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Nowadays people are always urging rigidity on writers. Sometimes they call it 'commitment.' It is getting so that there are playwrights who want to write only one kind of work; in their creative activity they vote straight down a party line. And I am beginning to be uneasy about a climate of belief that makes me feel a slight guilt because I want to do many different kinds of things in the theatre.

At first glance, one's immediate response to a statement like the abovementioned might be that it was given to the press because the playwright was angry and lamented the fact that his play had closed. The fact of the matter is that the statement came from a man who had already won the Evening Standard Award for the Most Promising New Playwright of 1958. Peter Shaffer's response to the critics is benign. His is not the statement of an angry young playwright like John Osborne with his dialogue in Look Back in Anger. It is a statement made by a writer recognized for his varied talents including his knowledge of criticism, having been a music critic for England's Time and Tide and a book reviewer for various periodicals. Perhaps the statement was made because both scholarly critics and newspaper reviewers have a difficult time placing Peter Shaffer into one of the categories so regularly used for British playwrights since 1956: "angry young playwrights," "kitchen-sink dramatists," "East End Jewish writers."
one-act as his medium. Within two years of each other, he presented two plays that could be acted on the same theatre bill. In *White Lies*, Shaffer delves into character studies that are quite different from the ones in his first plays. And in *Black Comedy* he creates a plot that demonstrates his talent for farce as well as for brilliant comic dialogue. The two plays represent a complete evening's entertainment on the theme of tricks and games.

Shaffer wrote *Black Comedy* for the National Theatre and it was first presented at Chichester on July 27, 1965, and subsequently at the Old Vic Theatre, London. It was presented in New York with its companion piece, *White Lies*, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on February 12, 1967. A discussion of *Black Comedy*'s conception and eventual completion will prove, in some detail, Shaffer's adeptness as a creative talent. Such a discussion will also shed light on the discipline and writing technique that make Shaffer a producer's playwright. The productions and scenarios for both plays were altered when they went to New York. The alterations were minimal; only phrasing and certain British words were substituted by more familiar terms for American audiences.
While lunching with Kenneth Tynan, in London in 1965, Shaffer was told that the National Theatre was in desperate need for a short piece to play opposite Strindberg's Miss Julie. It should suit the company and fit the repertoire as a whole. Shaffer reported his response to Tynan: "With much reluctance I mentioned that I had an idea for a short play—but only an idea: no plot, no characters, and no real sense of shape. I had been thinking about the marvellous sketch I saw performed by the Peking Opera in 1955—the one in which two fight a duel in the dark, with all the stage lights on. It occurred to me that the same idea could be used in a modern situation, given a power out or a blown fuse ..."[25]

Within hours Shaffer was whisked off to see Sir Laurence Olivier, director of the National Theatre, who commissioned Shaffer to write it. The advertising and selling of tickets for an unwritten play began. Shaffer began to work on his idea immediately and Tynan, Olivier, and he agreed that "all the laughs were to be connected to the light-darkness convention. Lines and situations that would work just as well in normal circumstances were to be avoided."[26]

Unfortunately, the first draft was scrapped one month later and Shaffer frantically tried to rewrite it in New York where he was also working on a television
script. In June he came back to England and revised what he had with John Dexter, the director. In four days, at the end of the month, the second half was completely rewritten. Shaffer gives part of the credit to Dexter, who he says "pounced on it enthusiastically and worked brilliantly and instinctively to bring it alive." In July under tremendous pressure, Shaffer was still rewriting and Olivier comments that it was "farce written under farce conditions." Finally, on July 27, 1965, the National Theatre acted as midwife to a very successful production of Black Comedy. The play, based on an episode from San Ch’a Ko’u, (Where the Roads Meet), a fourteenth century folktale adapted for the repertoire of the Peking Opera, received rave reviews.

It was seven years from Five-Finger Exercise to Black Comedy and in that time Shaffer had experimented with various types of dramatic form. From the well-made plot of Five-Finger Exercise Shaffer moved to a plotless Black Comedy. That it was written in record time is a fact that Sir John Gielgud verified. He said Shaffer was not only a producer's playwright but an actor's delight. "Peter is always willing to change lines if he thinks they will help the actor make the play go." Shaffer certainly demonstrated his ability with words in Black Comedy. Moving away from his three
character sketches in his first one-act comedies, Shaffer presents a veritable feast of players in a fast-moving farce. There is really no one deeply developed personality who dominates the stage for very long. Within the discipline and confining form of the one-act, Shaffer creates a tour de force with variations on a single theme of darkness. This time Shaffer's success is not one of thought or of drama, but of laughter. Shaffer's talent with Black Comedy lies in his ability to do in one hour what many playwrights never succeed in doing in three hours; he squeezes every last drop of theatrical fun from a comic situation.

When the curtain rises, the stage is black. One can hear a man's voice, Brindsley, conversing with his debutante girlfriend, Carol, with whom he is having a love affair. They are preparing, cleaning, and arranging the apartment for a visit both from a wealthy art patron who might buy one of Brindsley's works and from Carol's ultra-conservative father, Colonel Melkett. In order to impress Carol's father that Bohemian artists are not all bad, they have taken without permission, furniture and objets d'art from a neighbor who is away. Although the stage remains black for several minutes, it does not take long to realize that what is black to the audience is light to the characters. In a clever piece of theatric-
cality, Shaffer picks the middle of a record of loud martial music as the moment when the fuse blows out. There is a simultaneous slowdown of the music and the jump to a fully lit stage to reveal that what is now light must be understood to be darkness by the audience.

Shaffer makes no metaphysical speculations concerning light and dark; instead he quickly leads his audience into the beginning of an experience of wild slapstick comedy and farce. The play is filled with pratfalls, sightgags, easy buffs, and every trick left to us by the silent screen of the Twenties. Unlike his other one-acts, there is very little expressive content or very little besides laughter that an audience can take away from the show. Unlike the possible thesis or insights one might have after The Public Eye and The Private Ear, Black Comedy offers the audience nothing deeper than the opportunity to enjoy an hour of laughter.

While the initial fun of the play comes from simply maneuvering in the dark, the playwright's skill within the one-act form comes from the series of complications that he adds to exploit the situation. An old lady from next door intrudes and proceeds to get drunk on gin, which in the dark becomes confused with lemonade. The conservative father, Colonel Melkett, becomes infuriated with his inability to function with full military dignity in
a situation where he had hoped to face down his baby's Bohemian artist-lover: the owner of the furniture, a homosexual, arrives home unexpectedly and with great theatrical propriety, forces a quick return of his furniture right under his nose. And finally Brindsley is saved from a disastrous match with the Colonel's daughter by an old Bohemian girlfriend named Clea whom he recognizes when he accidently bumps into her in the dark and touches her buttocks. Clea is a free spirit. She sees perfectly in clear light as well as fog. Because she insists upon staying the night, the young man's problem is compounded, and he tries to hide her in the upstairs bedroom. When somebody hears her, however, he pretends she is his cleaning woman. Since it is dark nobody knows she is there except her former boy friend, Brindsley. Shaffer has her impersonate a cockney charwoman and innocently tell a fabricated story about her employer's past designed to shock everyone and break up the engagement. In successive dark scenes Shaffer creates skillful comic effects.

