment, or by their own personal reasons into destroying the life-enhancing forces. Shaffer's repressed men find their gods, but in the process are compelled to destroy them. All of them complete their experiences and acts of destruction more repressed and anguished than ever before.

These five plays are the products of a highly developed and exceedingly imaginative dramatic instinct. They reveal Peter Shaffer's gift for employing a wide range of contemporary theatre devices. The mime, masks and spectacle of The Royal Hunt of the Sun, the wire horse-heads, the actors-as-horses and the arena-style staging of Equus, the sterile, bone-white setting of Shrivings, and the magnificently baroque costumes and set design for Amadeus, illustrate Shaffer's desire to exploit the varied resources of the modern theatre in order to serve

his dramas.

Shaffer began writing plays in the late 1950's, a period in English drama associated with his countrymen and fellow playwrights John Osborne, Harold Pinter and Arnold Wesker. Although Clive Harrington of Five Finger Exercise in some ways resembles the restless figure of Jimmy Porter in Osborne's Look Back in Anger, Shaffer's work is contained within a dramatic sphere uniquely its own. From Five Finger Exercise in 1958 through Amadeus in 1979, Shaffer's drama represents a highly original development in theatrical style. Five Finger Exercise is set in a conventional, well-to-do English country house. In the naturalistic style of Galsworthy and Rattigan, the play is a series of intricately woven conflicts and climaxes involving a family and its daughter's young German tutor. In The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Shaffer departed considerably from the style of his previous work. Along with director John Dexter, Shaffer created a theatrically inventive and emotionally riveting chronicle of the Spanish conquest of Peru in 1532. Shrivings, produced in 1970 and re-written in 1974, was Shaffer's singular critical and financial failure. In this play, Shaffer deliberately restrained his theatrical inventiveness in order to give full power to the intellectual argument between a philosopher and a poet. The play provided harsh testimony to Shaffer's shortcomings as a dramatist. Equus is Shaffer's most notable, as well as most successful advancement in theatre practice and dramatic theme. Together again with director John Dexter, Shaffer fashioned his most dramatic, most theatrical, and most thematically compelling play. The confrontation between Martin Dysart and Alan Strang represents Shaffer's most perfectly composed elegy on the nature of man's spirit. Amadeus is

Shaffer's most recent play. It uses outstanding settings and eighteenth century costumes as well as effective use of lighting and the music of Mozart to create a conflict between two rival composers. In spite of its appealing theatricality, Amadeus is one of Shaffer's most dramatically flawed works. The conflict between Salieri and Mozart contains neither the weight nor balance that is so powerful in the other major plays. Salieri's destruction of Mozart emerges as merely systematic and ponderous.

With the exception of Five Finger Exercise, in which Shaffer's dialogue is ~~strongly~~ believable and compelling, the effectiveness of language in Shaffer's drama has been a constant object of criticism. Critics have repeatedly asserted that Shaffer's language, especially in The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Shrivings and Amadeus, failed to measure up to the thematic scope of his plays. To my mind, Shaffer's language does nonetheless contain a penetrating and even luminous quality, marked by a sheer simplicity. The characters of Peter Shaffer do not speak in terms of imagery or metaphor, but with simple and emotional directness.

Peter Shaffer has been extremely fortunate in acquiring artistic supporters and collaborators. His first major work was produced by the prestigious H. M. Tennent company. Three other major plays received their first production at Great Britain's National Theatre. With the exception of Shrivings, all of Shaffer's nine plays (including the one-act plays) have also been produced on Broadway. The list of performers who have appeared in Shaffer's plays reads like a "Who's Who" of British theatre in the past twenty-five years. Shaffer's directors - Sir John Gielgud, Peter Wood, John Dexter and Sir Peter Hall - are among the best in the world, as are his designers: Oliver Smith, Michael

Annals, John Napier and John Bury. With his directors, especially John Dexter, Shaffer has developed a special artistic relationship based on a process of mutual stimulation and a shared vision. It is largely due to this kind of collaboration that the two most theatrically successful of his plays - The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus - came into being.

Shaffer's one-act plays - The Public Eye, The Private Ear, Black Comedy and White Lies - the latter re-written as The White Liars - represent a different sphere of his work. All were critically and commercially successful when first produced. But they are not, in my opinion, thematically linked to Shaffer's full-length work. Unlike the full-lengths, each of the one-act plays is essentially a comedy. None contains the dynamic encounter between two polarized individuals that so marks the other plays. For these reasons, the one-act plays will not be examined in this thesis.

The aim of this thesis is to examine and discuss the theme - that of the search for and destruction of a god - that consistently appears in Peter Shaffer's five major plays, as well as the success or failure with which this theme has been realized in the plays' original productions. This thesis will evaluate Shaffer's achievements as a dramatist up to the New York opening of Amadeus. This study will examine Shaffer's five major works as they appear in published form, in addition to making use of such primary source material as interviews, newspaper features and original stage reviews.

Peter Levin Shaffer was born of Jewish parents on May 15, 1926 in Liverpool, England. His twin brother, Anthony, is the author of the play Sleuth. The family settled in London in 1942 where Shaffer attended St. Paul's School. In 1944 he was conscripted by the government to work in the coal mines in Kent and Yorkshire. He entered Cambridge University on a scholarship in 1947, graduating with a degree in History in 1950.

After graduating, Shaffer moved to New York City to work for Doubleday Books and in the Acquisition Department of the New York Public Library. He wrote his first television play during this time, The Salt Lands, a story set in modern-day Israel, dealing with the problems of a Jewish homeland. In 1954, Shaffer returned to London and worked for the music publishers Boosey and Hawkes. He also served as a literary and music critic for two now-defunct magazines, Truth and Time and Tide. In the mid-1950's Shaffer wrote three detective novels in collaboration with his brother Anthony. These were published under the pseudonym "Peter Anthony". His play The Salt Lands was televised in 1957, and a spy thriller he wrote, Balance of Terror, was aired on BBC Radio the same year.

Shaffer's first stage play, Five Finger Exercise, was produced in London's West End in 1958 and enjoyed a successful run both there and on Broadway the following year. Two one-act plays, The Private Ear and The Public Eye followed in 1962 and were also well-received on both sides of the Atlantic. The turning point in Shaffer's career came in 1964 with the National Theatre production of The Royal Hunt of the Sun, a play tha combined a compelling theme and story with exciting

theatrical technique. Shaffer was then commissioned by the National Theatre to write Black Comedy, a one-act play performed along with Strindberg's Miss Julie in 1965. In 1967, Black Comedy was performed with another Shaffer one-act comedy, White Lies in New York. Shaffer then re-wrote White Lies into The White Liars, which was produced with Black Comedy in the West End in 1968.

Equus, Shaffer's best and perhaps most controversial play, was produced by The National Theatre in 1973. Amadeus, the grandly theatrical portrait of Wolfgang Mozart and Antonio Salieri, was done by the National in 1979. Both Equus and Amadeus were very successful in New York - critically and commercially - and both were the recipients of major theatrical awards.

Shaffer currently divides his time between residences in London and New York. He is a bachelor, and his hobbies include music, architecture and walking.[1]

Chapter 1

FIVE FINGER EXERCISE

In his first stage play, Five Finger Exercise, Peter Shaffer began to develop the thematic patterns which were to appear consistently in each of his major works. In terms of structure and style, Five Finger Exercise far from anticipates the later work. However, the melodramatic and well-structured plot, along with a restless and unhappy central male figure helped to make it a successful play of its day. It was first produced in London in 1958, and opened on Broadway near the end of 1959. Five Finger Exercise was the product of several arduous years by Shaffer of practicing and refining his playwriting skill.

Shaffer chose the title for his play from a book of piano music. The book contained five interrelated pieces, and how they either enhance or diminish each other depending on their use.[1] Five Finger Exercise is about the interrelationships among the five members of the Harrington household.

Five Finger Exercise is about the Harringtons, a contemporary well-to-do English family. The story takes place at their weekend cottage in Suffolk, over a period of about two months. Stanley, the father, is a London furniture manufacturer. He is a stubborn, insensitive and aloof man, extremely conscious and even ashamed of his humble background. Louise, the mother, is a highly affected and culturally pretentious woman. She constantly criticizes Stanley's ignorance of the arts, and strives to maintain all the material possessions and appropriate attitudes that characterize an archetypal

family.

LOUISE: What is it, dear?

CLIVE: "Electra."

STANLEY: What's that?

LOUISE: (with exaggerated surprise): You can't mean it! You just can't mean it.

STANLEY: Mean what?

LOUISE: Really, Stanley, there are times when I have to remind myself about you - actually remind myself.[2]

Clive is Stanley and Louise's nineteen year-old son. He has become little more than a toy of his mother and he resents her persistent smothering and coddling. He is also alienated from his father, who looks down on Clive's interest in art and literature.

STANLEY: . . . But look here, if you can't stand on your own two feet you don't amount to anything. And not one of that pansy set of spongers you're going around with will ever help you do that.

CLIVE: You know nothing about my friends.

STANLEY: Oh yes I do. I've seen them. Arty-tarty boys. Going around London, giggling and drinking and talking dirty . . .[3]

Pamela is Clive's fourteen year-old sister. She is preoccupied with herself, her schoolwork, and her friends, and has yet to communicate with her parents and brother on a mature level. She is treated solely as a child, or even a pet. Walter Langer, a twenty-two year old German,

has moved into the cottage to serve as Pamela's tutor. He is a short time away from becoming a British citizen, and is anxious to please and get on with each member of the family.

Before Five Finger Exercise opens Walter has managed to distance himself from the quarrels and tension involving Stanley, Louise and Clive. Gradually, and against his will, he is pulled into the family conflicts. Clive warns him about the Harrington tendency to "cannibalize" one another:

> Well, let me give you a word of warning. This isn't a family. It's a tribe of wild cannibals. Between us we eat everyone we can.[4]

Near the end of Act One, Louise tries in vain to seduce Walter, while Clive enters, intoxicated, and finds them in an innocent embrace. After Louise leaves the room embarrassed, Clive pleads with Walter to go away on a trip with him. Walter reluctantly refuses, and in a sort of revenge, Clive later tells his father that he saw Louise and Walter making love, an outright lie. In spite of his ignorance, and alienation from his wife, Stanley does not believe Clive's charge, and strikes him as the Act ends.

In Act two, the Harringtons, one by one, begin to turn Walter into a scapegoat for each of their own insecurities and troubles. Louise turns against Walter after he explains that his affection for her is that of a son for his mother, rather than that of a lover. Humiliated, she encourages Stanley to fire Walter, using the excuse that he is a bad influence on their children. In accusing Walter of ruining Clive, corrupting Pamela and trying to seduce Louise (all of which he knows to be untrue), Stanley vents upon Walter his contempt for Germans:

> You filthy German bastard . . . (the boy winces as if has been slapped) Once a German, always a German. Take what you want and the hell with everyone else.[5]

Walter swiftly retreats to his room, just as Clive enters, once again drunk, and admits his lie regarding the scene between Louise and Clive. In utter despair, he begs his parents to recognize the lack of honesty within their family, and to accept his own search for an identity.

> Oh, it goes on and on. No meeting . . . Never . . . Why can't we be important to each other? Why can't we ever come into the room and be new to each other?[6]

Shaken by his words, Louise turns on Clive by implying that her son has homosexual feelings for Walter. As accusations and counter-accusations fly back and forth, Louise, Stanley and Clive suddenly realize that Walter is trying to gas himself to death in his room. Breaking into the room, they pull him out and succeed in reviving him. The curtain falls, as Clive, in anguish, says:

> The courage . . . For all of us. Oh, God - give it.[7]

Five Finger Exercise deals with a war within a family. The Harringtons have misplaced their capacities to relate to one another on an open and honest level. Where there ought to be understanding, warmth and love, there is ignorance and hostility. The family's recently acquired material comfort has made Louise obsessed with culture and refinement. Stanley, having worked hard to bring his family these

luxuries, cannot reconcile himself to his wife's attitudes, and remains insensitive and detached. Clive has become a pawn in the ongoing battle between his parents. Though Louise encourages Clive's interest in the arts, she does so primarily to get back at Stanley for his ignorance. Stanley, forever critical of Clive's university activities, urges him to make practical use of his opportunities in order to carve out a useful place for himself. Neither parent truly recognizes or appreciates Clive's own identity or desires, nor offers him genuine encouragement. Nor does Clive receive any gestures of real love. For these reasons, Clive is becoming an emotional cripple.

Walter Langer is the catalyst who brings the Harringtons' frustrations and ugly emotions out into the open. Walter, fleeing from an unhappy childhood in Germany, has idealized the Harringtons. Until the last few scenes, he consciously views them in this way. Before his eyes are pried open and his senses awakened, Walter sees a harmony within and among the Harringtons, and is eager to become part of it. In Walter, Louise discovers the charm and appreciation which her husband lacks. Clive, at odds with his family and with life, also finds himself drawn to Walter, but in a way never clearly specified. Clive finds in Walter companionship and emotional honesty, and becomes jealous of his mother's affections for him. Whether Clive loves his mother, or Walter, is never clarified, yet there is enough in the play to suggest that Clive's feeling for Walter is homosexual in nature.

Since Walter refuses to commit himself to any one member of the family, he must pay a painful price. He becomes the funnel into which the Harringtons pour their angers, jealousies and frustrations. Even Pamela, who is just vaguely conscious of the turmoil within her family,

briefly turns on Walter for treating her like a child. Walter's illusions regarding a harmonious family life are thus shattered. He has simply travelled from one cruel and unhappy family situation to another. However, the family's saving of Walter from death represents a coming together in a common effort, the only time during the play that this occurs. The implication is that Walter has managed at last to bring the Harringtons together with an act of sacrifice. The ending also suggests the Harrington family's recognition of Walter's spiritual and emotional value, and the way he has helped each of them confront their own shortcomings. Walter's illusions, nevertheless, have been destroyed.

The first performance of Five Finger Exercise took place at the Comedy Theatre in London on July 16, 1958. It was produced by H. M. Tennent, and the director was John Gielgud. The play was both a commercial and critical success. "A devastatingly true picture,"[8] wrote Peter Roberts of Plays and Players, and "A probing study of character,"[9] added J. C. Trewin of The Illustrated London News. Kenneth Tynan of The Observer remained disappointed with the play; he had difficulty believing in the desperation of Shaffer's characters: "There is more to the creation of character than merely taking a stereotype and making him suffer."[10]

The critic for The Times praised the quality of the play's writing in its "dialogue of lightly rippling subtlety"[11] while T. C. Worsley of The New Statesman wrote of Shaffer's "ability to give his situation depth; not only depth of complexity, but depth of time."[12] Wayland Young of The Tribune criticized the climax of the play: "there are lots of ingredients for an explosion, but it doesn't happen;

everything boils up, but with no bang at the end."[13]

J. W. Lambert of Drama saw Five Finger Exercise as "conventional in form, in feeling, and in its picture of family life; it might have been written thirty years ago."[14] Perhaps, Five Finger Exercise reminded Lambert of the work of John Galsworthy, Somerset Maugham and Terence Rattigan. These writers, whose plays dominated the British theatre of the early and mid-twentieth century, were all good craftsmen, and exponents of well knit, carefully constructed drama. John Galsworthy's Justice and Loyalties deal with close-knit groups caught up in a specific social problem. Loyalties deals with mistrust, betrayal and anti-semitism among a group of close friends. Terence Rattigan's The Browning Version is set in a boy's school, and deals with the intense relationships among a teacher, his wife, and a young student.

Rattigan's other plays, especially Separate Tables are normally set among the drawing room elite, and involve a family or close-knit group. In style and shape, Five Finger Exercise is not dissimilar to these. Shaffer also relies on the family unit set within its own living room, and stamps his play with a significant moral tone. On the surface, Five Finger Exercise appears as another well made family melodrama. But underneath, it raises important questions regarding the attitudes of England's nouveau riche, and the uncertainty facing post-war youth. In addition, the play reflects an ambiguous and complex attitude toward the post-war German.

Five Finger Exercise focuses on the various pairings among its five characters. These include the estranged, hostile relationship between Stanley and Louise, the artificial, patronizing one between Louise and Clive, and the cold indifference between Clive and his

father. Pamela is merely the pampered pet of the family. Her character is in part peripheral due to its lack of substance and purpose. She is only Walter's pupil. But her presence is also essential in that it emphasizes each of the family members' alienation from one another and total lack of communication. The play is also about the complex relationship involving Stanley, Louise and Walter. Louise feels romantic affection for Walter, but turns against him when she learns the true nature of his feelings. Stanley is jealous of Walter for capturing the attentions of his wife, son and daughter. The stylistic strength and emotional power of Five Finger Exercise lies in its concentration on these various dual relationships within the household.

The most important relationship in the play is between Clive and Walter. In Walter, Clive finds an answer to his loneliness, his inability to communicate openly with anyone, and his anguish over his future. In Clive's eyes, Walter embodies loyalty, faith in life, companionship, and above all, love. Clive receives none of these feelings from his parents who are obsessed with molding him into images of themselves. Walter does not completely comprehend Clive's need, however, or if he does, he is at odds with it in order to keep his idealization of the whole family intact and not exceed the bounds of loyalty. Walter feels he must serve each one of the Harringtons equally. In addition, Clive envies Walter for his independence and not having a family, whereas Walter envies Clive merely for his having one. Because Walter is wrapped up in his illusion, he is blind both to Clive's pleas for companionship, and to the romantic inclinations of Louise.

LOUISE: What are you thinking? Come on, tell me.

WALTER: Some things grow more when they are not talked about.

LOUISE: Try, anyway. I want you to.

WALTER: (looking away from her): It is only that you have made me wonder -

LOUISE: (prompting eagerly): Tell me.

WALTER: (lowering his voice still more as he walks toward Louise): Mrs. Harrington, forgive me for asking this, but do you think it's possible for someone to find a new mother? (Louise sits very still. The expression of eagerness fades, and its remnant hardens on her face. She stares at him.) Have I offended you?