Perhaps Shaffer was criticizing social hypocrisy or the changes one undergoes when forced to deal with the differences between illusion and reality. But a theme or plot analysis is really not necessary or essential to the success of the play. It is games and gags.
Shaffer writes his play with a shrewd sense of verbal humor and with excellent satirical characterizations. While the colonel is perhaps a bit cliché in his old British East Indian soldier role, the homosexual is delightfully funny. And Clea, the old girlfriend, is priceless. The success that the play had at Chichester, the Old Vic, and in New York seems well deserved. Shaffer's use of farce demonstrates his ability to utilize the variety that is available within the confines of the shorter play.

The majority of reviewers in London and New York treated Black Comedy as a welcome addition to the theatrical season. Walter Kerr, in the New York Times, stated that "Black Comedy is just the thing to brighten your life." Norman Nadel agreed and said, "It's been so long since we've had anything so funny as Black Comedy that an evening with this uproarious English play is like the rediscovery of laughter." White Lies, the companionpiece to Black Comedy, did not fare as well. It was written to keep Black Comedy company in New York and rewritten as The White Liars when it returned to London in 1968.

The similarities between it and his first two one-acts is minimal. There are two men and a woman and the idea that centralizes the play is a trick, or false
communication. There the similarity ends. Perhaps the reason it does not succeed as well as the others is that Shaffer attempted too much in too little space and violated the form of the one-act and its restrictions. The idea around which the play is based is a good one, but unfortunately Shaffer misuses it before the play is completed in its own right. He interrupts the action and attempts to change the direction from theatricality to drama. It is somewhat contrived with its moral revelations on honesty at the end of the play.

Baroness Lemberg is a palmist, clairvoyant, and consultant to royalty; her motto is "Lemberg Never Lies." She is a seedy middle-aged German-Jewish fortune teller operating and selling her wares in an English seaside resort. Into her shop come Frank, manager of a musical group, and his musician friend, Tom. On the side, Frank pays off the Baroness to lie about Tom's future with information that he has given her about Tom. The never-lying Baroness has her price and she says she will help Frank get back his girlfriend from Tom.

If Shaffer contrives too much with the moral, he does not totally neglect his ability with theatrics. He carefully creates a fascinating mystery-like atmosphere and fills the theatre with crystal ball divinations and black magic. The Baroness talks to herself, to her parrot,
and to the memory of her lost Greek lover, Vassili. She
throws the cards; she chants and the spirits of the past
surround her. Before her clients arrive, Shaffer care-
fully constructs her wryly ironic character for us in the
subtle style of *Five-Finger Exercise*.

When Frank bribes the Baroness, it is no surprise
when she accepts the money. In a long speech about
honesty she tells Frank that if he wants his girlfriend
back he should just tell his friend to leave her alone
rather than creating this whole scene:\(^{32}\)

**FRANK:** Is that how you think of me, Baroness?
One of the swine?

**SOPHIE:** (Frightened.) Of course not.

**FRANK:** I hope not. I really do hope not.

**SOPHIE:** I merely say . . .

**FRANK:** What do you merely say?

**SOPHIE:** That if you think I betray my art for a
few pounds, you are badly mistaken.

**FRANK:** Would I be equally mistaken if it was
twenty-five pounds?

**SOPHIE:** Twenty-five?

**FRANK:** As you said, if you want the best, you've
got to pay for it.

**SOPHIE:** I don't understand. Why don't you just
tell him to leave her alone?

**FRANK:** If I do anything, Baroness, I do it with
style. My own style. You do your job right,
this'll work a treat.
SOPHIE: He may guess.

FRANK: And even if he does—he'll still get the message. What's your answer? . . . Look--we've kept him waiting long enough. Yes or no?

SOPHIE: Disgusting! It's disgusting! . . .

FRANK: Twenty-five quid, dear.

SOPHIE: All right!

FRANK: A sensible lady. I'll go and fetch him.

SOPHIE: No--wait!

FRANK: What?

SOPHIE: Give me a minute, please, I must learn this stuff. (She picks up the envelope.)

FRANK: All right. I'll keep him waiting, tell him how great you were, reading me. But hurry it up.

SOPHIE: Ja, Ja . . . I'll call out when I'm ready.

Her desire to persuade Frank to tell the truth is a small twist of plot that begins the intrigue. When she does accept the information which Frank gives her on Tom and takes the money, one is not exactly sure what she is going to do.

Tom enters, and Shaffer lures his audience along with some intriguing actions. Tom and the Baroness begin the gameplaying, and Shaffer creates tension as the Baroness tries to decide whether to keep reading Tom's future.
Shaffer believes in the imagination of his audience and not in critical categories.

Unlike Osborne, Wesker, or Pinter, Peter Shaffer's plays have no common theme which connects each to the other in any one simple formula. His dramatic prose, more like poetry in its use of metaphor, evocative language and symbols, is intended to give a stereoscopic effect to characters and life. The mime, mystery, and magic of his plays, as well as actions in a drawing room, a dark house, or in a single one-room flat, are not abstractions but collect here and there as in real life. Shaffer's characters, unlike Osborne's or Wesker's, are taken from the real estate business, the offices that line Bond Street, the fourteenth-century folk tales told by the Peking Opera; they are sketched after the histories of their lives are read in Prescott's _Conquest of Peru_ or are drawn from the reports of students rioting in New York over the Viet Nam war. Like Peter Shaffer's own life, and unlike the lives of Osborne and Wesker, the lives of his characters are not suited to angry rhetoric or kitchen-sink discussions. His drama is meant for any audience with imaginative muscle—an audience with catholic taste and broad experience whose expectations are not restricted by labels.
SOPHIE: Mister, I do not feel so well this evening. I'm afraid I won't be able to read you.

TOM: You won't?

SOPHIE: I have a headache coming. I feel it. In a minute it will be very painful.

TOM: I'm sorry.

SOPHIE: You'll have to go. You can wait for your friend in the other room.

TOM: Yes. Well... good-bye.

SOPHIE: Ja.

(He takes his coat and goes to the door. He hesitates.)

You want something?

TOM: No.

SOPHIE: Er... Your handkerchief.

TOM: Oh! Yes!

(He comes back to claim it. She hands it to him.)

SOPHIE: Can that be only no sun--your paleness?

TOM: What else?

SOPHIE: You think I'm a fake. But somewhere in the back of your head, as you walked in here tonight, you were thinking something. Well?

TOM: I suppose what you always think about fortune tellers. You read stories of people going in for a laugh, coming out changed for life.

SOPHIE: You want to be changed for life?

TOM: Who doesn't?

SOPHIE: Then sit down again.

TOM: No, I'll be off now. I think I'm a bit mad sometimes. Honest.
SOPHIE: Sit, please.

TOM: No, really--

SOPHIE: Look, mister, what kind of a gentleman are you? You come here to ask my advice. I settle myself to give it. Then without a word of respect you turn your back and go!

TOM: You told me to go!

SOPHIE: Don't argue with a Baroness! Why do you people have no breeding?

TOM: I'm sorry--

SOPHIE: Then sit!

(Bewildered, Tom hangs up his coat again.)

Look, mister. Just for a giggle--you with your paleness--me with my headache--why don't we explore a little the possibility of changing your life? All right?

TOM: All right.

The game is quickly over as Tom turns the tables on Sophie and says "What a crazy way! To arrange all this--just to let me know! ... I suppose he set it up as a little joke!" 34

All at once the play assumes a Pirandellian atmosphere and the question of truth and illusion arises. Who is lying and who is telling the truth? Each person becomes wrapped tighter and tighter in his own little world of secrets: 35

TOM: What if it's a zonking great lie ... Like every word of that story.

SOPHIE: I don't believe it ...
TOM: It's true.

SOPHIE: Impossible. You say this to discredit me.

TOM: Why should I do that?

SOPHIE: Look, mister, what I see, I see. Lemberg never lies!

TOM: No—but I do . . . The bit with the guitar I invented as late as last week.

SOPHIE: You mean your father is not a miner?

TOM: No. He's a very nice accountant, living up in Hoylake.

SOPHIE: And your mother isn't dead?

TOM: Not in the biological sense, no. She likes her game of golf and gives bridge parties every Wednesday.

SOPHIE: But your accent . . .

TOM: I'm afraid that's as put on as everything else. I mean, there's no point in changing your background if you're going to keep your accent, is there?

SOPHIE: Beloved God!

TOM: Actually, it slips a bit when I'm drunk, but people just think I'm being affected.

SOPHIE: You mean to say . . . you live your whole life like this. One enormous lie from morning to night?

TOM: I suppose I do.

SOPHIE: Unimaginable!

TOM: Does it worry you?

SOPHIE: Doesn't it worry you?
TOM: Sometimes, yes. But not all the time. I've got used to it, I suppose. I regard the whole thing as a sort of . . .

SOPHIE: White lie?

TOM: Yes—very good. A white lie!

And now Sophie becomes more involved than she intended to be when it began. It is at this point that Shaffer subtly changes the direction of the story. From the "honest" Sophie who takes bribes we go to a philosophical and introspective exploration of truth and illusion:

SOPHIE: But why? Why? Why in Heaven's name?

TOM: Well, it started as a question of image really. I mean I quickly found out in the world of pop music you've got to be working class to get anywhere. Middle class is right out. No one believes you can sing with the authentic voice of the people if you're the son of an accountant. I mean, sweat's O.K., but taxes turn people off. Do you dig?

SOPHIE: Are you serious?

TOM: Believe me Baroness: I've worked it out. Look--everyone makes images--everyone. The way I see it, the whole world's made up of images--images talking at images--that's what makes it all so impossible!

SOPHIE: And do your parents know you've worked it out like this? Disowning them completely?

TOM: No. But they might as well. They've virtually disowned me, after all. Dad calls me 'Minstrel Boy' now every time I go home, and mother has a whole bit with her bridge club that I'm in London 'studying' music. Studying is a better image than sitting in clubs. She can see herself as the mother of a student. Both of them are talking about themselves, of course, not me. And I don't blame them. That's what I'm doing too . . . And all of us . . .
SOPHIE: What a complicated young mister you are.

TOM: Do you think I'm a bit mad?

SOPHIE: Because you choose to be somebody else?

No, that's not mad. That's not mad. Not entirely.

TOM: I've never told anyone this before. You must have very special powers.

SOPHIE: Can you really believe that after the way I told your fortune?

TOM: Well you were pretending then.

SOPHIE: If I were any good, my dear, would I need to pretend? Oh come, it's me to be embarrassed, not you. It serves me right for playing silly games. Let's both have a drink--what do you say? Cheer us both up!

TOM: I think it's more than a game to him.

Tom admits to a life of white lies and Sophie decides she likes him. Before Shaffer's interweaving plot gets the best of him, his characters still remain true to form. The playwright is able to create a perceptive and tantalizing comment on contemporary success.

Unfortunately Shaffer does not continue with his games and tricks of illusion. Unlike The Public Eye and The Private Ear, where from beginning to end the story continued to its logical conclusion, White Lies stops being theatre and becomes monologue. This type of change might be possible in a longer drama, but not within the confines of the one-act. The biting reflections and unexpected turns of action become languorous.
storytelling. The tattered chamber that was created to provide an atmosphere for a plot that doubled back on itself now becomes a lecture hall for Madame Lemberg. It is as if there were not enough action to complete the one-act. Once the prospective victim proves he is no fool, the dramatic action slows down. Rather than challenge his writing abilities, it appears that Shaffer pampered them.

After revealing her own white lies, the ones she told her Greek lover, Sophie advises Tom on truth and honesty. The neat dialogue and witty characterizations that began the play turn into a virtuoso diatribe on "Advice to the Loveless":

SOPHIE: What does that matter? You’ve never really been afraid of him. Only of yourself. Do you see?

TOM: Yes, maybe! But still--

SOPHIE: What? Still what?

TOM: I owe him everything. When he found me singing in a Chelsea pub, I didn’t have a penny to my name. He founded the group... he set me up... What kind of thanks is it to steal his girl?

SOPHIE: Thanks?!

TOM: Yes--thanks! Is that so funny?

SOPHIE: (Slowly.) Mister, do you want to know what your friend really wanted me to see for you in that crystal ball? Him and your girl burning to ashes. His word ashes...
(Pause. He looks at her in horror.)

I'm sorry.

TOM: He said that?—You wouldn't lie. Not about this?—

(The bell sounds outside. Both glance at it mutely)

SOPHIE: No, not to you. (Urgently and low.)

Go to her now, before the concert, take a deep breath—and tell her everything. I'll deal with him.

TOM: How?

SOPHIE: Just go!

(She propels him to the door.)

I said before you had disbelieving eyes.

It's not true. There is still a little hope in them. Don't let it fade out, mister. Like the sky into the sea. All gray.

TOM: Good-bye, Baroness.

SOPHIE: Sophie.

TOM: Sophie.

Sophie then gallantly stands up to Frank when he comes back for his money. Frank cruelly rids Sophie of her memories and with one melodramatic thrust of his hand, throws the parrot out the window. Sophie will not give in though she returns the money. She reads Frank's future by using the money as cards.

Perhaps because Shaffer realized that too much in the play was narrated and not performed, he rewrote it for London and called it *The White Liars*. Sophie recalls her affair with Vassili, but it is done on tape offstage and gives an eerie feeling of magic to the atmosphere of her room. The characters remain more consistent throughout and instead of an irate Frank, Shaffer given us a Frank who listens to Sophie’s predictions about Tom leaving the group. The curtain drops on a remorseful Frank. There are no long diatribes about truth and illusion.