LOUISE: (smiles, without joy): Of course not. I am . . . very touched.[15]

As a result of their severe insecurities and frustrations, Louise and Clive proceed to destroy both Walter and the idealism he represents.

The relationship between Clive and Walter is an element which reappears as a central theme in each of Peter Shaffer's major plays. This theme, the search for, and destruction of a god, is manifested by means of an intense relationship between two very different men. The bond encompasses such passions as love, worship, faith, honesty, greed and envy. In each play, the effects of these passions are ultimately catastrophic. Walter Langer is an early form of the life-enhancing,

ideal individual in Shaffer's major work. Walter is an honest, intelligent and sincere young man. He is a picture of calm and understanding within the Harrington's otherwise tense and angry household. He attracts the submerged feelings and desires of the Harrington family, and ends up almost destroyed by them because they cannot measure up to his quality of emotional honesty. The passionate, and honest, characters of Shaffer's plays are all in some way destroyed by their repressed and unhappy counterparts, who are representatives of society at large. In Five Finger Exercise, the central figure of repression - and opposite to Walter in nearly every aspect of personality and emotional temperament - is Clive.

Three of the London theatre critics referred to the Clive/Walter relationship in their reviews. Philip Hope-Wallace of The Manchester Guardian wrote:

> between the pathetic and the sympathetic there is that all important inch, which is never crossed, unless it is momentarily by the son of the house, and the enigmatic German romantic.[16]

Hope-Wallace is discussing the abilities of Clive and Walter to bridge important emotional gaps. But he does not deal specifically with the relationship between the two young men, or between other members of the family. The critic sees some significance in the characters of Clive and Walter, but does not see this as a major aspect of the play. The anonymous critic for The Times wrote of "the mixed up young man's [Clive] passing homosexual feelings for the tutor. They are feelings he is only just barely aware of. The tutor is not made aware of them at all."[17] This critic believes that Clive's feelings for Walter are

almost unconscious, while Walter is oblivious of them altogether. The critic also sees Clive's possible homosexuality only as a temporary disorder. Clive's envy and worship of Walter is accepted as genuine and wholehearted, yet its importance in the overall view of the play is downplayed. A third review, from Theatre World magazine, reveals the broadest insight. The writer is Frances Stephens:

> Clive is sickened by his mother's pretentiousness, and tormented by his love and jealousy of the tutor.[18]

Ms. Stephens provides the fullest assessment of Clive's attitude towards his mother and Walter. Louise's artificiality and pretense are sources of Clive's unhappiness, while Walter is clearly the object of Clive's envy and worship. In another part of her review, Ms. Stephens describes Walter's presence in the Harrington home as "a spiritual intervention."[19] This suggests that Walter is a somewhat divine, idealistic force by whom each member of Harrington family is sharply affected. All of the London critics praised the performances of Brian Bedford as Clive and Michael Bryant as Walter, but only the three reviewers already examined dealt in any way with the specifics of their relationship. None of them dealt with the issues of envy, worship or idealism, or the desire by each character to possess what the other already has: independence and an identity for Clive; a mother and the security of a family for Walter. Both men wish to cut off their old roots and replace them with ones more spiritually and emotionally fulfilling.

Five Finger Exercise opened in New York at the Music Box Theatre

on December 2, 1959. With the exception of Jessica Tandy - who replaced Adrianne Allen in the role of Louise - the original cast was intact. The overall critical attitude to the play was very favorable. "Five Finger Exercise is not so much written as lived,"[20] wrote Brooks Atkinson of The New York Times, and "something cumulative, very real, and in the final analysis, very great,"[21] added Jack Balch of Theatre Arts magazine. However, Harold Clurman, writing in The Nation, expressed his dissatisfaction with the play:

> The author will grow in stature when he has freed himself from the symmetry of conventional English theatrical forms and feelings. In both respects he is in advance of what has been common on the English stage in the immediate past, but not yet far enough in advance.[22]

As well, Clurman found the story line contrived, and the writing "too neat."[23] On the other hand, Brooks Atkinson considered Five Finger Exercise "an ideal expression of all of the arts of the theatre,"[24] while Jack Balch remarked, somewhat prophetically, "it is almost blindingly illuminating in synthesis."[25] Richard Hayes of Commonweal perceptively pointed out the sense of pride, stolidity, and emotional restraint which Shaffer succeeded in portraying:

> the tragic is not native to these people; their righteousness will make allowance for nothing so immutable: that is at once their glory, and their flaw.[26]

Only one of the New York critics, Kenneth Tynan of The New

Yorker (then on leave from The Observer) noted the special bond between Clive and Walter:

> Clive protests against the dismissal [of Walter] with a passion that has unmistakeably homosexual overtones.[27]

Unfortunately, Tynan does not elaborate on the nature of Clive's or Walter's feelings for each other. He sees Clive as homosexual, and that is that. In another part of his review, Tynan calls Walter "the fulcrum of the action, and the point of the play."[28] Tynan does not expand on this aspect either, yet one may propose that Walter's significance is perceived as that of an emotional catalyst.

Three London critics, in addition to Kenneth Tynan in New York, saw the relationship of Clive and Walter as important, but not important enough to draw attention away from the other pairings among the five characters. The Clive-Walter relationship is of major significance only in the light of Shaffer's later dramatic work. In Five Finger Exercise this relationship contributes to and enhances the theme, rather than serving as the theme wholly in itself. An entire family, and not just two young men, are under examination in this play. Emotional isolation has spread to each member of the Harrington household. Clive is the lone idealist who finds things worth living for in Walter. However, each pair of characters undergoes an emotional exercise, and each pairing contains its own deep emotional strength. Together, they form the heart of this play.

In an interview prior to the New York opening of Five Finger Exercise, Shaffer called his work "a morally based play, concerned with

various levels of dishonesty."[29] It also dealt, in Shaffer's words, with "the fabric of life itself."[30] In another interview, Shaffer was asked why he had chosen the contemporary home and family as his setting. He replied: "to audiences, it's familiar ground, and their guards are down. You can do more damage if you want to."[31] Shaffer evidently intended to use a conventional form of experience in order to capture and stimulate the thoughts and emotions of his audience. In spite of its conventional form, Five Finger Exercise succeeded in exploring many levels of dishonesty and moved its audiences into considering the contemporary English family in a new light.

Five Finger Exercise contains some of Shaffer's best writing, and his dialogue is powerful. The years which Shaffer spent perfecting his writing style and dramatic craftsmanship resulted in both critical and financial success, and Five Finger Exercise helped to lay the path for his career as a playwright. Several critics saw Shaffer as one destined to go far in his profession. Philip Hope-Wallace wrote: "Shaffer may do a lot to purify and revitalize the rather sluggish mainstream of British theatre."[32] Harold Hobson of The Sunday Times added: "By the end, one knows that Mr. Shaffer may easily become a master of the theatre."[33]

One of the critics of Five Finger Exercise, Wayland Young of The Tribune , noted Shaffer's habit of building a plot around duets: "Two by two they talk, and never four by four . . . Shaffer can write duets but not ensembles."[34] This is another prophetic remark, as it becomes evident that the strength of Shaffer's other major plays lies in their various confrontations between two characters.

In attempting to re-evaluate Five Finger Exercise within the context of late-1950's British drama, it is evident that the play does not fit among the Socialist dramas like those of Arnold Wesker, nor is it at all part of the Absurdist genre represented by the plays of Harold Pinter or N. F. Simpson. In style and structure, Five Finger Exercise is closer to the well made melodrama represented by Terence Rattigan. Clive Harrington, with his melancholy and restlessness, bears a strong relation to the figure of Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's Look Back in Anger. However, after the themes, conflicts and character relationships are closely examined, Five Finger Exercise does seem to be classifiable: it is consistent only with the rest of Shaffer's work. Clive Harrington is Shaffer's original portrait of spiritlessness, who is compelled to destroy Walter Langer, the figure of idealism and fulfillment he has come to admire and love. As in the major plays that followed, Five Finger Exercise is about individuals seeking to satisfy their essential spiritual and emotional cravings. Marked by its sound contruction, dramatic power, and fine language, it is a sensitive portrait of those necessary human needs which its characters strive to fulfill.

Chapter 2

THE ROYAL HUNT OF THE SUN

> General, you did for me, and now I've done for you. And there's no joy in that, or in anything now. But then there's no joy in the world could match what I had when I first went across the water with you to find the gold country. And no pain like losing it.[1]

These words, spoken by old Martin at the conclusion of The Royal Hunt of the Sun, summarize this play's concern with hope and disillusionment, life and death, and love and hate. The play is about the quest for gold and riches, but also about the quest for a god, for immortality, and for all that makes life worth living. Old Martin's words evoke both the intense joy of his search and discovery, and the utter sorrow that comes from his loss.

Shaffer had begun writing The Royal Hunt of the Sun in 1958, and continued to work on it through the six intervening years. It was first produced by Britain's National Theatre at the Chichester Festival in July of 1964. In December of 1964, the play opened at the Old Vic Theatre in London, in the repertory of the National Theatre. The Royal Hunt of the Sun represented for Shaffer both a remarkable departure in dramatic style and structure, and a continuation of his consistent theme of man in search of a god.

The Royal Hunt of the Sun is an emotionally riveting historical epic. The story of the Spanish general Francisco Pizarro and the Inca

God-King Atahuallpa is suspenseful, thought-provoking and moving. The images of immortality and spiritual fulfillent which comprise the play are evoked in powerful dramatic terms. The original production of this work ingeniously employed a wide range of the arts of the theatre, including song, dance, mime, exotic costumes, and a visually exciting set design. Together with superb acting and innovative direction, these elements combined to result in an extremely successful dramatic creation.

The Royal Hunt of the Sun is about the Spanish conquest of Peru in 1532: how one-hundred and sixty-seven Spanish soldiers destroyed an Inca empire of twenty-four million people. Francisco Pizarro is the commander of the Spanish expeditionary force. The journey to Peru marks his third and final trip to the New World. A career soldier, illegitimate by birth and raised in poverty, Pizarro is determined to find the gold of the Incas; at the same time Pizarro is also searching for a kind of immortality:

> If I live this next year I'm going to get me a name that won't be forgotten! A name to be sung here for centuries in your ballads, out there under the cork trees where I sat as a boy with bandages for shoes.[2]

One of the major characters of the play is Martin Ruiz. There are actually two Martins, Old and Young, played by two different actors who are at times onstage together. Old Martin is the narrator of the story, looking back on the adventure with a mixture of bitterness, cynicism and insight. His recollections are frequently juxtaposed with the youthful naive heroism of his fifteen year-old self, who serves as

Pizarro's page and interpreter for the Incas. In addition to being an enlightening and emotional experience in its own right, this dramatic device serves to emphasize the play's concern with worship, devotion, and disillusionment. Early in the play Old Martin says to the audience:

> Riding down Indians in the name of Spain.
> The inside of my head was one vast plain for
> feats of daring. I used to lie up in the
> hayloft for hours reading my Bible - Don Cristobal
> on the rules of Chivalry. And then he [Pizarro]
> came and made them real. And the only wish of my
> life is that I had never seen him.[3]

Act one of this play is called "The Hunt". After recruiting his army in Spain, Pizarro and his soldiers arrive in South America, and begin their trek through dense jungles and over treacherous mountains. In the original production, this effect was achieved through such overtly theatrical means as mime, sound and lighting effects. With the aid of an Inca guide, the Spanish came to Cajamarca, the city of the Incas, where they encounter the God-King Atahuallpa. Atahuallpa is the young, dignified and revered leader of the Incas of Peru. He is also - as he terms himself - "the son of the sun". Atahuallpa is also - like Pizarro - illegitimate, and fought a civil war with his half-brother in order to assume the kingship. Pizarro marvels that this man can be both illegitimate, and the embodiment of a god.

> PIZARRO: And he's the bastard? (All the Indians
> cry out.)
> Answer! He's the bastard?

CHIEF: He is the Son of the Sun. He needs no wedded mother. He is God.

PIZARRO: God?

CHIEF: God!

PIZARRO: God on earth?

VALVERDE: Christ defend us!

DE SOTO: Do you believe this?

CHIEF: It is true . . .

PIZARRO: God on earth![4]

Near the end of Act One, the Spanish and the Inca natives confront one another. Atahuallpa is taken prisoner, enabling the Spanish to massacre three thousand Inca warriors. In the original production, this massacre was achieved through a combination of mime and dance. As the Inca warriors fell dying to the stage floor, an enormous red-stained cloth flew over the stage to cover their bodies.[5] In the published text of the play, this scene is known as "The Mime of the Great Massacre."[6] The screams of the dying men pervaded the theatre, as the first Act came to a close.

The second Act of The Royal Hunt of the Sun is called "The Kill," during which the story focuses on the relationship between Pizarro and Atahuallpa. In Atahuallpa, Pizarro discovers the embodiment of faith, loyalty and honesty which he has spent his life seeking. Pizarro also comes to look upon Atahuallpa as a surrogate son. To his trusted second-in-command Hernardo De Soto, Pizarro confides:

He has some meaning for me, this man-god.
An immortal man in whom all his people live
completely. He has an answer for Time.[7]

For his part, Atahuallpa sees into the anguished soul of Pizarro, and slowly becomes his closest companion. Atahuallpa also consents to give the Spanish all the gold they want, in exchange for his own safe release. Soon, the gold of the Incas commences to form an enormous pile on the stage. Meanwhile, the friendship between Pizarro and Atahuallpa grows stronger, the general being oblivious to the vast treasure being laid at his feet. Pizarro also becomes oblivious to a task he must inevitably perform in order to ensure he keeps the gold. Diego, master of the horse, remarks to De Soto:

DIEGO: An altered man. No one's ever seen him so easy. He spends each day with the King. He's going to find it hard when he has to do it.

DE SOTO: Do what?

DIEGO: Kill him, sir.[8]

Finally, all of the gold of the Incas is collected. But Atahuallpa refuses to guarantee the Spanish their safety from the possibility of attack by Inca warriors. Pizarro is thus forced to keep Atahuallpa captive, and face the demands of his soldiers and priests to have him killed. Pizarro is agonized over the decision he must make. De Soto and Young Martin both urge Pizarro to set Atahuallpa free, whatever the consequences may be. These two men, both of whom are close to Pizarro, represent the freedom of choice that is available to the general. De Soto and Young Martin - like Atahuallpa - are symbols of principle and loyalty. Atahuallpa's trust in Pizarro, and the spiritual value of the Inca king to their general is far more important to De Soto and Young Martin than the threat of an attack:

DE SOTO: A man who butchered his prisoner after giving his word. There's a name for your ballads.

PIZARRO: I'll never live to hear them. What do I care? What does it matter? Whatever I do, what does it matter?

DE SOTO: Nothing, if you don't feel it. But I think you do.[9]

Pizarro makes it clear to Young Martin that he will not set Atahuallpa free, and dismisses his youthful but earnest page for insubordination. The moment is the last of Young Martin's faith in life, and devotion to Pizarro. Old Martin laments in retrospect:

I went out into the night - the cold night of the Andes, hung with stars like crystal apples - and dropped my first tears as a man. My first and last. That was my first and last worship too. Devotion never came again.[10]

Atahuallpa, like De Soto and Young Martin, empathizes with Pizarro's spiritual suffering. He urges Pizarro to let the soldiers and priests have their way. For if Atahuallpa truly is a god - as he insists he is - then he will be resurrected on the morning after his execution. Atahuallpa also offers Pizarro spiritual redemption, which the despairing General accepts. Atahuallpa then cuts the rope binding him to Pizarro, surrenders himself to the Spanish priests, and is killed. Pizarro spends the night standing beside the Inca's body, awaiting a resurrection that never comes. Emotionally and spiritually destroyed, Pizarro realizes that life has betrayed him once again. Never

again will he know worship, love or faith. The play ends with Pizarro lying beside the body and softly singing to the body of Atahuallpa, as Old Martin offers his final homage to his former commander.

Francisco Pizarro's journey to Peru is a search not only for gold and glory, but also for a god. He finds in Atahuallpa a living, breathing god, a divine force who becomes his object of faith and love. Through his relationship with the Inca, the cynical and atheistic Pizarro is spiritually and emotionally reborn. Pizarro finds himself - at the age of sixty-three - capable of loyalty and love, as his bond with Atahuallpa develops into an experience of happiness and inner peace. Despire the differences in ages, background and temperament, the two men find things that draw them together.

PIZARRO: I did not know my mother. She was not my father's wife . . . There's talk in the village still, how I was suckled by a cow.

ATAHUALLPA: You are not then . . . ?

PIZARRO: Legitimate? No my lord, no more than you.

ATAHUALLPA: So.

PIZARRO: So.

(A pause.)

ATAHUALLPA: To be born so is a sign for a great man.