Overall, *White Lies* appears to be the weakest of the one-acts that Shaffer has written. Yet, the play demonstrates continuing need to explore all means of the theatricality. With the exception of *White Lies*, there are no long philosophical scenes of contemplation. Shaffer seeks the theatrical and the entertaining, not the metaphysical. The form he chooses demands a discipline to which he more often than not is true. There are rapid developments of characters who must be true to themselves; they have no time to go from the beginning of their lives to the end; they are on the stage for a short time and they must use that time carefully. The dialogue in these plays must be interesting and revealing. The four plays were written in pairs to be
performed together, and if one examines them in pairs it becomes obvious that Shaffer was aware of tone and mood. The "black" farce with the "white" semi-serious story about truth and illusion; the private concept coupled with the public concept of communication; the eye and the ear—both means of sense perception. The playwright knows how to capture a large range of feelings.

After each success of his longer plays, Shaffer returned to the one-act. As mentioned in the opening paragraph of this chapter, this was a way in which the author could improve upon his skills as a writer. He practiced with character development; he tried to tighten his plots; he used a great many theatrical devices. All of the plays were written with parts that could be effectively acted. And in the special case of Black Comedy, there is an excellent opportunity for ensemble acting. His sense of comedy is light and easy and does not depend on jokes about death or dead babies that provide material for what is known today as "black comedy." Shaffer uses mystery instead of crime and horror to create atmosphere. His belief in a theatre that entertains and pleases can only be supported by plays such as these.

This consideration of Shaffer's one-act plays is by no means an attempt to document their role in theatre
history. All the facts concerning every playwright and critic involved in writing one-acts would have to be listed and analyzed, and consequences would need to be derived. It has been my intention here, and will be in the remaining chapters of this study, to record my impressions, and those of Shaffer's critics, and hopefully ascertain from these some considerable evidence of Shaffer's value to the student of theatre.
Compared with his contemporaries who write for the theatre, Shaffer's style is closer to the subtlety of jui-jitsu than to a fighter's vicious jabs, malevolent uppercuts and eye-opening lefts. He does not hurt you; but all the same, you cannot escape. The same can be said of his biography when compared to the formative years of his contemporaries. Unlike Pinter, who during the war would open the back door of his house "to find his garden in flames," Shaffer spent the war years tucked away outside of London in a highly regarded public school. He continued on to Cambridge University. Unlike Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, which according to many critics of British theatre began the dazzling and electrifying renaissance of Britain's post-war theatre, Shaffer's first London production, *Five-Finger Exorcise*, was a sensitive study of one small family in crisis. Like his own life, the characters were drawn from England's middle class--the business world of real estate and finance. During his early years, there was nothing in the establishment against which Mr. Shaffer raised his voice.

Like his plays, Shaffer's life is filled with variables. He and his twin brother Anthony were born in Liverpool, England in 1926, the sons of an Orthodox Jewish family. They moved to London from a comfortable
Footnotes for Chapter III


12Shaffer, Public, pp. 6-8.

13Shaffer, Public, pp. 19-20.

14Shaffer, Public, p. 25.

16. Shaffer, Private, pp. 16-17.


23. Shaffer, Private, p. 43.

24. [Unsigned], "In the Picture," London Observer, 6 May 1962.

25. The National Theatre, brochure for Miss Julie and Black Comedy.

26. The National Theatre, brochure for Miss Julie and Black Comedy.

27. The National Theatre, brochure for Miss Julie and Black Comedy.

28. The National Theatre, brochure for Miss Julie and Black Comedy.

29. Interview with Sir John Gielgud, 16 September 1970.


Shaffer, *Two Plays*, p. 29.

Shaffer, *Two Plays*, p. 30.

Shaffer, *Two Plays*, pp. 31-32.


Shaffer, *Two Plays*, p. 42.

CHAPTER IV

MYTH AND RITUAL: THE EXPERIMENT
OF TOTAL THEATRE

In Five-Finger Exercise and in the two one-acts Peter Shaffer wrote before The Royal Hunt of the Sun, The Private Ear and The Public Eve, he skillfully probed human relationships with sympathy and wit. In Black Comedy, written after his epic spectacle, he turned to farce and light comedy. In White Lies, he attempted a somewhat Pirandellian search for the difference between truth and illusion. The Royal Hunt of the Sun is a radical departure in time, in form, in subject matter, and in attitude from the rest of Shaffer's works. In his own words, he sought to create "... an experience that was entirely and only theatrical." Instead of drawing rooms and the offices of accountants, he filled the stages at Chichester, New York, and London with whirling Incas, dying Indians in glittering feathers, and the sounds and sights of the jungles of South America. It is a play that refuses to be hemmed in by the narrow limitations of a realistic theatre. It is an example of the playwright's considerable versatility and skill.
The Royal Hunt of the Sun was written for the National Theatre of Great Britain and was produced in 1964 at the Chichester Festival in England. It immediately became part of the National Theatre's repertory and was the first non-classical work the theatre had accepted since 1949. It was brought to New York in 1965. The reviews were overwhelmingly positive and theatre historians began using the play as an example of "total theatre." Although his other plays have been commercially successful (with the exception of The Battle of Shrivings), none has received equal critical attention.

Perhaps this was the result of Shaffer's switch from the neatly conventional style of Five-Finger Exercise to the epic and exotic nature one finds in The Royal Hunt of the Sun with its combination of song, dance and mime, or the striking sets, costumes, and dialogue which differ from the other plays. Epithets and labels like "total" and "epic" are commonplace in the criticisms and reviews of The Royal Hunt of the Sun, which seems to have satisfied a great many audiences, reviewers, and theatre historians in London and New York.

Whatever reason one selects to use as an indicateur for Mr. Shaffer's plays, The Royal Hunt of the Sun has
enough in it as drama to satisfy everyone. It offers theatrical splendour, thematic expansion and contraction, dramatic severity, philosophical dialogues and monologues that reveal the character's preoccupation with death and religion which fit into and which are contrasted with a background of choreographed mimes and muted jungle sounds which represent the myths of the Incas.

After discussing some possibilities for interpretations of his work—European hope versus Indian hopelessness, Pizarro as anti-life contrasted to Atahualpa's love and simplicity—Shaffer quotes from Genet and says that hopefully this statement will best summarize his intentions: "To see the soul of a man is to be blinded by the sun."³

The plot of the play concerns itself with a segment of Spanish history: the defeat of the Incas by the Spanish conquistadores. Shaffer selects the confrontation between Pizarro, the Spanish leader, and Atahualpa, Sun-King of Peru, as his primary focus and from this base builds a story that recalls not only the actual destruction of a civilization, but also represents the moral and ethical problems which surround that destruction. It begins with the aging Pizarro in his native village recruiting men for his last
expedition to South America. The audience is immediately made aware of the Church's passion to convert, Spain's greed for territory, the villagers' lust for gold and a small boy's dream of chivalrous glory. Pizarro needs assistance to force the world to recognize him before he dies. He was born a bastard, and he feels the State has never treated him properly.