PIZARRO: I think so too.[11]

As The Royal Hunt of the Sun progresses toward its tragic outcome, Pizarro and Atahuallpa exchange various skills and thoughts on religion and war. Pizarro grows closer to Atahuallpa than he has to anyone before in his life. When forced to choose between the Inca's

life or death, Pizarro acknowledges that his journey to Peru was indeed a search for a god whom he might call his own, and whom he has finally found:

> What if it was really true Martin? That I've gone god-hunting and caught one. A being who can renew his life over and over?[12]

Atahuallpa sees Pizarro's anguish, embraces his need for a faith, and near the end provides him with the forgiveness he would never have received elsewhere:

> Pizarro. You will die soon and you do not believe in your god. That is why you tremble and keep no word. Believe in me. I will give you a word and fill you with joy. For you I will do a great thing. I will swallow death and spit it out of me.[13]

Atahuallpa speaks this shortly before offering himself to the Spanish priests and soldiers. Earlier, when Pizarro in desperation for Atahuallpa's life ties himself to the Inca with a rope, the two men are literally united together. Later, as Atahuallpa lies dead in Pizarro's arms, the two men are united in death. The union becomes a symbiosis that is both metaphorical and eternal. The two men become one: Atahuallpa, the divine and idealistic side of mankind, is physically destroyed. Pizarro, the cold, cynical part of mankind is spiritually destroyed. Through this kind of symbiosis Pizarro and Atahuallpa can be seen as two separate, but ultimately united parts of the same man. When Pizarro confesses to Atahuallpa, the deed is both worthwhile and ironic. It is ironic because is Atahuallpa who is physically killed,

yet worthwhile because Atahuallpa's death helps prepare Pizarro for the imminence of his own. As Pizarro stands above Atahuallpa's body, his "old body is racked with sobs; then, surprised, he feels tears on his cheek. He examines them. The sunlight brightens on his head."[14] He says:

> What's this? What is it? In all your life
> you never made one of these, I know, and
> I not 'till this minute. Look (he kneels to show
> the dead Inca) . . . There's a snow falling all
> around us. You can almost see it. It's over
> lad. I'm coming after you. There's nothing but
> peace to come. We'll be put into the same earth,
> father and son in our own land. And that sun will
> roam uncaught over his empty pasture.[15]

Peter Shaffer creates the coming together of Pizarro and Atahuallpa with exceptional purity and sensitivity.

The character of Martin Ruiz is highly significant. Young Martin's devotion to Pizarro and trust in the laws of honor and chivalry serve as a revealing parallel to Pizarro's own feelings for Atahuallpa. As the end of the play progresses, both Young Martin and Pizarro are stripped of their illusions, and are spiritually crushed. Following the massacre of the three thousand Incas, Old Martin cynically observes the despair of his younger self, whose heroic ideals lie shattered.

> Look at the young warrier where he struts. Glory
> on his sword. Salvation in his spurs. One of
> the knights at last. The very perfect knight Sir

Martin, tender in virtue, bodyguard of Christ.
Jesus, we are all eased out of kids' dreams,
but who can be ripped out of them and live
loving after?[16]

The character of Young Martin emphasizes the concern of The Royal Hunt of the Sun with man's basic need for worship. In Young Martin one follows the ordeal of a journey from the youthful illusions of glory to the stark realities of betrayal and death.

The sun is the most compelling visual and thematic image in the play. It represents Atahuallpa's source of life, strength, and divinity. It is the perpetual image which Atahuallpa uses to justify his resurrection, and which Pizarro comes to recognize as the ultimate source of life and hope. The sun is constantly referred to in the play. Early in the story, Pizarro connects his search for gold with the play's title and theme:

When I was young, I used to sit on the slope
outside the village and watch the sun go down,
and I used to think: if only I could find the
place where it sinks to rest for the night, I'd
find the source of life . . . I myself can't
fix anything nearer to a thought of worship than
standing at dawn and watching it fill the world.[17]

Later, the following exchange between Pizarro and Atahuallpa takes place:

PIZARRO: You have gold?

ATAHUALLPA: It is the sweat of the sun. It
belongs to me.[18]

Near the end of the play, Pizarro has come to realize the true nature of his new-found god, as he explains to Young Martin:

> What else is a god but what we know we can't do without? The flowers that worship it. The sunflowers in their soil are us day and night, after cold and lightless days, turning our faces to it, adoring. The sun is the only god I know.[19]

This glowing and perpetual image of the sun, obviously difficult to render onstage believably as well as effectively, was achieved by designer Michael Annals in a most resourceful way: hundreds of shiny metal bottle tops were hammered flat and then attached to wooden struts arranged in a huge circle. In a simple and imaginative way, the glitter of the sun was realized. Later in the play, these "golden" layers were removed and added to the huge pile which the Incas have collected for the Spanish. A hollow black space was all that remained, which served as Atahuallpa's execution chamber.[20] The removal of the gold and the resulting empty void emphasized not only the eclipse of the Inca empire, but also all that remains of the soul of Francisco Pizarro.

The idea of writing The Royal Hunt of the Sun came to Shaffer while confined to bed for a period of doctor-prescribed rest. He decided to spend the time reading a "big, heavy Victorian" book, and the one he chose was William H. Prescott's The Conquest of Peru. Shaffer recalled the experience of reading this work:

> I was absolutely riveted by it. The whole drama of the confrontation of two totally different ways of life: the Catholic

> individualism of the invaders, and the complete communist society of the Incas.[21]

The passage in Prescott's book which apparently moved Shaffer to write The Royal Hunt of the Sun is that which describes Pizarro's reaction to the killing of Atahuallpa by his soldiers.

> An eyewitness assures us that Pizarro was visibly affected, as he turned away from the Inca, to whose appeal he had no power to listen, in opposition to the army, and to his own sense of what was due to the security of his country.[22]

This eyewitness is revealed in a footnote on the page which this passage is found. This footnote reads, "'I myself,' says Pedro Pizarro, 'saw the general weep.'"[23] This single line served as the basis for Shaffer's relationship between Pizarro and Atahuallpa. In an interview with The New York Times following the New York opening of The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Shaffer elaborated:

> It is historically true that Pizarro, after the death of Atahuallpa, sat weeping in the street of Cajamarca. I learned that from a footnote. That's not at all in character with the picture we get of Pizarro from the histories as a ruthless Conquistador. There's no historical explanation, but something about Atahuallpa must have touched Pizarro. It's not clear what the relationship was, and I've invented that.[24]

Another image, which had much to do with getting The Royal Hunt of the Sun first produced, was that which affected its stage director, John Dexter. The script had already passed through the hands of such major groups as the English Stage Company and The Royal Shakespeare Company. They had turned down the play, probably because of its staging problems, and the large cast it required. Dexter, then an associate director with the new National Theatre, found Shaffer's script in the office of Artistic Director Laurence Olivier. As he leafed through the pages, Dexter became captivated by a single stage direction, and knew then that the play had to be produced. The direction read: "They cross the Andes."[25]

As first performed at Chichester, England on July 7, 1964, in a production co-directed by John Dexter and Desmond O'Donovan, The Royal Hunt of the Sun was a presentation of total theatre. It featured a visually exciting stage design along with exotic costumes by Michael Annals, mime, dances, songs and a mixture of sound effects. Upstage center hung the huge golden sun, in the center of which Atahuallpa stood during the trek of the Spanish soldiers over the mountains and through the jungle. The costumes, with their combination of feathers, robes and armour were very colourful and visually appealing. In addition, huge and terrifying death masks were worn by the Incas when they surrounded Atahuallpa, lying dead in Pizarro's arms.[26]

The production drew a mixture of positive and skeptical reviews: "With its ancient armoury of words, costumes and acting, the theatre can do no wrong, and The Royal Hunt of the Sun has each in splendid abundance,"[27] wrote Bamber Gascoigne of The Observer. "A triumphant humanist affirmation . . . sheer theatrical pleasure,"[28] added Ronald

Bryden of The New Statesman. Several critics felt that the language of the play failed to measure up to its epic vision. "It lacks a language and a character of its own,"[29] stated Malcolm Rutherford of The Spectator, while John Gross of Encounter felt: "where we had hoped for high astounding terms, we were fobbed off with amazing reductions."[30] J. C. Trewin of the Illustrated London News went as far as to write: "the man for such a subject should obviously have been [Christopher] Marlowe."[31] Most critics, however, praised the play's exciting theatricality. "The masks and costumes are spectacular"[32] wrote John Gross. "No praise can be too high for Michael Annals' breathtaking costumes,"[33] exclaimed Frances Stephens of Theatre World, and "Michael Annals' set makes an enormous contribution,"[34] added Mervyn Jones of The Tribune. The design and production elements of The Royal Hunt of the Sun were fundamentally integral to the play's great dramatic success.

The roles of Atahuallpa and Pizarro were portrayed, respectively, by Robert Stephens and Colin Blakely. Both men were then rising stars with the new National Theatre Company, and both drew considerable critical praise for their creation of the complex and touching relationship between the Spanish general and his young Inca god. Bamber Gascoigne wrote, "Colin Blakely gives a performance of amazingly sustained power, and in Robert Stephens there is a vast quality of majesty."[35] Robert Brustein of The New Republic saw in Stephens' performance "the closest thing to Kabuki acting I have seen on a western stage."[36] Frances Stephens added: "there is a haunting quality in these brilliant performances not often experienced on the

English stage."[37] In the role of Old Martin, actor Robert Lang drew praise from The Times: "Robert Lang's disenchanted narrative on the innocent ideals of his younger self is touching."[38]

The critic for The Times described the coming together of Pizarro and Atahuallpa as "extraordinarily touching,"[39] while Benedict Nightingale of The Manchester Guardian perceived in the relationship "shared personal emotions and a liking for each other."[40] Ronald Bryden wrote:

> The Inca is Pizarro's prisoner, but he is also the god, the nobility, and the son he has always craved.[41]

Bryden obviously recognizes the irony inherent in Pizarro and Atahuallpa's situation. Atahuallpa embodies everything which Pizarro has spent his lifetime seeking. But as Atahuallpa is Pizarro's prisoner, their bond is both enhanced and restricted: restricted because the situation forces Pizarro into making a life-or-death decision; enhanced because the situation makes the two men inseparable and allows Pizarro to try to seize fully the peace and contentment without which he has lived up until now. Frances Stephens of Theatre World made another reflection on these two men. Ms. Stephens wrote:

> Atahuallpa has opened new horizons to the disillusioned older man from Europe, teaching him to laugh and to love; and there is a poignancy when Pizarro, now a convert to sun-worship, realizes his young god-king is dead.[42]

Ms. Stephens' use of the words "disillusioned" and "poignancy" help to sum up both the spirit of Pizarro and the mood of the play when

he realizes that his wise and compassionate Inca companion will never rise again. Atahuallpa's revitalization of Pizarro is evoked throughout the play, such as when Pizarro clumsily and comically tries to learn Atahuallpa's "dance of the aylu", or as Young Martin translates, "the dance of a nobleman."

ATAHUALLPA: You dance.

PIZARRO: I can't dance, lad.

ATAHUALLPA: (imperiously): YOU DANCE!

(He sits to watch. Seeing there is no help for it, PIZARRO rises and clumsily tries to copy the dance. The effect is so grotesque that YOUNG MARTIN cannot help laughing. The general tries again, lunges, slips, slides, and finally starts laughing himself. He gives up the attempt.)

PIZARRO: (to ATAHUALLPA): You make me laugh! (in sudden wonder) YOU MAKE ME LAUGH!

(ATAHUALLPA consults his young interpreter, who tries to explain. The Inca nods gravely. Tentatively PIZARRO extends his hand to him. ATAHUALLPA takes it and rises. Quietly they go off together.)[43]

Whereas Shaffer's first major play, Five Finger Exercise, concluded on a small note of hope, the ending of that work remained, for the most part, unresolved. In The Royal Hunt of the Sun the resolution

is significantly clearer, and has in it no hope at all. The Spanish general's singular source of love, joy and worship is killed along with the Inca king. Pizarro found God in the person of Atahuallpa, and in the end he is left with despair and a kind of lingering death at having life cheat him out of peace and worship. If anything, Atahuallpa's death makes Pizarro fully aware of the futility of seeking one's own immortality.

The Royal Hunt of the Sun opened in New York at the ANTA Theatre on October 26, 1965. It was produced by the Theatre Guild, and again directed by John Dexter and designed by Michael Annals. The American critics' reviews were mixed: "Here is a piece of work that uses the theatre as a resonant instrument,"[44] claimed Henry Hewes of The Saturday Review. Harold Clurman of The Nation wrote: "Everything in fact is well arranged though fundamentally conventional; it is all a product of ability, and not of a genuine subjective insight."[45] Howard Taubman of The New York Times felt that "its partial success is more commendable than victory in a more routine venture."[46]

Christopher Plummer played Francisco Pizarro, and David Carradine, Atahuallpa. Both actors drew mixed notices for their performances: "Mr. Plummer is a magnificent ancient,"[47] wrote John McCarten of The New Yorker, and "Mr. Carradine and Mr. Plummer bring direct, touching emotion to the final scenes,"[48] added Howard Taubman. Robert Brustein of The New Republic had seen the English production and thought the American version comparatively far less satisfying. Brustein had admired the Kabuki-style performance of Robert Stephens in London and found David Carradine's Atahuallpa only "occasionally

powerful."[49] As for Plummer's Pizarro, Brustein wrote: "he gives us all the trappings of the character with little of its inner life."[50] The anonymous theatre critic for Newsweek commented on the dialects used by the American actors: "The Spaniards seem to hail from all five boroughs of New York while the Incas range from Harlem, to Trinidad, to Tarzan's Africa."[51]

The New York critics wrote about the Pizarro-Atahuallpa relationship in various ways. Robert Brustein wrote: "by the end , the whole brutal struggle has degenerated into a fraternal romance between a lissome young redskin, and a lonely aging paleface."[52] Albert Bermel of The New Leader saw little more in the relationship than "a mutual admiration society."[53] Howard Taubman however perceived elements which are integral to the play's theme. Taubman described it as "the prisoner's triumph over the conqueror, for Pizarro is spiritually captured by the young Inca."[54] In addition, the Newsweek encapsulated The Royal Hunt of the Sun's concern with love, faith, immortality and disillusionment:

> The sixty-three year-old Pizarro forms a strange relationship with his youthful captive . . . he is drawn by the Inca's personal serenity, and his calm belief in his own divinity. Atahuallpa's failure to rise shatters Pizarro's dream; yet he has gained a kind of wisdom; the divided conqueror is now stripped of his illusions and ready to face his own death.[55]

Emotionally and spiritually the bond between Pizarro and

Atahuallpa is much more developed, more dramatically intense, and obviously of more tragic dimension and consequence than that of Clive and Walter in Five Finger Exercise. Pizzaro and Atahuallpa are profoundly dependent on each other, and embrace each other's faith, or need for a faith, completely. In Five Finger Exercise, the relationship between Clive and Walter is only one of that play's several emotional interactions. In The Royal Hunt of the Sun, the focus is solely upon the compassionate yet tragic attachment between the Spanish general and the Inca king.

In the published edition, Shaffer acknowledges the enormous contributions of director John Dexter and designer Michael Annals, whose combined resourcefulness earned critical praise from London and New York critics alike. Together with their physical conceptions and considerable expertise, Shaffer succeeded in attaining his wish for a kind of total theatre. The playwright elaborated on this idea in a New York Times article prior to the play's opening on Broadway. Shaffer wrote of the duty of a dramatist and his collaborators to exercise the "imaginative muscle"[57] of their audience. The Royal Hunt of the Sun, in Shaffer's opinion, represents his attempt to satisfy his audience's profound need for revelation and imaginative fulfillment:

> The Royal Hunt of the Sun, though first and foremost an actor's piece, is also a director's piece, a musician's piece, a pantomimist's piece, and above all, an audience's piece - an experience that is entirely and only theatrical. Total theatre,[58]

The Royal Hunt of the Sun, as originally produced, featured outstanding design elements, superb acting, and was a huge commercial, if not totally a critical, success. It was the first new British play to be staged by the National Theatre, and was also the first to match, and even excel the quality of work being staged by its main rival, The Royal Shakespeare Company. The play began the National Theatre's tradition of presenting new British drama, established the company's reputation for theatrical athleticism in its use of mime, sound and visual effects, and brought such performers as Colin Blakely and Robert Stephens to the forefront of British acting. In addition, The Royal Hunt of the Sun marked the beginning of a partnership between John Dexter and Peter Shaffer which continued in Black Comedy, White Lies and Liars, and Equus.[59]

Shaffer's theme was powerfully evoked in the original staging. The concepts of worship, spiritual rebirth and disillusionment were vividly attained through the portraits of Pizarro, Atahuallpa, and Martin Ruiz, in addition to the perpetual image of the sun. However, Shaffer drew harsh criticism over his low quality of language and dialogue. The critics found the play's words severely wanting in poetic and historical dimensions. John Gross of Encounter wrote: "the greater the issue, the more potent the language needed to bring it to life."[60] In his book New Trends in 20th Century Drama, Frederick Lumley writes: "The text itself is much less impressive; strangely enough the play does not make for reading, and it is difficult to conceive the impact without seeing the extraordinary comprehension of John Dexter and Desmond O'Donovan in production."[61] The quality of

Shaffer's language remained a constant target of the critics with all of his later major plays. However, none of the critics questioned Shaffer's interpretation of history, and several admired him for his progressing from the more traditional and domestic form of Five Finger Exercise to one of much greater thematic and theatrical proportions. Critic John Elson wrote: "In breaking away from the well-made play to tackle a historical subject on an epic scale, Shaffer showed his ability to absorb some Brechtian techniques, as well as those of Antonin Artaud, who had demanded a theatre of mime, ritual and inarticulate cries.[62] John Gross wrote: "Few things in Mr. Shaffer's earlier work would have led one to discern in him the future historian of Pizarro and Atahuallpa."[63]

As reflected in Old Martin's words at the opening of this chapter, The Royal Hunt of the Sun is a play about intense love and painful loss. It is a play about the worship, and the desecration of the god and faith which a man seeks, finds, but only momentarily grasps. It is about the lonely journey that is man's search for immortality. With the exception of Equus nine years later, in no other instance has Peter Shaffer so finely evoked his theme. The Royal Hunt of the Sun represents one of its author's most fruitful efforts to show the coming together of two vastly different men. Pizarro finds in Atahuallpa the faith in life he has spent his life seeking, but is compelled through fate and his situation to destroy it, and turn his own shattered soul once more towards a dark dillusionment.

Chapter 3

SHRIVINGS

Shrivings or The Battle of Shrivings is Peter Shaffer's seventh play, and also the seventh to be produced. Following The Royal Hunt of the Sun, the National Theatre presented a one-act play by Shaffer called Black Comedy, in 1965, on a double-bill with Strindberg's Miss Julie. In 1967 in New York, Black Comedy was revived along with another one-act play by Shaffer called White Lies. In 1968 Shaffer re-wrote White Lies as The White Liars, and saw this new version staged with Black Comedy in London that same year. In 1970, Shaffer returned to full-length drama with The Battle of Shrivings.