Shaffer complicates Pizarro's life and this search for glory with the fascinating Atahuallpa, the Sun-King of the Incas. When Pizarro captures the open-hearted and innocent Inca king, by a trick, he finds not only an image of a king but an image of an ordered society; besides being a deity to his people, Atahuallpa can also move the grizzled old fanatic to responses he has never known—laughter and tears. The Inca king is a sun; he is also a son. In the final scene, Pizarro accepts him as both.

While the confrontations and exchanges between the two leaders take place, the vaster forces of history shape, move and thwart them. A harsh Dominican priest, Valverde, demands submission to the Faith; a mild Franciscan, De Nizza, coaxes the Sun-King to salvation through suffering. Added to those who represent the forces of Christian faith are the soldiers and Indians who become the supernumeries of history; the European
dynamic versus the static Incan world where peace and prosperity are shared.

The Incan wealth is won and the Indians massacred while Spanish soldiers prepare to sail home with ships full of glory and gold. Pizarro and Atahuallpa stand face to face ready to see what each is made of and the major part of the play revolves around their discussions, discoveries, and disappointments. The two leaders form a spiritual relationship which means despair for Pizarro and a spiritual as well as a physical death for the Inca King. However, Atahuallpa, ironically, triumphs in his death over Pizarro.

In his noble security, the son of the Sun awaits Pizarro as another god, but instead of bringing a benediction from Heaven, Pizarro brings the Spanish sword of blood and destruction. Pizarro captures him and promises to free him when the royal chamber has been filled with gold. Of course, this does not happen. The innocent child of nature, the "noble savage" Atahuallpa, captures the curiosity of the cynic Pizarro. The Spanish conquistador becomes enthralled by the savior in the Indian, who believes his godhead will raise him from the dead. Pizarro dreads, but courts, the great Inca's murder. The existential in Pizarro emerges: if Atahuallpa is resurrected might not Christ have been?
Once the Sun-God is killed, Pizarro stands guard over his body with desperate hope. When the Inca fails to stir, Pizarro lets out a strangled cry of "Cheat" over the corpse followed by a lamentation for the loss of his son:

Cheat! You've cheated me! Cheat . . .
(For a moment his old body is racked with sobs; then, surprised, he feels tears on his cheek. He examines them. The SUNLIGHT brightens on his head.) 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.) Ah, no. You have no eyes for me now, Atahuallpa: they are dusty balls of amber I can tap on. You have no peace for me, Atahuallpa: the birds still scream in your forest. You have no joy for me Atahuallpa, my boy: . . .

The story is tightly constructed and the various characters, both Spanish and Incan, provide an excellent dramatic overview of the real historical occurrence. While the massacre of the Incas can be documented, Shaffer explained that the relationship, as he presents it, cannot. But he adds, "... it is historically true that Pizarro, after the death of Atahuallpa sat weeping in the street in Cajamarca." Shaffer did his historical homework well and used what he had read in William Prescott's *The Conquest of Peru* as a basis for his play. Although he admits to several interpretations for his play, there is no particular desire on his part...
to close out others. While he concedes that first and foremost it is "an author's piece," he adds that it "is also a director's piece, an actor's piece, a musician's piece, a pantomimist's piece, and above all, an audience's piece." 6

This play varies so much from his other works that it is fascinating to study both the theatrical and dramatic impulses that spurred the author into writing it. I think such an investigation will shed even more light on the ability of Mr. Shaffer to create good drama and theatre in a variety of ways and with a kaleidoscope of ideas. Understanding the dramatic mood of the author in The Royal Hunt of the Sun will assist in an appreciation of the theatrical spectacle it became. As stated previously, Shaffer portrayed the historical visions of sixteenth century Spain and Peru so that the ideals and fanaticisms of both stand in sharp contrast to the actuality that is also represented. Involved in this contrast, and seminal to understanding the play, are certain codifications or myths which the author used to breathe dramatic life into a Spanish conquest and an Incan massacre. Shaffer's awareness of the systematizing of principles, rules, and laws of both societies demonstrate the knowledge of sixteenth century history acquired especially for the writing of the play.
middle-class neighborhood in 1935, where they remained until the beginning of World War II. Jack Shaffer, their father, was in real estate. The war years were spent in safety and comfort until 1944 when Peter and Anthony were conscripted for service as coal miners in Kent and Yorkshire, a grueling three-year tour of duty. Like Walter Langer in *Five-Finger Exercise*, Peter Shaffer spent his early years learning from books and involving himself in the intellectual side of life. He did not hang out at the Fleet Street milk bar in London's East End during his childhood, nor did he struggle in impoverished circumstances as a young writer. On the contrary, he was raised in a middle-class atmosphere, edited a magazine at Cambridge, worked in New York at a mid-Manhattan bookshop and in the Acquisitions Department of the New York Public Library. It was during this time that he wrote *The Salt Land*, a play set in Israel that strove for the effect of classical tragedy in modern terms. After returning home in 1954 he wrote a radio play called *The Prodigal Father* and began to devote more time to writing. He was willing to learn and write in a variety of styles.

Mr. Shaffer believes that for professional writers "it is better to write something than nothing. And if you don’t have anything particular to say there is no
Although Shaffer did not use the term "myth" in his introduction to the text of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, he approaches a definition of the term when he speaks of the "codifications" to which man gravitates to "mark the intensity of his reactions to life." He also discusses what he feels is the problem of the individual and his historical importance. In the Introduction to the play he says:

I suppose what is most distressing for me in reading history is the way man constantly trivializes the immensity of his experience; the way, for example, he canalises the greatness of his spiritual awareness into the second-rate formula of a Church—any Church: how he settles for a Church or Shrine or Synagogue, how he demands a voice, a law, an oracle, and over and over again puts into the hands of other men the reins of repression and the whip of Sole Interpretation.

He later adds that "to separate worship from codification is also as hard as to separate sex from violence." It is interesting to note that Joseph Campbell and Ernest Cassirer, the former a literary critic and the latter a cultural philosopher, support Shaffer's view when they define myth. In his literary study, *The Man with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell writes about the man who desires to be "all" but is thwarted by the limitations of sex, age, intelligence and vocation.
. . . he cannot be all. Hence the totality—the fullness of man—is not in the separate members, but in the body of society as a whole; the individual can be only an organ. From his group he has derived his techniques of life, the language in which he thinks; through the past of that society descended the genes that built his body. If he presumes to cut himself off, either in deed or in thought and feeling, he only breaks connection with the source of his existence.

Thus, Campbell asserts, man belongs to a "mythologically instructed community" which provides him with a body of images and identities to which he may aspire. He adds, "In his life-form the individual is necessarily only a fraction and distortion of the total image of man."11

Cassirer helps to clarify the term and states that myth is that which:12

. . . somehow emphasizes the physiognomic character of experience while at the same time it has the property of compelling belief. Its power is that it lives on the feather line between fantasy and reality. It must be neither too good nor too bad to be true, nor must it be too true.

This definition, like Campbell's, assists one to interpret Shaffer's use of the term "codification." For Shaffer, too, myths are the selected values by which a culture directs the communal actions of its members and by which it provides those members with a sense of purpose. As he states in The National Theatre playbill for his production, " . . . we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives, will imprison ourselves in totems,
taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations, in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have. It is in the dramatic presentation of myths that Shaffer demonstrates man's search for immortality. I believe the success of Shaffer's play lies first in his ability to dramatically present these myths upon which civilizations are founded, and second, to shape the dramatic presentation to the fullest potential of the stage.

Pizzarro and Atahuallpa are theatrical spokesmen for greater myths of sixteenth century Spain and Peru. What are these myths? In Spain, they rose from historical roots. Castile and León were united in the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabel in 1649, a marriage that represented total reconquest and religious unity. The reconquest of Spain from the Moors which had begun in 718, was completed in 1492. Jews and Moslims were expelled and those who remained were forced to convert to Catholicism. Unified and nationalistic Spain was also Catholic Spain. Religion constituted the very essence of the country. Thus when the conquistadores left for the New World, they set out to liberate the heathens by teaching them the way of the Cross as a substitute.

In The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Valverde, the Dominican priest, explains to Pizarro's recruits the purpose of the conquest.
Look at him [Atahualpa] well. This is a heathen. A being condemned to eternal flame unless you help him. Don't think we are merely going to destroy his people and lift their wealth. We are going to take from them what they don't value, and give them instead the priceless mercy of heaven. He who helps me lift this dark man into light I absolve of all crimes he ever committed.

The other priest, De Nizza, later defines the myth of the Holy Conquest by telling each conqueror that he is a Knight of God:

You are the bringers of food to starving peoples. You go to break mercy with them like bread, and outpour gentleness into their cups. You will lay before them the inexhaustible table of free spirit, and invite to it all who have dieted on terror. You will bring to all tribes the nourishment of pity. You will sow their fields with love, and teach them to harvest the crop of it, each yield in its season. Remember this always: we are their New World.

Within the speech is the concept of the merciful, the missionary of Divine Love; coupled with this is the medieval idea of the Crusader knight, the warrior against evil. Valverde calls the soldiers "huntsmen of God," and tells them that "the weapons you draw are sacred! Oh God, invest us all with the courage of Thy unflinching Son. Show us our way to beat the savage out of his dark forests on to the broad plain of Thy race."17

Shaffer illustrates, and history testifies to, the ethics of the Spanish conquest and the fact that these ethics were sanctioned by the Church. Shaffer
demonstrates this evangelical feeling in a scene between Atahualpa and Valverde: 

ATAHUALLPA: (Naughtily,) Where is the God?

VALVERDE: (Through Felipillo,) I am the priest of God.

ATAHUALLPA: I do not want the priest. I want the God. Where is he? He sent me greeting.

VALVERDE: That was our General. Our God cannot be seen.

ATAHUALLPA: I may see him.

VALVERDE: No. He was killed by men and went into the sky.

ATAHUALLPA: A God cannot be killed. See my father. You cannot kill him. He lives forever and looks over his children every day.

VALVERDE: I am the answer to all mysteries. Hark, pagan, and I will expound.

Shaffer comes close to demonstrating the historical law of the Church that stated that natives could not be slaughtered until given the opportunity of hearing the Gospel message. Of course, this law was a sham and the results of enforcing it were usually affronts to the Church.

VALVERDE: Beware!

ATAHUALLPA: Ware you! You kill my people; you make them slaves. By what power?

VALVERDE: By this. (He offers a Bible through Felipillo,) The Word of God.
ATAHUALLPA: (He holds it to his ear. He listens intently. He shakes it.) No word. (He smells the book, and then licks it. Finally he throws it down impatiently.) God is angry with your insults!

VALVERDE: Blasphemy!

Another great myth of sixteenth century Spain revolves around the cultural orientation of the times. Historically speaking, the conquerors' conception of society was still based on the feudal system. In the New World there was a parallel system—slavery—and Shaffer demonstrates his awareness of this fact when Pizarro encourages his recruits by promising them that "... over there you'll be the masters—that'll be your slave."

The author also captures the feeling of the conquistadores about chivalry, the medieval concept that was long dead by the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, like Quijote in search of the ideal, these conquerors used the discovery of the New World as an opportunity to seek new adventures as knights beating down the chivalric "foe." The Young Martin is filled with chivalric idealism: in his imagination he becomes another Amadís of Gaul. "He knows all his codes of chivalry by heart." And he himself recalls his dreams of conquest.
If you could only imagine what it was like for me at the beginning, to be allowed to serve him. But boys don't dream like that anymore—service! Conquest! Riding down Indians in the name of Spain. The inside of my head was one vast plain in the 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 came and made them real.

The young boy is surprised when the disillusioned Pizarro says:

Look you, if you served me you'd be Page to an old slogger: no titles, no traditions. I learnt my trade as a mercenary, going with who best paid me. It's a closed book to me, all that chivalry. But then, not reading or writing, all books are closed to me. If I took you you'd have to be my reader and writer, both.

And later Pizarro says:

Give me a reason that stays noble once you start hacking off limbs in its name. There isn't a cause in the world to set against this pain. Noble's a word. Leave it for the books.

Along side the medieval concepts of chivalry and feudalism existed a mind filled with the Renaissance imagination, a world of literature and art evidenced by history. This imagination is a part of Pizarro's thinking. He tells De Soto that he once hoped to find his Arcadia in the New World:

... When I began to think of a world here, something in me was longing for a new place like a country after rain, washed clear of all the badges and barriers: the pebbles men drop to tell them where they
are on a plain that's got no landmarks. I used to look after women with hope, but they didn't have much time for me. One of them said—what was it?—my soul was frostbitten. That's a word for you—frostbitten.

Each man on the expedition seeks his own Arcadia. Most of these dreams were based on the El Dorado myth, describing a kingdom of gold. All through the story, Shaffer demonstrates, both figuratively and literally, the myth most Spaniards believed. Pizarro and his men are surrounded by golden streets and are amazed at the city where gold literally grows. There is also surprise at the similarity between the harmony and order that surrounds them and that which exists in their Arcadian dream worlds; it is an image of the dream-like Utopia each man must have heard about before leaving Spain. It was a Renaissance concept. The Spaniards are aware of the contrast between Spain and the new found land.

DE NIZZA: How beautiful their tongue sounds!

YOUNG MARTIN: I'm trying to study it, but it's very hard. All the words seem to slip together.

FELIPILLO: Oh, very hard, yes! But more hard for Indian to learn Spanish.

DE NIZZA: I'm sure. See how contented they look! This could be Eden at the world's start—when work was praise, and vegetables sang!

DIEGO: It's the first time I've ever seen people glad at working.