The unusual stage and publication history of this play is of considerable interest in itself. It was first produced in 1970 under the title of The Battle of Shrivings.[1] This play had a short run in London's West End, and was never published. In 1971, Shaffer rewrote the play, calling it simply Shrivings. Though not immediately produced, this play was published in 1974. Efforts to obtain a copy of the original play for this study were unsuccessful, so that it is Shrivings upon which this study primarily relies, in addition to primary critical material pertaining to the 1970 stage version. Shrivings differs greatly from the rest of Shaffer's work in shape and style. Nevertheless it possesses the playwright's consistent theme that we have already examined. The play is also comprised of Shaffer's perpetual elements: worship, envy, faith, disillusionment and the direct confrontation between two men who are fundamental opposites.

Shrivings deals with an encounter between Mark Askelon, a cynical, reclusive and brilliant poet, and Gideon Petrie, an internationally-known philosopher and pacifist. The action takes place at Shrivings, Gideon's house in the countryside near London. Shrivings is a former monastery, and the term itself is synonymous with penance, confession, and refuge. Shaffer writes in his opening stage directions: "In the Middle Ages, Shrivings was a House of Retreat."[2] It is Gideon's wish that his house maintain this purpose for all who may pass by. The name becomes more and more ironic, as Gideon and his followers, rather than removing themselves from the world's cruel realities, gradually come to face them in the strongest of terms. As the plot develops, Shrivings becomes hardly the place of refuge it is meant to be.

David Askelon is Mark's estranged, teenaged son. A university drop-out, he is a skillful carpenter and a follower of Gideon's at Shrivings. Lois Neal is Gideon's young secretary, and another student of his pacifist philosophy. Mark arrives at Shrivings on the weekend before he and Gideon, his one-time teacher, are to receive awards for their separate contributions to humanist causes. The play gradually develops into a philosophical and moral debate between Mark and Gideon on the nature of man's improveability.

GIDEON: What do you know?

MARK: That the gospel according to Saint Gideon is a lie. That we as men cannot alter for the better in any particular way that matters. That we are totally and forever unimproveable.

GIDEON: No.

MARK: We will kill forever. We will persecute forever. We will break our lust forever on enemies we invent for the purpose.

GIDEON: No.

MARK: We are made of hostility as the spring is made of pollen. And each birth renews it, as the spring renews the year.

GIDEON: No.

MARK: Prove it.

GIDEON: Impossible. It is a faith, like others.[3]

David and Lois are caught in the middle of these exchanges, serving both as witnesses to and pawns in the struggle between the two men. Near the end of the first act, Mark makes an agreement with Gideon. He dares the older man to eject him from Shrivings before the weekend is over. Gideon agrees to Mark's challenge calmly insisting that he will never throw him out. Should Gideon hold to his word, Mark promises to give up his pessimistic outlook on life, and embrace the optimistic one that is Gideon's. As Act One closes:

MARK: You have no choice, now.

GIDEON: (amused): Oh my goodness.

MARK: Don't you know who I am?

GIDEON: Who?

MARK: The Ruffian with the pistol. Shoot me, and <u>YOU'RE</u> dead.

GIDEON: Peace, my friend.

MARK: Impossible. Battle has begun.[4]

Over the next two days, Mark systematically challenges Gideon's optimistic view of mankind. Gideon returns from one of his peace protests to find Mark cooking meat in Gideon's all-vegetarian kitchen. Later, at Mark's insistence, a game is played with apples. It is a kind of "torture" game, where Mark is the victim, while the others are given the opportunity both to "silence" him and inflict "pain" by squeezing certain apples. Mark proceeds to insult and berate Gideon, David and Lois, as they in turn commence to squeeze the various "pain" and "silence" apples. Mark relates the story of Enid, Gideon's ex-wife. Enid left Gideon years earlier after he decided he would give up sexual activity for the rest of his life. The real reason that Enid left, Mark claims, was because of her husband's hypocrisy. Mark says:

> Why do you imagine, Miss Neal, that your employer gave up sex? Because he found you ladies such a block on his path to virtue? Don't you know the only sex Gideon ever really enjoyed was with boys? . . . The world saw only a Great Renunciation on the grandest philosophic grounds: but not so Enid. All she saw was a self-accusing pederast pretending to be Gandhi.[5]

Finally, David can take no more. He seizes the "death apple", and smashes it down over and over again. Pieces fly about the room. David, Gideon and Lois obviously played right into Mark's hand. They have unwittingly given him with ample proof of man's natural tendency to

become violent. They have turned the tables on themselves. The next day, Mark seduces Lois, and succeeds in arousing Gideon's pent-up jealousies and frustrations. Gideon cannot believe that his beautiful young disciple has made love to the enemy. Despite all this, he holds fast to his part of the challenge. Mark's final act of outrage is thrust upon David. He tells David that he is not his own son, but rather the illegitimate result of his mother's infidelity. By the time the play ends, one learns that this is not true. Nevertheless, this lie is another of Mark's means to reveal to Gideon the unsympathetic character and ultimate imperfectability of man. The weekend is now over, and Mark is still firmly ensconced at Shrivings. Gideon has won the battle, and Mark declares himself a convert to the philosopher's optimistic and pacifist beliefs. But the price Gideon has paid for his new convert is enormous. Though winning the battle of Shrivings, Gideon has been revealed as a hypocrite, and has lost all conviction in man's self-improvement.

Before Mark arrives at Shrivings, Gideon firmly believes in the rightness of his peace protests, the virtue of his sexual abstinence, that his home is a place of refuge and penance, and in the return to such simple, worthier tasks as David's carpentry. Mark's appearance succeeds in shattering all of these beliefs. As a young man, Mark also had been a student of Gideon's. He was an aspiring poet with a lovely Greek wife who idolized him and a new baby son, David. But Giulia, Mark's wife, soon became gravely ill, and lost all of her pleasure and joy in life. So too did Mark. Watching Giulia suffer each day awakened him to the ugliness in life and within himself:

> I see a girl. I drive her back to the villa. I go up with her into your mother's room. She lying there, drinking Coca-Cola her favorite way, out of a bottle. Now barely able to speak, she turns to me with her usual smile for any new thing. The girl giggles. 'Don't be afraid,' I say. 'My wife enjoys this. Its for her we do it.' And so. Slowly. On the floor. At the foot of her bed from which she could not move. I saluted her with my ecstacies . . . she didn't live three weeks after that.[6]

After Giulia died David was sent away to boarding school, while his father went into seclusion with his poetry. Shortly after his arrival at Shrivings, Mark relates to the others an incident while in New York: watching a teen-age peace protester having his hair literally pulled out by a belligerant policeman:

> I remained at my lawyer's window, looking down at him. He sat there on the kerb looking up at me. We lasted like that forever. I mean, five minutes. Five centuries in another sense, until I saw him transformed to an earlier time, five hundred years at least, when Wall Street was just another granite ledge padded by Redskin feet, and he another human sack, holding its scalped head . . .

> Five hundred years and no change. Five thousand and still the identical horror.[7]

Seeing such things made Mark bitterly pessimistic toward any possibility of man's improveability. In his opinion, wars will go on forever and man's inherent urge to commit violence to his fellow men will never be satisfied. Lois and David's faith in Gideon's pacifism is tested, and found to be worthless. As the play ends, the old believer himself is forced to accept this agonizing truth.

The relationship between, and respective transformations of Mark and Gideon are at the center of Shrivings. Mark is the life-force of this drama. He embodies all that is sexual, artistic and emotional in man. In the course of the play, he becomes the object of Gideon's admiration and envy. Gideon sees in Mark the antithesis of his own passive and emotionally-restrained character.

Mark and Gideon can be seen as the separate halves of the same man: Mark represents man's aggressive side; Gideon his passive side. Their coming together in the process of battle represents a powerful spiritual and dramatic symbiosis. Their confrontation also results in a kind of neutralization of both forces. The ideals of both men have been tested and to a considerable extent been found worthless. What remains is a void of uncertainty over the future.

The debate between Mark and Gideon is conveyed in heavily philosophical terms. When the play was produced as The Battle of Shrivings on February 5, 1970 at London's Lyric Theatre, few of the critics felt the argument was coherent. Philip French of Plays and Players wrote "Mark and Gideon, having partially exchanged roles, are both equally-broken men."[8] Irving Wardle of The Times contributed the

best capsulization of the play's resolution:

> in reclaiming one lost sheep, Gideon has lost everything, including his own belief. The two antagonists simply change sides.[9]

As with The Royal Hunt of the Sun, certain critics did not believe the language and dialogue of The Battle of Shrivings was effective. Once again the critics were convinced that Shaffer's language failed to measure up to the seriousness of his subject. Irving Wardle thought the play's level of debate "might have been a good deal higher,"[10] and D. A. N. Jones of The Listener claimed that "the language and argument let the play down."[11] In a review entitled "Noisy Weekend", J. C. Trewin of The Illustrated London News, who six years earlier had thought Marlowe would have made a better play out of The Royal Hunt of the Sun, now wrote: "one is usually aware of Shaffer's presence behind it all, and wishing that the name could have been Shaw."[12] Indeed, with its levels of moral and ethical debate, Shrivings, in concept at least, is perhaps the most Shavian of Shaffer's plays. Critic Frederick Lumley elaborated on this point: "The Battle of Shrivings does not add to Shaffer's reputation; it merely suggests that Shavian situations require Shavian wit."[13] A number of critics felt Shaffer had modeled Gideon too closely upon the eminent philosopher Bertrand Russell, while Mark was perceived as a combination of Robert Graves and Dylan Thomas. D. A. N. Jones criticized Shaffer for attempting to place such formidably intellectual and artistic figures on the stage at once: "It is theoretically possible to write lines for Robert Graves or Bertrand Russell, but to try both looks like carelessness."[14] Unless, of course, the dramatist possesses the

carry it off. Language aside, The Battle of Shrivings drew exceptional reviews for its two leading performers. Sir John Gielgud played Gideon Petrie while Patrick Magee was Mark Askelon. Ronald Bryden of The Observer wrote of Magee: "His performance makes the play worth seeing,"[15] while Philip French praised the same actor's "persuasive charm and dominating performance."[16] French also liked the "serenity and benign authority"[17] which Gielgud brought to his part. J. C. Trewin wrote of Gielgud: "Nobody could show more truthfully the battle within Gideon's mind."[18] The production of The Battle of Shrivings also included the character of Enid Petrie, Gideon's wife. In one scene, Enid hands Gideon a powerful verbal thrashing, and it was she, not David, who lost control and smashed the "death" apple to pieces.[19] In the rewritten play Shrivings, Enid was removed, having already left Gideon years before. In his introduction to Shrivings Shaffer explains that he originally created Enid out of a fascination for the wife of Mahatma Gandhi. He had read how, at the age of forty, Gandhi informed his wife of his decision to give up all sexual activity, having come to recognize it as a source of aggression in himself: "I could not stop wondering about the reaction of Mrs. Gandhi."[20] Yet Shaffer decided:

> despite my speculations about Gandhi's wife I could not finally avoid the insistent conclusion that Enid was a dramatic cliche, and that the scene where she was finally struck by her husband was simply no fitting climax to the play.[21]

The unavailabity of the script for The Battle of Shrivings prevents a fuller assessment of Enid's character. However, the reviews

of the production fill in several gaps. Hilary Spurling of The Spectator described Enid as "doleful and distraught,"[22] while Philip French called her Gideon's "self-effacing wife"[23] and added: "Mark forces Enid to see that she has been deprived of self-realization by sacrificing herself to Gideon's career."[24] The fine actress Wendy Hiller played the role of Enid and earned excellent reviews. J. W. Lambert of Drama wrote: "the philosopher's wife, having endured twenty-seven years of childless chastity, gives Wendy Hiller a chance to exercise that pursued and measured disapproval of which she is a mistress."[25]

As with all of his plays, Shaffer was fortunate in having a director of considerable stature undertake The Battle of Shrivings; the man in this case, Peter Hall, drew mixed criticism for his handling of a difficult play. Whereas Ronald Bryden called Hall's direction "immaculate as usual,"[26] Hilary Spurling described Hall's efforts as "ponderous in the extreme."[27] Benedict Nightingale of The New Statesman exclaimed: "why a director of Peter Hall's calibre volunteered for this dramatic Waterloo I can't imagine."[28] In an interview with Plays and Players, Hall attempted to justify his decision to undertake The Battle of Shrivings.

> Shaffer was trying to do something ambitious and important - he had the courage to put a metaphysical argument on the stage in human terms. I was personally hurt about the critical reaction this provoked for Shaffer's sake.[29]

The Battle of Shrivings was Peter Shaffer's first (and to date, only) critical and commercial failure. It was, moreover, the only one

of his plays not to be immediately restaged in New York. In his Plays and Players interview, Peter Hall stated his wish that the play had been produced by a subsidized group such as the National Theatre or the Royal Shakespeare Company. Under such circumstances, the play's chance of a longer run would have been better enhanced; instead, it received a short run under a commercial management.[30]

This play is deeply dependent on its language and dialogue. But the ethical debate at its center is conveyed in an often ambiguous manner. The conclusion of the play is never wholly clarified. In Shrivings, Shaffer deliberately tried to increase and emphasize the effectiveness of his language through an ideological debate. But at its best, Shaffer's language is not a language of imagery or metaphor. Instead, it is straightforward and simple. The simple, and emotional qualities of the exchanges between Pizarro and Atahuallpa, and Dysart and Alan are integral to those plays' success. With its almost bare set of bone-white furniture, and limited physical action, The Battle of Shrivings is the least theatrical and least visually satisfying of Shaffer's works. Through The Battle of Shrivings, Shaffer revealed his shortcomings as a playwright. The dramatic power of The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Equus, and Amadeus lies in their fascinating combination of visual theatricality, language, and the compelling theme of a man in search of a God. Though thematically related to the other plays, The Battle of Shrivings attempted to do without the unique arts of the theatre which made the others so commercially - if not entirely critically successful. Because of those deficiencies, the play failed. In his Note on the Play Shaffer wrote:

> Other plays of mine had relied for their completion on elaborate stretches of physical action. In this one I wanted the electricity to be sparked almost exclusively from the spoken words.[31]

But as the reviews for The Battle of Shrivings indicate, a Shaffer play cannot work on language alone.

In his introduction to the published edition of Shrivings, Shaffer said his play dealt with "the idea of human improveability."[32] Shaffer wrote the play in New York City, and was deeply affected by the "baffling contradictions"[33] caused by such events as the peace protests, the war in Vietnam and the killing of students at Kent State University:

> Over and over I returned to the apparent truth that an absolute non-agressive position seems unattainable by man without the tangible loss of warmth and cherishable humanity (what warm man will spare the Ruffian with the Pistol threatening his beloved?).[34]

Though a disappointment on the stage in 1970, Shrivings remains, in print, an occasionally powerful play. Both Mark and Gideon are cleverly conceived characters, and their conflict is conveyed in strong verbal terms. As John Russell Taylor wrote, the rewritten version was "more consistent and intensified in its overall gesture."[35] But in spite of these improvements, one cannot compare the play's rather trivial milieu with the far more theatrical ones of The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Equus and Amadeus. Shrivings is a reflection of Shaffer as a

playwright in search of a director who can fully share his vision. This ambitious vision on the director's part is necessary in order to elevate Shaffer's prose and realize the theme in an imaginative and different way. It is precisely this kind of vision which Shrivings does not have.

Chapter 4

EQUUS

Equus is Peter Shaffer's most absorbing, most intense, and most ingenious play. It is a story about a crime of passion. This passion stems from a young man's capacity for obsessive worship. The play is also a mystery tale, as well as a psychological study and a brilliant piece of theatre. Like The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Equus reveals a wide range of theatrical resources and the expansive imagination of its author. Like all of Shaffer's major work, Equus invokes the playwright's theme of a man in search of a god, combined with the elements of love, hate, envy, worship and disillusionment. In Equus, Shaffer examines deeply the harrowing aspects and catastrophic consequences that accompany the defeat of man's quest for spiritual fulfillment. Equus is also the play which brought Shaffer - fifteen years after Five Finger Exercise - international renown. Prior to Amadeus in 1979, Equus was, critically and commercially, Shaffer's most successful play.

Martin Dysart, a psychiatrist, is the narrator and principal character of Equus. Dysart relates the story of the play in flashback, and his narrative carries the audience and reader through the action. He introduces scenes, plays in them, and reveals to the audience his views and deepest thoughts. Thus, the entire play is a re-enactment from Dysart's point of view of the experience of treating Alan Strang. Alan, a 17 year old boy, has with a hoof pick, gouged out the eyes of six horses. When the play begins, Hesther Salomon, a magistrate and a

close friend of Dysart's asks him to take Alan on as a patient. After hearing the nature of Alan's crime, the overworked Dysart reluctantly agrees to try and treat the boy. During the scenes that follow, Dysart questions Alan, his parents, and the stableowner in an attempt to piece together the nature of Alan's mind and discover what it was that led him to stab the horses.

In discussing the plot and theme of Equus, it is essential to understand the style in which the play was originally staged. The stage was laid out in the form of a three-sided arena, the fourth side opening out to the audience. A square wood-floored acting area surrounded by wooden railings, was situated in the center of the stage. On one side, behind the railings, sat the actors who would play Hesther, Alan's parents, Dalton the stableowner, Jill Mason the stable girl, and a nurse. These actors were in view of the audience for the entire performance. When required for a scene, they would simply step into the acting area, and when finished would return to their seats. In his description of the setting Shaffer wrote of these actors: "They are witnesses, assistants - and especially a Chorus."[2]

Upstage, behind the wooden square, sat members of the paying audience. During the play Dysart addressed them directly from time to time, as he addressed the main body of the theatre. No other actors ever referred to them. In the center of the square were three little plain benches, also made of wood. These benches (along with a yard-high metal pole that served as a support for the horse Nugget) were all that comprised this square wooden acting area, which served as Dysart's hospital office, the Strang home and the stables. Above the stage, overhead lighting created brightly lit scenes, as in a hospital,

amphitheatre or boxing ring.[3] With the audience and actors as witnesses and Dysart as conductor, the atmosphere of Equus is one of inquiry, and tense observation, as in a laboratory or operating room. This conception of staging has been the norm for all major productions of the play. It is the precise manner of staging as conceived by John Dexter and Shaffer.