ATAHUALLPA: Nine years to twelve, protect harvests. Twelve to eighteen, care for herds. Eighteen
to twenty-five, warriors for me--Atahualpa Incal

DE SOTO: I have settled several lands. This is the first I've entered which shames our Spain.

ESTETE: Shames?

PIZARRO: Oh, it's not difficult to shame Spain. Here shames every country which teaches we are born greedy for possessions. Clearly we're made greedy when we're assured it's natural. But there's a picture for a Spanish eye! There's nothing to covet, so covetousness dies at birth.

But De Nizza, the priest, seems determined to demonstrate the flaws in a society such as this. How could there be a "real" Arcadia?29

Of course. It gives life meaning. Look around you: happiness has no feel for men here since they are forbidden unhappiness. They hold everything in common, so they have nothing to give each other. They are part of the seasons, no more: as indistinguishable as mules, as predictable as trees. All men are born unequal: this is a divine gift. And want is their birthright. Where you deny this and there is no hope of any new love; where tomorrow is abolished, and no man ever thinks, 'I can change myself,' there you have the rule of Anti-Christ.

Thus Shaffer, in The Royal Hunt of the Sun, captures the myths that supported the actions of the Spanish in Peru. The religious need to fight the pagans and the personal greed for gold that the Spaniards brought with them are viewed by Shaffer as those values which give Spain its sense of purpose. They are the myths that spurred on the Spanish conquerors and gave them meaning.
for the hardships they endured and purpose for the acts they committed. They were myths upon which a civilization was based; these were not just ideals. They are dramatically contrasted to the myths underlying Incan civilization.  

The major part of Incan thought is expressed through Atahuallpa. Villac Umu, the priest of the Incas, can be compared to De Nizza and Valverde; Challcuchima, the Incan general, is similar to De Soto, Pizarro's first lieutenant. But it is to Atahuallpa one must go for profound study. His belief in the Incan way of life and his devotion to the Incan religious system contrasts sharply with Pizarro's loss of faith and hope in the Christian European tradition.

Shaffer presents us with the first great Incan myth-belief in a living god. Atahuallpa justifies the murder of his half brother while he discusses his origin as the new Sun-God:

PIZARRO: You are a robber bird yourself.

ATAHUALLPA: Explain this.

PIZARRO: You killed your brother to get the throne.

ATAHUALLPA: He was a fool. His body was a man. His head was a child.

PIZARRO: But he was the rightful king.
disgrace in writing a straightforward entertainment. That way you prevent the machinery from getting rusty and improve your technique." From his early radio plays and the mystery novels he wrote with his brother, Shaffer went on to write the screen play for William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. In 1962 The Globe Theatre presented his one-act *The Private Ear*, a story that revolves around the suspicions of a stodgy accountant about the infidelity of his beatnik wife. Shaffer, in four brief years, moved from the techniques of the well-made play, as evidenced by *Five-Finger Exercise*, to the serious fantasy of his one-acts. With several commercial successes in Shaffer's favor, it is no wonder that Sir Laurence Olivier, Director of the National Theatre in London, risked commissioning Shaffer to write a comedy for the company's 1965 repertoire. Sir Laurence said, "For the first time, and with fruitful results, the National Theatre acted as a midwife." Shaffer produced, on very short notice and under a great deal of pressure, *Black Comedy*, a farce in which a group of people convey the illusion of darkness on a brilliantly lit stage.

In 1963, a year before the launching of the epic drama *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Shaffer fashioned the text for Joan Littlewood's Christmas play for children called *The Merry Rooster's Panto*, a musical updating of
ATAHUALLPA: I was the rightful God! My Sky Father shouted, 'Rise up! In you lives your Earth Father, Huayana the Warrior. Your brother was fit only to tend herds, but you were born to tend my people.' So I killed him, and the land smiled.

Atahuallpa's attitude represents the belief that there is a unique spiritual relationship between man and the universe around him.

In the Incan king's empire there was no division of secular, practical and spiritual life. Thus, the Headman (or as Pizarro calls him, "the Lord of the Manor") who directs the work of one thousand families also cares for the needs of those people: clothes, land, food, and spiritual comfort. The Headman explains his work to the priest De Nizza:

HEADMAN: Here all work together in families: fifty, a hundred, a thousand. I am head of a thousand families. I give out to all good. I give out to all clothes. I give out to all confessing.

DE NIZZA: Confessing? You have confessing?

HEADMAN: I have priest power... I confess my people of all crimes against the laws of the sun.

DE SOTO: What laws are these?

HEADMAN: It is the seventh month. That is why they must pick corn.

ATAHUALLPA: (Intoning.) In the eighth month you will plough. In the ninth, sow maize. In the tenth, mend your roofs.
There was also a belief in a type of agglutination with nature; it was a oneness typified by Atahuallpa. De Nizza recognizes it when he is explaining their way of life to Pizarro and says: "They are part of the seasons, no more; as indistinguishable as mules, as predictable as trees." And Pizarro knows what it is too. He argues against killing Atahuallpa and fights De Nizza, when speaking in the favor of the Incas: "They've looked at your wares and passed on. They live here as part of nature, no hopes and no despair."33

But like most primitive religions, the religious organizations of this one did not prohibit certain elements of fear: the knowledge that nature was powerful and never to be controlled by man. Nature was unpredictable and the people believed in natural signs which dictated attitudes and actions. Villac Umu explains omens to the messenger Manco and to his king:35

MANCO: Atahuallpa! God!

ATAHUALLPA: God hears.

MANCO: Manco your Chasqui speaks. I bring truth from many runners what has been seen in the Farthest Province. White men sitting on huge sheep. The sheep are red! Everywhere their leader shouts aloud 'Here is God!'

ATAHUALLPA: The White God!

VILLAC UMU: Beware, beware Inca!
ATAHUALLPA: All-powerful spirit who left this place before my ancestors ruled you. The White God returns!

CHALLCUCHIMA: You do not know this.

ATAHUALLPA: He has been long waited for. If he comes, it is with blessing. Then my people will see I did well to take the Crown.

VILLAC UMU: Ware you! Your mother Moon wears a veil of green fire. An eagle fell on the temple of Cuzco.

MANCO: It is true, Capac. He fell out of the sky.

VILLAC UMU: Out of a green sky.

CHALLCUCHIMA: On to a house of gold.

VILLAC UMU: When the world ends, small birds grow sharp claws.

ATAHUALLPA: Cover your mouth. (All cover their mouths.) If the White God comes to bless me, all must see him.

This dialogue illustrates the use of natural signs as a manifestation of truths and shows the people's fear toward nature. Atahuallpa disregards the signs as indicative of destruction and instead reinterprets them as a blessing for the people since they represent the coming of the White God.

Shaffer is not true to historical fact here. Instead of expecting mercy from the coming of the white gods, the Incas anticipated destruction. Since Divine Will could not and must not be opposed, the only attitude to take was a stoical one. Historically, Shaffer misinterprets Atahuallpa's stand, but manages
to establish the Incan myth of "divine destruction" through the other Indian priests and chieftians. The idea of national solidarity behind the wishes and decrees of the Man-God Atahuallpa are seen in the words of Challcuchima, Incan general, as he speaks to Pizarro:

"God is tied by his work, like you. But if he raised one nail of one finger of one hand, you would all die that same raising.