As Equus proceeds, Dysart begins to uncover details of Alan's background and psyche. From Alan's father Frank, Dysart learns of the religious obsessions of Alan's mother Dora:

DYSART: Would you say she was closer to him than you are?

FRANK: They've always been thick as thieves. I can't say I entirely approve - especially when I hear her whispering that Bible to him hour after hour, up there in his room.

DYSART: Your wife is religious?

FRANK: Some might say excessively so. Mind you, that's her business. But when it comes to dosing it down the boy's throat - well . . . [4]

Frank himself has strong socialist convictions and is non-materialistic, and, among other things, he forbids television in the house. Secretly, Dora would allow Alan to slip to their neighbours and watch endless westerns on their television. Having been read fairy tales about a horse when he was very young and then becoming addicted to western films, Alan grew up with the horse as a constant source of imaginative

wonder. Then an incident of profound psychological significance occurred, which Alan and the other actors recreate for Dysart and the audience. While riding a horse for the first time as a young boy, Alan was belligerantly pulled off by his father, for no other apparent reason other than sheer anger. This event only increased Alan's desire to make the horse his single and most concentrated-upon object of devotion. A picture of the suffering Christ in Alan's bedroom is soon replaced by one of a compelling white horse. And after obtaining his weekend job at Dalton's stables, Alan is at last able to live out his passion by riding through an open field late at night, naked, every few weeks. The six horses of Equus comprise one of this play's most visually satisfying and theatrically effective elements. The performance of these "horses" represents an outstanding example of theatrical imagery and excellent stage choreography. Six male actors were each dressed in brown velvet, and on their feet wore four-inch high metal hooves. When required for a scene, they placed over their heads large masks of horse's heads, skeletal and transparent in design, constructed out of wire and leather.[5] In his introduction to the published text, Shaffer describes these masks as they appeared in the original production:

> . . . tough masks made of alternating bands of silver wire and leather; their eyes are outlined by leather blinkers. The actor's own heads are seen beneath them: no attempt should be made to conceal them.[6]

Shaffer also wrote of the masks:

> Great care must be taken that the masks are put on before the audience with very precise timing - the actors watching each other so that the masking has an exact and ceremonial effect.[7]

Upon entering the square wooden acting area, these actors-as-horses stood perfectly upright, with their hands held behind their backs. Through the expertly-rehearsed movement of their heads and necks, and the thunderous stamping of their hooves on the wood floor, the actors attempted to suggest the manners and presence of real horses.[8] As Shaffer specified in his introduction to the play:

> Any literalism which could suggest the cosy familiarity of a domestic animal - or worse, a pantomime horse - should be avoided. The actors never crouch on all fours, or ever bend forward.[9]

As he begins to understand the nature of Alan's obsessive worship, Dysart also comes to reconsider the nature and duties of his profession. He tells the audience of a "very explicit dream" he has had, in which he is an executioner, slicing up and ripping out the entrails of a large herd of children. This is a metaphor for the serious doubts which Dysart is starting to feel about his work:

> It's this unique talent for carving that has got me where I am. The only thing is, unknown to them [his helpers]; I've started to feel distinctly nauseous. And with each victim it's getting worse . . . and the implied doubt that this repetitive and smelly work is

> doing any social good at all - I will be the next across the stone.[10]

Dysart is also trapped in a loveless and childless marriage, and views his day-to-day existence as arid, callous and deprived of spirit. Three weeks of each year he Greece, and there partially fulfills his passion for Greek culture and history. In Alan Strang, Dysart encounters a sick young man who, in spite of his demented state, has come to know the meaning of true passion and worship. Alan's few hours in the fields astride the horse Nugget have in them more love, devotion and spiritual fulfillment than Dysart can begin to comprehend:

> I sit looking at pages of centaurs trampling the soil of Argos - and outside my window he [Alan] is trying to BECOME ONE in a Hampshire field![11]

Dysart comes to envy Alan enormously, perceiving in the boy a capacity and desire for life, and for emotional arousal which all of his picture-books and trips to Greece will never equal. With no friends, little schooling, and an ignorance of the outside world, Alan lives solely for his god, Equus. His rides on the horse are his ultimate moments of being, and most intense instances of emotional, spiritual and physical unity with his god. The eyes of Equus are perpetually cast on Alan, guiding and inspiring him - until, that is, the night with Jill in the stables.

As Equus approaches its climax, the dilemma that faces Dysart begins to weigh heavily in his mind. By curing Alan of the nightmares from which he suffers, and exorcising him of the memory of his crime, Dysart will also destroy Alan's capacity for passion and worship. No

more will Alan ride with his god Equus, and experience his ultimate state of emotional and spiritual fulfillment. The views of Dysart, and Shaffer, are highly personal ones. Society is seen as a repressive force which sets certain standards of normality from which Alan in his obsession has strayed. But it is vital to remember that Alan would not need to be cured if he had not committed his terrible crime. Society, in reality, does tolerate a certain amount of deviance - it merely demands a cure when a crime of Alan's magnitude is involved. Nevertheless, Dysart does not see society in this way: society, according to Dysart, demands its standards of normality at the price of man's passion. And as one of society's enforcers of normality, Dysart feels compelled to serve it:

> The Normal is the indispensable, murderous
> God of Health, and I am his priest.[12]

Dysart both shares and perceives Alan's passion. But his role as an "enforcer of normality" forbids him to prolong this experience. He knows he must ultimately cure Alan, destroy the boy's passion and at the same time stifling the best parts of himself. It isn't that Dysart is incapable of feeling but simply that his role in this repressive society forbids him to have these feelings.

With Jill and the horses, Alan re-enacts for Dysart - and the audience - the night of his attack on the horses. After seeing a pornographic film with Jill, at which he embarrasingly meets his father, Alan is led by the girl back to the stables and is seduced by her. In making love to Jill, Alan believes he has humiliated himself and betrayed his faith to his god. In terror, he screams:

> Eyes! . . . White eyes - never closed! Eyes like flames - coming, coming! God seest! God seest! . . . NO! . . .[13]

In crazed anger he yells at Jill to get out, grabs the hoof-pick and swiftly stabs out the eyes of each horse. The crime is re-lived, the nightmares end and the memories for Alan are gone. Though stripped of his life-enhancing passions, Alan is now fit to resume a place in society. He lies exhausted on a bench, as Dysart turns to the audience one last time. It is now that Dysart admits his own spiritual destruction. He, too, is now blinded and doomed to an interminable groping in the dark. He is destined to search for a light, and for an understanding of why he must do what he does. Until then, Dysart remains chained to society's repressive standards of normality.

> In an ultimate sense I cannot know what I do yet I do ultimate things. Essentially I cannot know what I do, yet I do essential things. Irreversible terminal things. I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking at heads! I need, more desperately than my children need me, a way of seeing in the dark. What way is this? . . . What dark is this? . . . I cannot call it ordained of God. I can't get that far. I will however pay it so much homage. There is now, in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out.[14]

As with William Prescott's obscure footnote that led him to the writing of The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Shaffer's point of departure for

Equus sprang from one momentary and unforgettable image. In 1971 Shaffer heard from a friend the bare outline of an actual incident involving a boy somewhere in England who had blinded a number of horses. This friend died a short time later, and Shaffer, despite his efforts, was unable to uncover any more details regarding the incident.[15] In his note on the play he writes:

> . . . it was enough to arouse in me an intense fascination . . . I knew very strongly that I wanted to interpret it in some personal way. I had to create a mental world in which the deed could be made comprehensible.[16]

Shaffer spent two years writing Equus, during which he talked with several psychiatrists, delved into animal and child psychology and examined the nature of horses as religious and sexual symbols.[17]

Equus was first presented by the National Theatre at London's Old Vic on July 26, 1973. It was directed by John Dexter and designed by John Napier. Along with The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Black Comedy, Equus was the third of Shaffer's plays to be produced by the National Theatre. Mixed reviews greeted the new play: "Sensationally good"[18] wrote Michael Billington of The Guardian and "Mr. Shaffer proves himself a very daring boy," added Harold Hobson of The Sunday Times.[19] Robert Cushman of The Observer praised the play's theatrical elements, but also wrote "taken realistically, the play is a dud."[20] Kenneth Hurren of The Spectator concurred: "Equus is a play to be seen, if only to be disbelieved."[21]

The critics commented highly favorably on Napier's set design. J. W. Lambert of Drama described the horse-masks and high hooves as

containing "an unearthly beauty."[22] Irving Wardle of The Times wrote of the actors-as-horses: "they fill the theatre with the sense of a potent and ancient force returning to life."[23] The best summation of Napier's achievement was written by Helen Dawson of Plays and Players:

> skeptics who question the wisdom of getting a stable-load of horses onto the stage without a lot of clobber will be silenced by John Napier's beautiful, spare, skeletal silver horses' heads, and the clanging hooves on which they rest their legs like tired ballerinas.[24]

Martin Dysart and Alan Strang were portrayed by Alec McCowen and Peter Firth. Both actors received outstanding plaudits from the London critics. McCowen drew excellent comments as the anguished and introspective psychiatrist: "A mixture of steely impatience and faltering humanity"[25] wrote Helen Dawson, and "played on a knife-edge of professional skill and personal disgust"[26] exclaimed Irving Wardle. As Alan, Peter Firth received similar praise: "Peter Firth brings tremendous nervous energy and lyricism"[27] wrote Wardle, while J. W. Lambert added: "Peter Firth exactly conveyed the measure of the boy's tousled misery."[28] The role of Dora Strang provided actress Jeanne Watts with one memorable, emotionally-charged speech. This moment occurs immediately following a heated exchange between Alan and his mother at the hospital. Dora then hands another verbal lashing to Dysart:

> Let me tell you something. We're not criminals. We've done nothing wrong. We loved Alan. We

> gave him the best love we could . . . No doctor. Whatever's happened has happened because of Alan. Alan is himself . . . What I did in there was inexcusable. I only know he was my little Alan, and then the Devil came.[29]

J. W. Lambert described Ms. Watts' rendering of her passionate speech as "a fine outburst against the easy universal tendency to put all the blame for a child's errors on the parents."[30]

Robert Cushman pointed out that Shaffer's prose in Equus ranged from "fair to indifferent",[31] while Helen Dawson wrote: "The imagery is undeniably powerful, though the language rarely rises to it."[32] These comments recall the weaknesses also attributed to The Royal Hunt of the Sun and especially The Battle of Shrivings. In the case of both these plays, the critics felt the language failed to measure up to Shaffer's vision. With The Royal Hunt of the Sun, the critics were nevertheless captivated by the play's ingenious and exciting theatrical style. With Shrivings, Shaffer minimized the play's theatricality and thrust all his energies into the argument and dialogue thus meeting with disaster from the critics. In Equus, Shaffer returns to the combination of serious theme and exciting theatrical style which worked successfully in The Royal Hunt of the Sun. It is a return to the kind of play Shaffer writes best, which offers the most imaginative staging possibilities, and which has resulted in much critical and commercial success. Equus reinforces the critics' view of Shaffer as a creator of serious well-expressed, though undistinguished dialogue and innovative, visually compelling theatrical images. Michael Billington considered Equus a better play than The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Shrivings "if

only because the intellectual argument and the poetic imagery are indivisible."[33]

In an interview with The New York Times Magazine in 1975, Shaffer paid considerable credit to the director of Equus, John Dexter. It was Dexter, said Shaffer, who decided on the basic set design, the idea of actors playing horses inside wire masks, the nude love scene between Alan and Jill and many other production details. In his early drafts of Equus, Shaffer had employed a straightforward, chronological time scheme. But it was Dexter who suggested a technique of cutting back and forth in time as a way of "cooling and containing"[34] the horror of Alan's crime, and to give the play a lecture-hall atmosphere. The artistic relationship between Shaffer and Dexter is both fruitful and unique. In every one of Shaffer's plays that he has directed, Dexter has shared the playwright's dramatic vision. In The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus, Dexter found outstanding theatrical metaphors for presenting Shaffer's theme. In The Royal Hunt of the Sun, the most compelling physical symbol was the sun itself.

In Equus, the actors-as-horses, the arena style staging and re-enactment of significant incidents from Alan's past contribute to the theme's realization. The rehearsal process of a Shaffer-Dexter production is an experience of mutual imaginative stimulation for both author and director. Dexter uses Shaffer's script as his starting point, and, with the playwright's aid, begins to create out of the written images an effective theatrical realization. This very special relationship, based on a sharing of vision, works to the benefit of both artists. The result is a play where the language and action become indivisible.[35] Both the playwright and director are equally

responsible for the ultimate creation of Equus. To emphasize this point, two important comments are worth citing: Irving Wardle of The Times wrote: "Not for the first time Shaffer owes whatever numinous results he does achieve to his director."[36] Equally valid is a remark by Robert Cushman in The Observer: "though one's first impulse, as with The Royal Hunt of the Sun, is to give the credit to the director and choreographer, this is probably unfair; the images they so stunningly flesh out were Mr. Shaffer's first."[37]

At the center of Equus lies the important relationship between Dysart and Alan. In Alan, Dysart recognizes the most powerful embodiment of passion, love, and worship he has ever known. Dysart's own passions for Greece pale alongside the intense feelings Alan has for his god Equus. Dysart confronts Alan at a time when he is most vulnerable to his need for worship and eternal faith. In his own way, Alan sees into the psychiatrist's tortured spirit, and through various means succeeds in drawing Dysart nearer to him. When Alan relives one of his rides through the fields and, later on, the events with Jill and the horses in the stable, opportunities are provided for Dysart to experience and share Alan's passion thus making it, momentarily, his own. Michael Billington saw the relationship of the two men as the true focus of Equus, and commented on the play's concern with passion and society's view of normality:

> the real concern is with the relationship between the doctor and the boy . . . the doctor realizes that by restoring the boy to normality he is in fact killing the motivating force of his life.[38]

In his review, Kenneth Hurren described the enormous envy on Dysart's part, in discovering what he most desires in Alan:

> a strange jealousy of the passions ignited in Alan by horses, and of the ecstasy that he himself never found, either in his contemplation of God or in his love of women.[39]

The issue of emotional restraint versus limitless passion is embodied in the conflict between Dysart and Alan, and serves as the heart of Equus. Dysart's agonized speeches about his professional and personal lives shed light on his tormented and hungry spirit. Dysart is thirsting for passion, as well as a source of intense devotion. He would willingly sacrifice all he has for just one of Alan's ecstatic rides on his horse at night. Alan Strang is also a tormented, hungering spirit. Having been deprived and grown ignorant of society's conventional sources of devotion - women, literature, television, education - Alan is compelled to find his own personal source of passion, and his own god. "For the second time in a Shaffer play," wrote Robert Cushman, "Man meets God."[41] The theme of Equus was also well summarized by Harold Hobson:

> the play is about the capacity for worship, the realization of the supernatural, the transcendence of material things without which in Mr. Shaffer's Dionysiac, religious, ecstatic view, life is empty and hollow.[42]

Equus opened at the Plymouth Theatre in New York on October 24, 1974. It was produced by Kermit Bloomgarden and Doris Cole Abrahams. As in London, the director and designer respectively, were John Dexter

and John Napier. American critics gave much praise to the play. Clive Barnes of The New York Times called Equus "a very fine and enthralling play,"[43] and Jack Kroll of Newsweek exclaimed: "as pure theatre, Equus is not to be missed."[44]

Peter Firth recreated his role of Alan Strang in New York and drew excellent comments for his performance. Henry Hewes of The Saturday Review wrote: "Peter Firth makes the furtive and insolent Alan into an ultimately sympathetic victim."[45] T. E. Kalem of Time added: "Peter Firth makes Alan a fallen angel of anguish."[46] The role of Martin Dysart was portrayed in New York by British actor Anthony Hopkins, who earned outstanding reviews. "Sweeping professionalism,"[47] claimed Harold Clurman of The Nation, and "a virtuoso performance gauged to a fraction,"[49] added Clive Barnes. T. E. Kalem wrote "Anthony Hopkins' psychiatrist is a tour de force that should make any other Tony Award contender blanch." Within a few years, the role of Dysart became one of the most coveted parts in contemporary theatre, and was subsequently played by such actors as Colin Blakely, Brian Bedford, Anthony Perkins, Len Cariou, Douglas Campbell, Kenneth Haigh and Richard Burton. As Dora Strang, Clurman saw in Frances Sternhagen's performance "a forthright and touching truthfulness."[51]

Both Dexter and Napier drew equally enthusiastic reviews. Henry Hewes wrote: "a great part of the play's success comes from its boldly innovative staging."[52] Brendan Gill of The New Yorker exclaimed: "Equus is directed with an energy that threatens to lift the Plymouth Theatre one hundred feet into the air over 45th Street - not the worst place in the world for a theatre to be."[53] T. E. Kalem wrote of the actors-as-horses: "they have such hieratic dignity and beauty, that a

special citation should be awarded to John Napier."[54]

The majority of New York critics recognized the conflict between emotional restraint and limitless passion that comprised the Dysart-Alan relationship. Brendan Gill pointed out the polarity of Dysart's and Alan's positions:

> he [Dysart] discovers that the boy, sick as he seemingly is, has had the joy of passion greater than any that the doctor himself has ever felt.[55]

Gill went on to describe the consequences of curing Alan, namely the destruction of the young man's passion for the sake of society's standard of normality:

> If Dysart cures the boy, it will be at the expense of that passion, which the doctor envies and would like to share.[56]

Harold Clurman pointed out the measures that Dysart is compelled to take, and the way these actions reflect back upon himself:

> Dysart may be eliminating what is actually creative in the boy, at the same time freezing his own best impulses.[57]

Together with the enormous success and renown which Equus brought to Shaffer in America, the play also exposed him to a number of startling and even alarming criticisms. One unidentified reviewer suggested that Equus was no more than an overdone closet-homosexual drama, where the stables represented a gay bath-house and the horses six virile studs.[58] The implication was emphasized, wrote this reviewer, by Alan's inability to consummate his sexual intercourse with Jill. In a 1975 interview, Shaffer responded to these remarks. In order to

create the awesome image of animal power, he explained, it is absolutely necessary that the horses be played by men, rather than women.[59] As for Alan's inability to fulfill his lovemaking with Jill, Shaffer said:

> The boy is unable to have sex with the girl not because of the image of another man in his mind, but quite literally of a horse.[60]

Shaffer also defended the use of total nudity in this love scene, and in Alan's subsequent stabbing of the horses. Since this scene is vital to Dysart's curing of Alan, it is necessary to show the boy physically as well as mentally stripped. In a 1980 television interview, Shaffer said the scene was meant to be anti-erotic, or "clinical", enhanced by the gradual increase in bright white light upon the naked figures of Alan and Jill. Alan's total nakedness as he screams "Find me! Find me! . . .," after he stabs the horses, is a metaphor for the total stripping away of his passion. In Shaffer's opinion, the end of Act One, where a fully-clothed Alan recreates for Dysart his ride with the horse, constitutes the true erotic moment of Equus.[61]

Another major criticism of Equus was that the play represented a defense of insanity, and that Dysart's revealing speeches to the audience reflected a severe undermining of psychiatric practice. The main proponent of this view was Dr. Sanford Gifford of the Harvard University Medical School. Dr. Gifford charged Shaffer with resorting to pretension, banality and clever theatrical tricks in order to satisfy the public's desire to know more about the private life of psychiatrists.[62] These allegations angered Shaffer even more than those that called Equus closet-homosexual drama. In his 1975 New York

Times Magazine interview, Shaffer answered Dr. Gifford by emphasizing the amount of research that had gone into the play, particularly his discussions with one eminent London child psychiatrist. This psychiatrist - whose name Shaffer does not disclose - read the completed script of Equus and endorsed it fully. He had even said to Shaffer: "You don't imagine, do you, that psychiatrists of intelligence don't entertain these doubts all the time, sometimes to the point of extreme anguish?"[63] In his television interview, Shaffer remarked with a wry wit: "In London the play was controversial because it was allegedly cruel to horses. In New York the play was controversial because it was allegedly cruel to psychiatrists."[64] Shaffer also spoke of his general skepticism concerning psychiatrists, who he said "try to unlock all the doors with the same key."[65]

Nevertheless, several New York theatre critics had difficulty accepting Shaffer's portrait of a modern-day psychiatrist. Harold Clurman expressed his concern with what he perceived as the play's message: "Equus is an echo of the new cant: that the schizophrenic is closer to the truth than the ordinary citizen."[66] Clurman looked upon this attitude as "bogus" and added that "Dysart must be cured of his faulty reasoning."[67] In similar fashion, Jack Kroll of Newsweek wrote:

> R. D. Laing [psychiatrist and writer] suggested that he would include radical social action as part of his therapeutic armoury . . . this is a serious element that is missing in Dysart's view, which stops at self-pity.[68]

The coming together of Alan and Dysart is significantly more compelling, emotionally wrenching, and of greater consequence than that of Clive and Walter in Five Finger Exercise and Gideon and Mark in

Shrivings. The images of passion invoked by Alan, and the portrait of frustration and disillusionment represented by Dysart are both exceedingly vivid. At stake in Equus is not only the realization of a god, but also the permanent mental condition of a young man, the fundamentals of psychiatric practice, and the conflict between society's definition of normality and man's natural need for worship. The coming together of Alan and Dysart does however recall the highly-moving and symbiotic relationship between Pizarro and Atahuallpa in The Royal Hunt of the Sun. In the end, Dysart, like Pizarro, is spiritually destroyed. In his curing of Alan, he has removed his last opportunity to grasp spiritual fulfillment. As a result of the conforming and strangling rules of the society in which he exists, Dysart emerges from his experience more disillusioned and more blind than ever before.

Chapter 5

AMADEUS

In 1782, composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote to his father Leopold:

> You wonder how I can flatter myself that I shall be maestro to the Princess? Why, Salieri is not capable of teaching her the clavier! All he can do is to ignore me in this matter by recommending someone else, which quite possibly he is doing![1]

In 1786, Leopold wrote to Mozart's sister:

> I know that very powerful cabals have arranged themselves against your brother. Salieri and all his supporters will again try to move heaven and earth to down his [Mozart's] opera.[2]

The feelings and suspicions recorded in these passages, as well as in many other letters and documents of the period, helped to provide the historical basis for Peter Shaffer's play, Amadeus. Amadeus is a drama which brings together two of the most successful, and most different musical personalities of the eighteenth century. The encounter between the rival composers Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Antonio Salieri serves as the vehicle for Shaffer's persistent theme of a man in search for a god. The tension of this encounter is enhanced through portraits of envy, admiration, and worship. Amadeus also contains several major dramatic flaws, among them a poorly conceived

climax. But in terms of its production style, the play is a lavish spectacle for the eye and the ear, and revolves around two bold, egocentri , and dramatically powerful characters.

nadeus is set in Vienna and deals with the last ten years of Moza life, from 1781 to 1791. But the play is also set in another time. The year is 1823, and 71 year-old Antonio Salieri - the narrator and principal character of the play - is recalling the events involving Mozart at the Viennese Court. The audience is watching a series of flashbacks, told from Salieri's point of view. Salieri has a special reason for telling this story. He claims to have slowly poisoned Mozart to death, and asks the audience to serve as his witnesses and judges. This idea is based upon the theory that the real Salieri - shortly before his death in 1825 - spread the rumor that he was responsible for the death of the former child prodigy Mozart. This was noted by Beethoven, a pupil of Salieri, in his diary:

> Salieri keeps claiming that he is guilty of Mozart's death, and made away with him by poison.[3]

But immediately before his death, as Shaffer explained, Salieri suddenly denied these rumors and confided in a friend to tell everyone that he did not murder Mozart. It has never been verified whether Salieri did or did not start the rumor himself, nor were his claims of responsibility for Mozart's death ever proved. Yet the possiblity of such an incident enhanced by the antagonism, well-documented in the historical record, between the two composers, along with the mysterious circumstances surrounding Mozart's funeral provided Shaffer with the points of departure from which to create Amadeus.[4]

Amadeus opens with the appearance of two characters known as the Venticelli, or as Salieri calls them, the "little winds."[5] These men are Salieri's personal gossip-mongers, and serve no other purpose than to appear periodically to inform their employer of important or secretive matters involving Mozart and the Viennese Court. Their function also includes spreading rumors on Salieri's behalf, so that in the beginning they are seen and heard circulating the rumor that Salieri had murdered Mozart. In close-cropped grey hair and shabby dressing-gown, Salieri sits alone on the bare stage and addresses the audience for the first time. He recalls his youthful desire to be a composer, and of the bargain he struck long ago with his god to serve as his voice through music.

> Signore, let me be a composer! Grant me sufficient fame to enjoy it. In return I will live a life of virtue. I will strive to better the lot of my fellows. And I will honor you with much music all the days of my life![6]

Beckoning the audience to bear witness, Salieri removes his dressing-gown, revealing a handsome outfit of the eighteenth century, dons a powdered wig, and commences to speak in the voice of a man thirty years younger. Salieri and the audience are now transported back to the year 1781: the stage is set for the appearance of Mozart.

Salieri first encounters Mozart in the library of Baroness Waldstadlen, a gathering place for artists and politicians. Salieri is shocked to discover that the famous composer is no mature, eloquent, young man, but rather childish, unkempt, and foul-mouthed. The irony

for Salieri of this revelation is that musical genius could derive from the mind of an "obscene child":

MOZART: Hey - Hey - What's Trazom?

CONSTANZE: What?

MOZART: T-R-A-Z-O-M. What's that mean?

CONSTANZE: How should I know?

MOZART: It's Mozart spelt backwards, shit-wit! If you ever married me you'd be Constanze Trazom.

CONSTANZE: No I wouldn't.

MOZART: Yes, you would. Because I'd want everything backwards once I was married. I'd want to lick my wife's arse instead of her face.[7]

This encounter also marks the first time Salieri hears his rival's music. The effect upon Salieri is shattering. He bolts feverishly across the stage, realizing for the first time the awesome imagination of Mozart's music, and the terrible inferiority of his own. Later on, Salieri and Mozart are formally introduced by the Austrian Emperor Joseph II. Salieri plays a short Welcome March on the fortepiano as Mozart enters. Before the scene ends, Mozart replays this March totally from memory, and transforms it from the trite piece it was to something of musical brilliance. Salieri begins to understand that Mozart is unlike any other composer he has ever known. And at this point, Salieri begins to contemplate the thought of murder.

By having Salieri, rather than Mozart or a third party, as the

narrator of Amadeus, Shaffer manages to present a highly personal view of history. Salieri, not Mozart, was the more popular composer in late eighteenth century Vienna. Salieri was the official Court Composer to the Emperor, served as a tutor to such musicians as Beethoven and Schubert, and achieved considerably more prosperity and fame in his lifetime than Mozart ever did.[8] Mozart's works, The Marriage of Figaro, The Magic Flute, and Don Giovanni met with little success when they were first performed. These operas became famous only after Mozart had died. Salieri's works, on the other hand, were all initially well-received, but fell into oblivion during Salieri's last few years of life. Since Salieri is the narrator of Amadeus, everything and everyone is seen through his eyes: the infantile Mozart, his promiscuous and equally childlike wife Constanze, Salieri's own plump, matronly wife, and the Emperor Joseph II:

> The Emperor Joseph the Second of Austria.
> Son of Maria Therese. Brother of Maria
> Antoinette. Adorer of music, provided that
> it made no demands on the royal brain.[9]

The most significant reason for Salieri as narrator is that he alone, of all the members of Vienna's musical hierarchy, recognizes the genius of Mozart's work, and its vast superiority over his own. In his bargain with God, Salieri had asked for fame and excellence in music. Salieri does achieve fame and excellence, but this excellence is in the eyes of everyone but himself. This is the element which fuels Salieri's envy, rage, and his ultimate decision to do away with his far superior rival.

"The Night of the Manuscripts" is the scene in which Salieri and

the audience hear Mozart's music rise off the sheets which have been brought to Salieri by Constanze. Salieri is emotionally and spiritually devastated. He realizes now that Mozart, and not himself, is the true Voice of God, and that his pledge to a life of virtue and honesty in exchange for musical gifts has been in vain. The most remarkable aspect of these manuscripts is that they are original scores, without any signs of corrections. Salieri remarks:

> It was puzzling, then suddenly alarming.
> What was evident was that Mozart was simply
> transcribing music - completely finished in
> his head. And finished as most music is
> never finished.[10]

In an interview, Shaffer likened Mozart to God's "secretary", a man who conceived - through divine inspiration - and composed entire symphonies and operas in his mind, and then went through the rather tiresome task of putting it all down on paper.[11] More than any other scene in Amadeus, "The Night of the Manuscripts" is surely the clearest indication in the play of Mozart's genius, and of the essential difference between him and Salieri.

In anguish, Salieri revokes his bargain with God. God, in Salieri's view, has not kept his part of the agreement:

> 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, infantine,

conceited Mozart![12]

As the first act of Amadeus comes to an end, Salieri slips on his powdered wig, places once more the old dressing gown about his shoulders and returns to his older self. Before leaving the stage, he forewarns the audience of the battle to come:

When I return I'll tell you about the war
I fought with God through his preferred
creature - Mozart, named AMADEUS. In the
waging of which, of course, the creature had
to be destroyed.[13]

In Act Two, Salieri proceeds gradually to destroy Mozart. As a result of Salieri's subtle and malicious manipulations, Mozart is deprived of any pupils, and his musical works are virtually ignored by the Viennese musical elite. But for one brief moment, Shaffer puts aside Mozart's unpleasant character, as Mozart and a court official argue over the meaning of opera. This moment represents Mozart's single burst of genuine eloquence in the play, and effectively realizes the composer's musical imagination and ingenuity:

Opera is realer than any play! A dramatic
poet would have to put all those thoughts down
one after another to represent this second of
time . . . Astonishing device: A vocal quartet!
I tell you I want to write a finale lasting half
an hour! 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. That's our job, we composers: to combine the inner minds of him and him, and her and her - the thoughts of chambermaids and court composers - and turn the audience into God.[14]

Mozart's speech, with its brilliant combination of candour and insight, is the only occasion in Amadeus when the audience can grasp Mozart's feelings about music without the intrusion of Salieri. The rest of the play however, is completely dominated by Salieri. Salieri is the one who, with his running commentary, sets the pattern and mood of nearly every scene. In one of the most moving moments of the play, all the characters are watching and listening to Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro. Salieri, as is his fate, must undergo the agony of being the only one on stage to recognize this opera's true worth:

> Could one catch a greater moment? And how except in a net of pure artifice? The disguises of opera had been invented for Mozart (he can barely look out at the 'stage'). The final reconciliation melted sight. Through my tears I saw the Emperor yawn.[15]

Mozart's life continues to degenerate. His financial situation worsens, and his wife and children leave him. His opera The Magic Flute enrages the Society of Freemasons, on whom its story is based. Finally, an unknown patron, later identified as a Count Walsegg commissions the desperate young man to compose for him a Requiem Mass. Seizing on a chance to deliver the final death blow, Salieri dons a cloak and mask of grey, and as a figure of Death, appears before Mozart's window each

night in an effort to drive him insane. At the climax of the play, Salieri confronts Mozart, and permits him to remove the mask. Beckoning Mozart to die, Salieri then swiftly withdraws, as the half-crazed Mozart collapses into the arms of his returned Constanze. Mozart dies the following morning. Upon his death certificate is written "kidney failure, hastened by exposure to cold."[16]

Amadeus does not have the emotional development and the setting up of a tense confrontation from which a powerful climax can emerge. There is no balance of conflict contained in the encounters between Salieri and Mozart. Salieri carries out his slow destruction of his rival methodically, and with no opposition. Missing are the dramatic tension and exciting visual and emotional elements which made Pizarro's tender cradling of Atahuallpa's body, and Alec Strang's blinding of the horses so moving and meaningful. The climax of Amadeus - Mozart's removal of Salieri's mask - is dramatically ineffective. It is merely another tedious step in Salieri's process of destruction. For these reasons, Amadeus possesses the weakest climax of any of Shaffer's major plays.

The battle, in any case, is now over. The voice of God has been stopped. But Salieri must pay a terrible price for his victory. Salieri's price is his personal knowledge that his own music will never reach the heights scaled effortlessly by the Mozart. In his old age, Salieri is forced to see Mozart's music revived and become immortal. At the same time, Salieri is condemned to watch his own achievements fade gradually into oblivion. At one point Salieri states the essential difference between himself and Mozart:

> We were both ordinary men, he and I. Yet he from the ordinary created legends - and I from legends created the ordinary.[17]

As Amadeus draws to an end, Salieri, now returned to old age, addresses the audience one last time. He insists that, in claiming responsibility for Mozart's death, he has at last achieved the fame, albeit notoriety, which life deprived him of as an artist. The "Patron Saint of Mediocrities," as he proclaims himself, Salieri cuts his throat in an attempt at suicide. He then beckons his audience one last time:

> Mediocrities everywhere - now and to come - I absolve you all! Amen.[18]

As the light fades, the Masonic Funeral music of Mozart is heard throughout the theatre.

The original sets for Amadeus, designed by John Bury, were highly successful in recreating the atmosphere of Vienna's musical circles. An extensive description of Bury's design was set down by Shaffer in his preface to the play's published edition:

> The set consisted basically of a handsome rectangle of patterned wood, its longest sides leading away from the viewer, set into a stage of ice-blue plastic. The rectangle largely represented interiors: Salieri's salon, Mozart's last apartment, assorted reception rooms and opera houses. At the back stood a grand proscenium sporting gilded cherbus blowing trumpets and supporting curtains of sky blue. Into this space superb

> backdrops were flown, and superb projections were thrown to show the scarlet boxes of theatres, the black shape of the guillotine or a charming white Masonic Lodge copied from a plate . . . this wonderful upstage space, which was in effect an immense Rococo peepshow will be referred to [in the text] as the 'Light Box'.[19]

The set also included Salieri's ever-present cake-stand, the wheelchair in which he sat as his older self, and a fortepiano. Suspended above the stage was a large chandelier consisting of many globes of opaque glass. The period costumes were both accurate and sumptuous, while changes in time and place were indicated throughout merely by changes in light.[20] This elaborate stage design emphasized the period of Mozart and Salieri, and created a strong sense of the society and conditions in which they experience their antagonism.

Wolfgang Mozart is the life-force of Amadeus. His sexual, verbal and artistic athleticism is sharply contrasted with the emotional restraint and propriety of Salieri. An irony of the play lies in Mozart being the man of genius, and Salieri the man of mediocrity. Mozart is the vessel in which Salieri's object of worship - music - is found. Initially, Salieri thinks of himself as the true life force, and Voice of God. But following "The Night of the Manuscripts," which is the turning point of Amadeus, all of Salieri's remaining passion is swept up into one enormous purpose: revenge upon the God who has betrayed him. The once benevolent, model gentleman of Viennese society now lives only for the destruction of God's Voice - Mozart. Salieri's act of

destruction is motivated by intense jealousy and frustration as well as loss of faith. Salieri is the most malicious of Shaffer's God destroyers. His actions spring solely out of envy and feelings of betrayal. It is in this way that he differs from his counterparts in Shaffer's plays. Pizarro, Gideon, and Dysart all act out of demands made upon them by their respective social and physical environments. They must destroy their gods in order to uphold the standards of the societal order which they represent. Pizarro must sacrifice Atahuallpa in order to ensure the safety of his soldiers. Gideon sees himself as a symbol of man's improveability, optimism and hope. To maintain his convictions, Gideon must impose them on Mark, at the cost of his own self-esteem. As one of society's appointed enforcers of normality, Martin Dysart must exorcise the god in Alan and deprive himself and the boy forever of life's passion.

Salieri's encounter with Mozart takes on the form of a declared war. Although he succeeds in destroying Mozart, Salieri emerges from Amadeus far from being a victor. In the long term, he fails to halt the recognition of Mozart's musical genius. Mozart's music survives both the young composer from whom it sprang and the malevolent rival who sought to destroy it. This is the play's other, more cruel irony. The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Shrivings and Equus each conclude with an image of a sympathetic destroyer, a man who is as much victimized as he whom he destroys. But Amadeus ends with a portrait of a selfish and evil man who sees all his efforts done in vain. Salieri is a wholly evil destroyer of divinity who receives a proper and enduring punishment. In an interview with The New York Times, Shaffer spoke of Salieri and his dilemma:

> He was a nice man who suddenly found
> himself in the presence of sublimity
> created by a person who was next to an
> idiot in the other things in life.
> Therefore Salieri was finished with God.
> God had not held his side of the bargain.[21]

Two mysterious and significant facts formed the germ from which Shaffer commenced to write Amadeus. Shaffer first became intrigued by the story of the mysterious Count Walsegg, the man who reputedly requested Mozart to write a Requiem Mass. Later it was learned that the Count had hoped to have the Mass passed off as his own creation. In his communications with Mozart, the Count had always relied upon an intermediary, whose identity has never been known, though he may well have been the Count's servant. The mystery surrounding this unknown messenger motivated Shaffer to employ the premise that it was Salieri - bent on driving Mozart to madness - who was this messenger, donning a great cloak, tri-cornered hat and mask in order to haunt his rival to death.[22] The second idea which inspired Shaffer to write Amadeus derived fom the historical belief that a terrible thunderstorm had raged through Vienna on the day of Mozart's funeral in 1791, and that for this reason, most of the mourners never reached the grave site. Shaffer then came across a report of the weather records for that year and discovered that on the day of Mozart's burial there was no thunderstorm at all. Shaffer was struck by the fiction of a falsified weather report, and wondered whether a possible conspiracy had existed. Had the precise location of Mozart's grave been deliberately kept secret in order to prevent an exhumation and post-mortem? Was someone being protected?

Was this someone Antonio Salieri?[23] In a 1980 interview, Shaffer said:

> The cold eyes of Salieri were staring at me, and what had started as idle speculation about a seemingly sinister set of circumstances began to acquire quite other dimensions.[24]

Amadeus was first performed by the National Theatre in London on November 2, 1979. It was directed by Peter Hall and designed by John Bury. Paul Scofield played Salieri, with Simon Callow as Mozart and Felicity Kendal as Constanze. The rest of the cast was made up of thirty-two members of the National Theatre Company. The play received mixed reviews from the critics: "A genuinely thoughtful and moving play, of a kind all too rare,"[25] wrote Francis King of The Sunday Telegraph. J. C. Trewin of The Illustrated London News described Amadeus as "a narrative in terms unflinchingly theatrical."[26] The play's detractors included John Barber of The Daily Telegraph who thought the play "used too many words,"[27] and Benedict Nightingale of The New Statesman who felt "without Scofield to rivet and mesmerize us, Mr. Shaffer's lavish argosy would simply sink."[28]

Several critics mentioned the flawed structure and disappointing climax of Amadeus. Michael Billington of The Guardian found the play's first act "exquisitely gripping",[29] but then complained that Shaffer had once again "bolstered his work of recorded fact with his usual metaphysical confrontation between Envious Mediocrity and Harassed God."[30] Polly Toynbee of The Spectator thought Act One was "crisp and enjoyable",[31] most effective in its "powerful image of the

arbitrariness of God's grace."[32] But in Act Two, the play collapsed: "With still two more hours to run, the play has nothing more to say."[33] Similar feelings were voiced by Steve Grant of The Observer, who described Mozart's unmasking of Salieri as "a letdown; it fails to attain the proceedings of pure, enduring tragedy."[35]

The level of language in Amadeus is, with respect to the compelling historical personages at hand, and to the essence of Shaffer's theme, very weak and uninteresting. The language is also inferior to that employed in Shaffer's Equus and The Royal Hunt of the Sun. The language and dialogue in Amadeus lacks any profound intelligence or wit. The encounters between Mozart and Salieri come across as tiresomely simplistic. This weak and far-from-believable level of debate contributes to the weakness of the play's climax. The emotional development, between the two adversaries does not exist. The major portion of Amadeus consists of Salieri's narration and his intrusive asides to the audience. In this way, Amadeus tends to be less about a confrontation of two men, than an expose of one character - Salieri. It becomes more a play about the nature of mediocrity, than about mediocrity's encounter with genius. These opinions are reinforced by the comments of various critics: Martin Esslin wrote in Plays and Players that "neither the form nor the language is up to its tremendous subject matter. How can genius be made manifest in the theatre? The writer would have to be of equal genius to invent lines of convincing impact, otherwise the genius in question would become a mere lay-figure, a mere name being dropped."[36] Polly Toynbee thought Amadeus required "more music and less talk,"[37] while Steve Grant considered much of the play "empty rhetoric."[38] Nevertheless, there were critics who were

willing to overlook the play's flaws. Francis King wrote: "despite its wordiness, the play never fails for one moment to hold the attention."[39] Steve Grant added: "Its ability to hold the seemingly contradictory characteristics within its central protagonist ensures our attention, ambivalence, and our sympathy."[40] J. C. Trewin, whom Shaffer had failed to satisfy since Five Finger Exercise twenty-one years before, was finally won over again: "an absorbing study of what might have been; away from the classical repertory, Amadeus is the stage in its grand manner."[41] With its extensive set design, lavish costumes and props, and Mozart's music to create its best dramatic moments, Amadeus in spite of its weak dialogue, stands alongside The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus as a superb combination of visual theatre and serious theme.

As with Equus, Shaffer roused considerable controversy with Amadeus. The issue concerned the playwright's portrait of Mozart as a vulgar, childish and arrogant personality. This image of Mozart was met with anger by some of the London critics. Martin Esslin criticized Shaffer for turning Mozart into "a figure of grotesque inappropriateness, a veritable monstrosity."[42] Steve Grant called Shaffer's Mozart "grossly unhistorical,"[43] and Francis King thought it "doubtful that Mozart would have rolled under a fortepiano, or behaved with such boorishness."[44] Benedict Nightingale called Amadeus "a calculated travesty as biography."[45] In spite of all these remarks, nearly everything that Shaffer attributes to Mozart is based on historical fact. Mozart did in real life have a very unpleasant personality. He was fond of scatological remarks, used baby talk with his wife, was exceedingly arrogant and rarely had a kind word for his

fellow composers. In a typical letter to his cousin Maria Anna, Mozart wrote:

> As I was doing my best to write this letter, I heard something on the street. I stopped writing, went to the window, and the sound ceased . . . when I looked back into the room, I again noticed it. In the end Momma said to me: "I bet that you have let that one off." Well I thought, "Let's see," put my finger in my arse and then to my nose - and Momma was right after all. Well, farewell. I kiss you 1,000 times and remain, as always, your little piggy wiggy.
>
> Wolfgang Amade Rosy Posy[46]

In another letter to his father, Mozart offered his opinion on the Italian composer Muzio Clementi:

> Well, I have few words to say to my sister about Clementi's sonatas. Everyone who hears them must feel that as compositions they are worthless. They contain no remarkable or striking passages except those in sixths and octaves . . . he has not the slightest expression or taste, still less, feeling.[47]

But such historical support failed to satisfy Martin Esslin, who believed that Shaffer had misconceived Mozart: "It is one thing to be scatological in letters to intimate relations, another to make him use that kind of language in public, in polite society, at the very court of the Emperor!"[48] Esslin seems to feel that if Shaffer had to alter the historical Mozart in this way in order to suit his play, then the play

should not have been written at all. But how can one assess the degree to which Shaffer had altered Mozart, if at all? The playwright's own research proved that there was something infantile and grossly immature about Mozart. For nearly all of his life Mozart depended on his father Leopold to manage his affairs and to provide a strong guiding hand. Leopold's death in 1787 devastated Mozart, and forced the childlike young man to rely on his equally childlike wife, Constanze.[49]

J. C. Trewin expressed a view exactly opposite to Esslin's: "Certainly Mozart behaves like an obscene child, but in the context we can accept this . . . in the theatre we can accept anything."[50] The context to which Trewin refers implies the awesome irony that is at the very heart of this play. This irony derives precisely from Shaffer's emphasis on Mozart's unpleasant personality. How could such great music come from the mind of such an infantile person? Mozart's personality serves to heighten the contrast between him and Salieri. Salieri dedicates himeslf to a life of benevolence, and develops into a figure of decorum and propriety. Yet nothing he writes - in his own eyes - ever surpasses the mediocre. The essential difference between the genuine artist, and the would-be artist, is therefore intensified through this exposition of personalities. Certainly this is the context to which Trewin refers in his statement. Mozart, as conceived by Shaffer, is appropriate to the scheme of Amadeus, and to the war which is undertaken between Salieri and God.

Paul Scofield earned excellent reviews for his portrayal of Salieri. "Plays to perfection"[51] wrote Michael Billington; and "a towering performance"[52] stated John Barber. J. C. Trewin's evaluation of Scofield's performance is also worth noting: "Scofield looms across

the night with a portrait that is at once of the theatre and of life."[54] In the demanding role of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Simon Callow drew mainly good reviews: "energetic, bouncy and fiercely self-assured"[55] wrote Steve Grant. J. C. Trewin praised Callow's "uncompromising realization."[56] But Martin Esslin could not accept this portrait of Mozart. "Simon Callow resembles nothing more than a buffoon; horse-faced and giggling, who seems to have escaped from one of the children's plays that one might still occasionally find around the country, and which rely on characters like this to provoke at least some mirth from the tiny tots."[57] Esslin did appreciate the "fusion of naive earthiness with genuine charm"[58] of Felicity Kendal's Constanze, as well as Salieri's "sallow, skeletal servant,"[59] played by Philip Locke.

Peter Hall received several fine critical comments for his direction of Amadeus. The most articulate of these was written by Francis King:

> Peter Hall's production creates a world that is exactly right in its mixture of brutality and elegance . . . Mozart's music is used with extraordinary poignancy to show both the ephemerality of life, and the permanence of art.[60]

John Elsom of The Listener remained disappointed with Hall's efforts, and lamented the absence of "the guiding hand of John Dexter."[61] In Elsom's view, Dexter had "seized upon the melodramatic moments which Shaffer had provided - the death of Atahuallpa in The Royal Hunt of the Sun, the blinding of the horses in Equus - and directed them with such

skill and imagination . . . minor decisions which greatly contributed to the overwhelming climaxes."[62] Elsom thought the climax of Amadeus failed as a result of the lack of directorial imagination. Peter Hall's playing down of the confrontation between the masked Salieri and the demented Mozart was, in Elsom's opinion, a major error. Elsom wrote:

> If a Shaffer play fails at its climax, as it does here, the effect is one of great disillusion - so much rhetoric to so little effect.[63]

Amadeus opened in New York at the Broadhurst Theatre on December 17, 1980. Ian McKellen appeared as Salieri, with Tim Curry as Mozart and Jane Seymour as Constanze. As in London, the director was Peter Hall and the designer John Bury. The play received several superb notices from the critics. "An angry and thrilling play"[64] wrote Frank Rich of The New York Times. Roland Gelatt of The Saturday Review claimed that Amadeus "gives heartening evidence that there is still room for the play of ideas."[65] On the other hand, T. E. Kalem of Time found Amadeus "less dramatically arresting or emotionally compelling than The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus."[66] In an interesting backhanded compliment, Jack Kroll of Newsweek wrote: "The Shaffer play has become a brilliant surrogate for 'great' theatre."[67]

The relationship between Salieri and Mozart was not observed in great detail by the New York critics. Brendan Gill of The New Yorker called Mozart "the unwitting pawn"[68] in the war between Salieri and his god. Gill added correctly: "the contest is not an equal one, yet Shaffer makes it continually interesting."[69] T. E. Kalem recognized Shaffer's familiar theme, and called Amadeus a play about "the death of

God, the need for God, and the rage against God if he does exist."[70] Roland Gelatt movingly summarized the reality and anguish of Salieri's situation:

> the external mystery of genius, and the
> anguish many of us suffer in recognizing
> how far short our own best efforts fall.[71]

The New York production of Amadeus differed significantly from its London counterpart. Several alterations were made by Shaffer in an effort to improve it for its Atlantic crossing. In his preface to the first American publication of Amadeus, Shaffer wrote: "I was led on by what became a nearly obsessive pursuit of clarity, structural order and drama."[72] In the London production, Shaffer explained, Salieri had seemed to be observing Mozart's decline, without sufficiently contributing to it. In the new version of Amadeus - upon which the writer of this study has relied - Salieri is "where he properly belongs: at the wicked center of the action."[73] Shaffer also added the scene in Act Two, where Salieri and others are watching the performance of Mozart's The Magic Flute. This "rowdy and vigorous scene dramatizes the moment previously only hinted at - where Salieri perceives Mozart to be the flute of God."[74] If Shaffer added this scene for the reason he gives, then his efforts appeared to be unnecessary. Both the reader and audience of Amadeus are aware as early as the far more overwhelming "Night of the Manuscripts" scene that Mozart is a figure of genius, and indeed the flute of God. Shaffer's other major change involved the masked figure of Death. In London, this mysterious messenger was 'played' by Salieri's servant, a religious fanatic named Greybig. Shaffer's dissatisfaction with this device lay in his awareness that

Salieri could not possibly guess that Mozart would react to Greybig in the demented way the audience knows he did. Therefore, the character of Greybig was eliminated, and the figure of Death became Salieri himself.[75]

The New York production of Amadeus also involved an extensive re-working of the various confrontations between Salieri and Mozart. To attain the desired dramatic effect, actors Ian McKellen and Tim Curry rehearsed their scenes in a variety of ways, occasionally improvising, until Shaffer and director Peter Hall pinpointed precisely what worked best.[76] The final climactic encounter between the two composers was also re-worked, and was, in Shaffer's words, "composed with the active and generous encouragement of Peter Hall, who displayed throughout this period of trial a miraculous calm, and who staged the final result with superb assurance."[77] One of the more intriguing aspects of this re-development of Amadeus is that the play was already a success in London, and that the changes that were made might easily have backfired, rather than making, as they did, the play even more successful.

Peter Hall drew excellent reviews from the New York critics. "No cast under Peter Hall's direction ever fails to glisten with finesse, force and impeccable timing,"[78] wrote T. E. Kalem. Frank Rich added: "Mr. Hall molds his large company into a painterly tableaux that vividly portrays a distant, rococo world."[79] Rich also called John Bury's setting "ingenious",[80] while Jack Kroll wrote: "Mr. Bury's set invokes operatic vibrations."[81] In an interview with The New York Times prior to his play's Broadway opening, Shaffer said:

> As I worked I could see operatic elements.
>
> Here was an opening chorus, the whispers

> of the populace. Here, with the entrance of the two gossipy courtiers, was a duet. Here is a trio, later a quartet. Salieri's monologues are big arias.[82]

In a Tony-Award winning performance, actor Ian McKellen received outstanding reviews. Frank Rich wrote: "This actor's voice provides the play with its true musical score."[83] In an interview, McKellen called the role of Salieri one of the greatest and most challenging in his career.[84] McKellen related what Paul Scofield, the London Salieri, had told him: "Salieri is more tiring to play than King Lear."[85] As Mozart, Tim Curry earned equally good reviews. Frank Rich described his performance: "The impressively fine-tuned performance by the braying yet sensitive Mr. Curry . . . he gains a kind of feverish grandeur as he approaches a drunken, impoverished death."[86] Jack Kroll added: "This sustained duet by two exciting actors is a rare treat."[87]

Although a play about music and God, and conceived by Shaffer in somewhat operatic terms, Amadeus falls considerably short of attaining the grand scope of drama and tragedy that is characteristic of opera. The level of language and confrontation in Shaffer's "duets, trios and quartets" is very weak, while the play as a whole is built too extensively around the tiresome and often intrusive "arias" of Salieri. The playing of Mozart's music provides Amadeus with some of its best dramatic moments, but the music alone cannot sustain the strength of a play.

Commercially, if not entirely critically, Amadeus is Peter Shaffer's most successful play. It has been the recipient of many major theatrical awards, and has had long runs in London and New York. In

spite of its weak language, and poor balance of conflict between its two central characters, Amadeus is an exciting blend of visual effects, strong characterization, and bold, imaginative plot. The concept of Antonio Salieri, the near-forgotten composer of the period, as storyteller, commentator and protagonist is a highly imaginative device. History is re-interpreted, Mozart is portrayed as the helplessly immature young man he was, and Salieri - through his destruction of Mozart - achieves the immortality he has sought.

Though structually and dramatically disappointing, the climax of Amadeus is thematically significant. As Mozart is about to remove Salieri's mask, the latter "tears off a piece of Mozart's music paper, elevates it in the manner of the communion service, places it on his tongue and eats it." Salieri then says to Mozart:

> I eat what God gives me. Dose after dose. For all of life. His poison. We are both poisoned. I with you, you with me.[89]

Salieri and Mozart are, at this point, metaphysically linked in an experience of mutual destruction. Each man pays a severe price for either being, or imagining himself to be, the Voice of God. Salieri must recognize the genius of Mozart and his own inferiority. Mozart must suffer poverty, despair and the misfortune of having his work revived posthumously. The climax of Amadeus is the closest the two composers come to a state of mutual spiritual destruction. Salieri's swallowing of the music paper can be seen as a final but futile effort to consume the genius of Mozart. But like all of Salieri's previous efforts, this one is also in vain. Salieri succeeds in mentally and

physically eradicating Mozart. But what Salieri most desires, the God given gift for music, is denied him. As Amadeus ends, both composers are destroyed men: Mozart physically, and Salieri spiritually. This kind of mutual destruction is also seen in the climaxes of The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus. In the former, Pizarro's realization that Atahuallpa will not be resurrected signifies a moment of death for both men. Atahuallpa is dead in body, and Pizarro dead in soul. The disillusioned general's cradling of the dead Inca is a kind of symbiosis of both men in death. In Equus the re-enactment of the blinding of the horses serves also as the purging of Alan's passion and source of devotion. Dysart, as the instigator of this purging, destroys the remaining passions within himself, while blinding and chaining himself to a life of eternal spiritlessness and disillusionment. In Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Salieri discovers the embodiment of his god, and all for which he has striven in his art. Ultimately, Salieri, like Dysart, is blinded; blinded to the true will of his god, and left with only the remaining passion to destroy it.

CONCLUSION

The most remarkable feature of Peter Shaffer's five major plays is the diversity and range of their theatrical imagination. Owing, to a great degree, to the outstanding skills of their directors and designers, the five major plays succeed in creating believable and fascinating worlds. This has been achieved through the creation of a gallery of strong and convincing characters, a simple but highly penetrating quality of language, a provocative theme and an extensive employment of the theatre's resources. Through the combination of these elements, it is entirely possible to sense the quaint, comfortable yet tense atmosphere of the Harrington home, the exotic jungles and Inca city of Peru, the aura of mystery and tension which surround Martin Dysart and Alan Strang, as well as the richly-appointed ambience of Vienna that is the stage for the conflict among Salieri, Mozart and God. Each of the five major plays are the results of Shaffer's efforts to create a kind of total theatre, and to stimulate, in his own words, the imaginative muscle of his audience.

The most important element that links these plays is a single theme. This is also the element which served as the original spark, or point of departure for this thesis. In each play, the discovery and eventual destruction of a godlike figure serves as the central line of development. These godlike figures - Walter Langer, Atahuallpa, Mark Askelon, Alan Strang and Wolfgang Mozart - are embodiments of intellectual, artistic, spiritual or emotional superiority. They are also, in Shaffer's view, embodiments of life's idealism. The conflicts between these godlike men and their inferior opposites - Clive

Harrington, Francisco Pizarro, Gideon Petrie, Martin Dysart and Antonio Salieri - appear most prominently, and with the greatest force in The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Equus and Amadeus. In Five Finger Exercise, it is the problems within a whole family which are the focus of conflict. In Shrivings, the conflict between Mark and Gideon exists, but in a more ambiguous and uncertain manner, with neither man in a superior, or inferior role. Nevertheless, both Five Finger Exercise and Shrivings feature the element of dualism, or symbiosis, that is evident in the other three plays. It is clear, in each play, that a repressed, more inferior man fails to raise himself to, or accept the qualities of, his superior counterpart. In the process, the inferior man somehow destroys the godlike man, and the latter's superior nature is sacrificed for the sake of society's codes. In these plays, Peter Shaffer seems to be searching for a reconciliation, or compromise between man's expressive and repressive qualities. Shaffer's conclusion is that no compromise is possible, and that the outwardly emotional and spiritual side of man must be surrendered in favor of a more controlled, placid and acceptable way of life.

In order to emphasize and enlarge his theme, Shaffer and his directors conceived a series of powerful theatrical metaphors. The sun in The Royal Hunt of the Sun is a perpetual symbol of faith and strength. Its hollow blackness at the play's end reflects the destruction, and hollowness of Pizarro's spirit. The horses in Equus, along with play's constant referral to "eyes" emphasize the playwright's concern with passionate devotion and society's blindness. For Salieri and Mozart, the music of Amadeus serves as the ideal expression of worship and genius. For both composers, music is the peak

of spiritual and artistic achievement. These metaphors have been conceived by Shaffer and his directors during the process of rehearsal. This is a very special kind of collaboration, based on the sharing of visions and a mutual understanding of what the plays are meant to be. It is a process whereby the director and playwright succeed in creating an outstanding theatrical realization of what was, in the beginning, Shaffer's original conception. The choice of director has been integral to the outcome of a Shaffer play. It is no accident that The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus, both directed by John Dexter, are the most theatrically fulfilling of Shaffer's works. In these two works, Shaffer's conceptions have been shared and realized in a successful and totally unified way.

The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus are the two most successful, and most satisfying of Shaffer's plays. In both plays, the theme, language, characterizations and use of theatrical resources are brought together in a meaningful and totally expressive way. They are highly satisfying in the emotional sense. The relationships in each play are fully developed and contain much conflict, pathos, love and despair. Atahuallpa, with his regal dignity, pride and understanding of Pizarro's anguish, and Alan Strang, with his demented though unquestionable devotion to the horses, are Shaffer's most complete embodiments of passion and godlike individualism.

Pizarro and Dysart, in all their pain, are Shaffer's most tragic and despairing figures. Both men long for simple, spiritual fulfillment which, in the end, continues to elude them. The emotional exercise undergone by all four men brims with discovery and tragedy. In addition, the two men of each play fully express the dualism of man's

personality that is the concern of Peter Shaffer. Though this dualism is a prominent force in all five major plays, nowhere but in The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus is it so well conceived and evoked.

In terms of theme and theatricality, Amadeus is closely related to The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus. The conflict between Salieri's mediocrity and Mozart's genius recalls the essence of the two previous plays. But the relationship between these two men does not have the emotional power, balance or overwhelming denouement that is so effective in the other plays. There is no real development in the relationship between Salieri and Mozart. The plot of Amadeus emphasizes the experience of Salieri, while Mozart's role is, in certain instances, little more than peripheral. In Act One of Amadeus, Salieri encounters and comes to understand the nature and quality of Mozart. It is here that the real dramatic power and development of the play occurs. Act Two however, is devoted to the gradual and unopposed destruction of Mozart through Salieri's manipulation. It is a most unequal and unbalanced contest. As well, the conflict lacks any sort of emotional dynamics that might bring the two composers into a believable and even violent confrontation.

The language and dialogue of this play as opposed to The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus is - with the exception of Salieri's closing speech of Act One and Mozart's discourse on opera in Act Two - unfeeling and lifeless. Salieri's prolonged narrative, and his dialogue with the other characters lacks the introspection or agony that so characterizes the language of The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus.

The quality of Shaffer's language, in all of his plays, has been a constant object of criticism. Most of the critics found the language

too shallow or trite, failing to measure up to the scope of Shaffer's theme. Some critics felt that a more romantic, or epic, quality was the kind that these plays' subjects necessitated. But the experiences undergone by Shaffer's characters are not so much romantic or epic as they are natural and human. In spite of their exotic or period settings, the emotional experiences expressed in the plays are strongly contemporary. Shaffer's quest for a reconciliation between the repressive and expressive qualities of man is, as his plays reflect, not limited to a precise time or place. The language which Shaffer does employ is, at its best, simple, penetrating and luminous. It is a language of deep emotional and spiritual significance, and its qualities are best displayed in The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Equus. The success of this language lies in its sincere revelation of a deeply honest and strikingly passionate human experience. The words evoked by Pizarro and Dysart accurately reflect the inner turmoil that they experience. Pizarro's dialogue with Atahuallpa is simple, forthright and moving. Dysart's conversations with Hesther, Alan and the Strangs are revealing and honest.

In Amadeus, the language is a clear letdown. There is no luminous or penetrating quality to the dialogue between Salieri and his fellow characters. The dialogue is remarkably flat, lacking in any deep emotion or meaning. The emphasis is placed on Salieri's prolonged narration, while the dialogue of the play receives short shrift. This failure to develop language in Amadeus is no doubt related to Shaffer's inability to fully develop the conflict between Salieri and Mozart.

Shrivings and Five Finger Exercise lie somewhat beyond the stylistic circle of Shaffer's other three major plays. Neither play possesses the theatrical ingenuity that is one of hallmarks of the other

three. Thematically, both these plays remain within Shaffer's dramatic sphere. The language of Shrivings is clear and strong, the dialogue, in many instances is forceful and emotional. The confrontation between Gideon and Mark represents the essential Shaffer duel between man's repressive and expressive qualities. But as the original production - The Battle of Shrivings - reflected, so much was the emphasis placed on language, that the play as a whole suffered. In choosing to do away with theatrical resources, the play became more a discourse on philosophy than a dramatic presentation. Its intellectual, rather than theatrical substance, became the focus. The result left one to conclude that a Shaffer play, for all its thematic intent, cannot stand on language, or intellectual substance alone. Missing in Shrivings were those innovative techniques that overwhelmed and moved audiences in The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Equus and Amadeus. Missing was a degree of theatrical imagination that would complement the words spoken by Mark and Gideon. In essence, Shrivings helped to prove Shaffer as a playwright in search of a director and/or designer who can fully share his vision, and can contribute a sense of theatre capable of realizing it.

Five Finger Exercise appears, on the surface, to stand even further apart from the Shaffer sphere than Shrivings. It is however, a far more satisfying play than Shrivings. Though conventional in style and form, it is emotionally arousing and exceptionally well-written. Its character relationships and plot development reflect considerable skill and thought on the playwright's part. It is a strong and meaningful statement on the complex relationships within a family. It is an ideal expression of the hopes and anxieties that both drive people

apart and bring them together. In the characters of Clive and Walter, Shaffer captures the emotional currents within two young men at pivotal moments in their lives. In addition, and most important, Clive and Walter serve as Shaffer's initial dramatic embodiments of the irreconcilable conflict between spiritual despair and emotional honesty, and as vehicles of the painful journey that is man's quest for inner fulfillment.

Peter Shaffer's plays, in spite of their imperfections, are ideal examples of an expansive and refined theatrical imagination. Through their theme, they reflect the views of a man of deep human and emotional concern. Shaffer's plays are outstanding endeavors for actors, directors and designers. Whether seen on stage or read from the page, the plays do not fail to excite and arouse. The characters conceived by Shaffer live, breathe, laugh and weep. The experience of these characters is intensely human, and equally contemporary.

The tragic men of Shaffer's plays - Clive, Pizarro, Gideon, Dysart and Salieri - undergo experiences of immense anguish and revelation. And nowhere in Shaffer's plays is this experience more brilliantly and movingly realized then in the last scene of The Royal Hunt of the Sun. Nowhere in Shaffer's plays is there a more painful, haunting, or more beautiful image than in the final tableau of Pizarro gently cradling the dead body of his god and his love Atahuallpa, accompanied by the final, agonizing words of Old Martin. The metaphor for this play comes from a line which Shaffer, in a newspaper article, quoted from the playwright Jean Genet: "To see the soul of a man, is to be blinded by the

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CONCLUSION

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Appendix

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION DETAILS

FIVE FINGER EXERCISE

FIVE FINGER EXERCISE was first performed at the Comedy Theatre in London on July 16, 1958. The cast was as follows:

STANLEY HARRINGTON ..... Roland Culver

LOUISE HARRINGTON ..... Adrianne Allen

CLIVE HARRINGTON ..... Brian Bedford

PAMELA HARRINGTON ..... Juliet Mills

WALTER LANGER ..... Michael Bryant

Directed by John Gielgud

Setting by Timothy O'Brien

Awards: Dramatist Award of the London Evening Standard.

Best Play by a New Playwright for 1958-59 Season.

FIVE FINGER EXERCISE opened in New York at the Music Box Theatre on December 2, 1959. The cast was as follows:

STANLEY HARRINGTON ..... Roland Culver

LOUISE HARRINGTON ..... Jessica Tandy

CLIVE HARRINGTON ..... Brian Bedford

PAMELA HARRINGTON ..... Juliet Mills

WALTER LANGER ..... Michael Bryant

Directed by John Gielgud

Setting by Oliver Smith

Lighting by Tharon Musser

Awards: New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Foreign Play.

THE ROYAL HUNT OF THE SUN

THE ROYAL HUNT OF THE SUN was first presented by the National Theatre at Chichester on July 7, 1964. The cast was as follows:

MARTIN RUIZ ..... Robert Lang

MARTIN RUIZ AS A BOY ..... Roy Holder

FRANCISCO PIZARRO ..... Colin Blakely

ATAHUALLPA ..... Robert Stephens

HERNANDO DE SOTO ..... Michael Turner

Plus 28 members of the National Theatre Company

Directed by John Dexter and Desmond O'Donovan

Scenery and Costumes by Michael Annals

Lighting by John Read

Music by Marc Wilkinson

Movement by Claude Chagrin

THE ROYAL HUNT OF THE SUN opened in New York at the ANTA Theatre on October 26, 1965. In the leading roles were:

MARTIN RUIZ ..... George Rose

MARTIN RUIZ AS A BOY ..... Paul Collins

FRANCISCO PIZARRO ..... Christopher Plummer

ATAHUALLPA ..... David Carradine

HERNANDO DE SOTO ..... John Vernon

Directed by John Dexter

Scenery and Costumes by Michael Annals

Lighting by Martin Aronstein

Music by Marc Wilkinson

Movement by Claude Chagrin

THE BATTLE OF SHRIVINGS

THE BATTLE OF SHRIVINGS was first performed at the Lyric Theatre in London on February 5, 1970. The cast was as follows:

GIDEON PETRIE ..... John Gielgud

MARK ASKELON ..... Patrick Magee

DAVID ASKELON ..... Martin Shaw

DORA PETRIE ..... Wendy Hiller

LOIS NEAL ..... Dorothy Lyman

Directed by Peter Hall

Designed by John Bury

EQUUS

EQUUS was first presented by the National Theatre at the Old Vic on July 26, 1973. The cast was as follows:

MARTIN DYSART ..... Alec McCowen

NURSE ..... Louise Ramsay

HESTHER SALOMON ..... Gillian Barge

ALAN STRANG ..... Peter Firth

FRANK STRANG ..... Alan MacNaughton

DORA STRANG ..... Jeanne Watts

HARRY DALTON ..... David Healy

HORSEMAN ..... Nicholas Clay

JILL MASON ..... Dora Godwin

And: Neil Cunningham, David Graham, David Kincaid, Maggie Riley, Rosiland Shanks, Veronica Sowerby and Harry Waters.

Directed by John Dexter

Scenery by John Napier

Lighting by Andy Phillips

Music by Marc Wilkinson

Movement by Claude Chagrin

EQUUS was first presented in New York at the Plymouth Theatre on October 24, 1974. The cast was as follows:

MARTIN DYSART ..... Anthony Hopkins

NURSE ..... Mary Doyle

HESTHER SALOMON ..... Marion Seldes

ALAN STRANG ..... Peter Firth

EQUUS (cont'd.)

FRANK STRANG ..... Michael Higgins

DORA STRANG ..... Frances Sternhagen

HARRY DALTON ..... Walter Matthews

HORSEMAN ..... Everett McGill

JILL MASON ..... Roberta Maxwell

And: Gus Kaikkonen, Philip Kraus, Gabriel Oshen, David Ramsay and John Tyrell

Directed by John Dexter

Scenery by John Napier

Lighting by Andy Phillips

Music by Marc Wilkinson

Movement by Claude Chagrin

Awards: New York Drama Critic's Circle Best Play Award

Drama Desk Award for Best Foreign Play

Drama Desk Award for Best Actor (Anthony Hopkins)

New York Outer Critics Award for Best Play

Tony Award for Best Play

Tony Award for Best Director

AMADEUS

AMADEUS was first presented by the National Theatre in the Olivier Theatre on November 2, 1979. The cast was as follows:

THE VENTICELLI .... Dermot Crowley, Donald Gee

VALET TO SALIERI ..... Philip Locke

ANTONIO SALIERI ..... Paul Scofield

JOHANN KILIAN VON STRACK ..... Basil Henson

COUNT ORSINI-ROSENBERG ..... Andrew Cruikshank

BARON VON SWIETEN ..... Nicholas Selby

EMPEROR JOSEPH II ..... John Normington

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART ..... Simon Callow

CONSTANZE WEBER ..... Felicity Kendal

And 15 members of the National Theatre Company

Directed by Peter Hall

Designed by John Bury

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Antonio Salieri

Music Direction by Harrison Birtwistle

Fortepiano Played by Christopher Kite

Awards: London Evening Standard Award for Best Play

Plays and Players Award for Best New Play

AMADEUS, in a revised version by Peter Shaffer, opened in new York at the Broadhurst Theatre on December 17, 1980. The cast was as follows:

THE VENTICELLI .... Gordon Gould, Edward Zang

VALET TO SALIERI ..... Victor Griffin

ANTONIO SALIERI ..... Ian McKellen

JOHANN KILIAN VON STRACK ..... Paul Harding

AMADEUS (cont'd.)

COUNT ORSINI-ROSENBERG ..... Patrick Hines

BARON VON SWIETEN ..... Louis Turenne

EMPEROR JOSEPH II ..... Nicholas Kepros

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART ..... Tim Curry

CONSTANZE WEBER ..... Jane Seymour

And: Haskell Gordon, Caris Corfman, Linda Robins,
Michael McCarty and Philip Pleasants

Directed by Peter Hall

Designed by John Bury

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Antonio Salieri

Music Direction by Harrison Birtwistle

Awards: Tony Award for Best Play

Tony Award for Best Actor (Ian McKellen)

Tony Award for Best Director

Tony Award for Best Scenic Design

Tony Award for Best Lighting Design

New York Outer Critics Award for Best Play

New York Outer Critics Award for Best Actor (Ian McKellen)

Drama Desk Award for Best Play

Drama Desk Award for Best Actor (Ian McKellen)