Another element of fear which persisted in the Incan mind was the knowledge that one could never be absolutely sure of the order of nature; never sure that something would be so. Nevertheless, one lived in hope. The laws of God concerning the duties of each month and each age were kept, and the people hoped that Father-Sun would provide sufficient maize, the "bread of life." Shaffer emphasizes that the Incas' lives were centered around the cultivation of the corn fields and their protection. The harvest song which Atahuallpa sings to Pizarro also concerns the problems of robber birds who would steal from the fields of life. Elements of nature are seen to be in conflict. Symbolically, the song concerns the conflict of human natures: robber birds (Spaniards) who would disrupt and destroy the life of the Incan people by robbing them of the heart of their existence--the worship of the Sun."
In order to insure the safety of their lives and land, the Incas worshipped Atahuallpa and believed that he would eventually be resurrected. Atahuallpa relates to Pizarro the creed in which his people believe:

ATAHUALLPA: Only my father can take me from here. And he would not accept me killed by men like you. Men with no word. You may be King in this land, but never God. I am God of the Four Quarters, and if you kill me tonight I will rise at dawn when my Father first touches my body with light.

PIZARRO: You believe this?

ATAHUALLPA: All my people know it— it is why they have let me stay with you.

While Young Martin scoffs at the claim of the Incan's resurrection, he asserts that it is a lie and unreasonable. Pizarro reminds him of a similar belief found in the Christian "truths" to which Martin would never ascribe the term "myth"—the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Pizarro pursues his debate with Martin and sums up man's belief in a Divinity—a Catholic God or an Incan Atahuallpa—as "... the only way to give life meaning." And for a moment Pizarro believes in the myth of the Incan God who lives over again by returning to the source of life— to the Sun.

Why not? 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 after night, after cold and lightless days, turning our faces to it, adoring. The sun is the only God I know! We eat you to walk. We drink you to sing.
Our reins loosen under you and we laugh. 
Even (He recalls his attempt at dancing.)
I laugh, here! I laugh! . . .

Finally, Shaffer asks what happens when the myth fails? What happens if Atahualpa does not reincarnate? For the Incas a second myth replaces or provides an "alternate ending" but does not destroy belief in the religion and national unity. In both societies, adherence to societal codes was established through fear. In the case of the Spaniards, the fear was of eternal damnation; for the Incas, the fear was of a revengeful nature.

While Shaffer takes certain liberties with historical facts, particularly with the character of Pizarro, one must remember that Shaffer's purpose was not to present a historically accurate picture of the conquest. He uses myths revealed to us by history as the driving forces of his characters and tries to show how men constantly put their spiritual awareness into the hands of someone else; how men demand that the interpretation of their lives be in the possession of others.

Shaffer demonstrates how the Church and State in both Peru and Spain were united and were instrumental in determining the acts of the individual man, in sanctifying violence and lovelessness, and in sponsoring
societal atrophy. While presenting us with this over­view, he paints a sympathetic picture of both Pizarro and Atahuallpa: the existential man who longs for meaning versus the man who is God—who believes in himself and sees the meaning and purpose behind his acts. Pizarro and the Sun-God are both representatives for twentieth century men. They symbolize those who cannot subscribe to the current myths advocated by society and also those who do join with the masses and acquiesce to the myths.

The confrontation of the two men, both representatives of doomed cultures, results in the destruction of each man and the myths which each embodies. Atahuallpa is murdered without being reincarnated. Pizarro is left alone, cheated of any beliefs except the knowledge that "... the only joy is death." He says, "I lived between two hates; I die between two darks: blind eyes and a blind sky." ^45

All this is expressed by Peter Shaffer through his sensitivity of theme combined with spectacle. Because there is a minimum of scenery, mimes, masks, and magic demand imagination from the audience and it is ultimately up to the spectator to create for himself the pre-Columbian world and the evil magnificence of the conquistadores. If the critics term it "epic"
theatre it is because the term "... carries the alternate meaning of a lavish spectacle and of a play which requires audiences to think for themselves." It is theatrically larger than life. Shaffer's theatrical sense is demonstrated by his creation of men whose faces are entirely hidden by masks and whose words are only ritual chanting in an unknown tongue and yet who are eloquent, moving, and expressive.

One need only to listen to Marc Wilkinson's musical score for the original Chichester production or look at Michael Annal's feathered costumes glittering with gold to feel the sense of grandeur that is part and parcel of Shaffer's theatrical creation. Cymbals, bells, chants, the primitive toil song and the final lament (phonetically exact words transcribed by a Spanish monk in the sixteenth century which are part of the lament for the death of an Inca king), support the seriousness of Shaffer's dramatic content. As Shaffer himself says speaking of Wilkinson's music, "... to me, [the music's] most memorable items are the exquisitely doleful lament which opens Act II; and most amazing of all the Final Chant of Resurrection to be whined and whispered ... howled and hooted, over Atahuallpa's body with Darkness."
Before examining the stage directions and descriptions of sections of the play to better understand the spectacle, one should keep in mind Shaffer's own words concerning his ideas on the "theatrical" part of his work. In the Introduction to the script he says:

Why did I write *The Royal Hunt*? To make colour? Yes. To make spectacle? Yes. To make magic? Yes—if the word isn't too debased to convey the kind of excitement I believed could still be created out of 'total' theatre.

The 'totality' of it was in my head for ages: not just the words, but jungle cries and ululations, metals and masks; the fantastic apparition of the pre-Columbian world.

The Incas, historically, were worshippers of the sun and Pizarro's Christian soldiers sought the gold that lined the streets of Peru as well as the conversion of the Indians. Shaffer's opening scene is splendidly mimed and staged for this contrast. After discussing their Christian mission, several Spaniards drop to their knees before a wooden crucifix, their backs a wall of ermine to the audience. Left on stage is the Young Martin and Pizarro. When Pizarro leaves:

(The BOY is left alone, The Stage DARKENS and the huge MEDALLION high on the back wall begins to glow. great cries of 'Incas!' are heard. The BOY bolts Offstage. Exotic MUSIC mixes with the chanting. Slowly the MEDALLION opens outward to form a huge golden sun with twelve great rays. In the centre stands Atahuallpa, sovereign Inca of Peru, masked, crowned, and dressed in gold. When he speaks, his voice, like the voices of all the Incas, is strangely formalized. Enter below the Inca court...
Immediately, the pagan adversary is before us in all his splendor.

The seat of Atahuallpa is a monolithic gold structure that occupies the center of the stage; brilliant feathered cloaks light the field with costumes while the primitive incantation and birdlike songs of the Incas create the aura of the deep jungle beyond the Andes. Shaffer pointedly had the scenes representing the massacre of hundreds of Indians and the dismantling of their civilization mimed, so that it is even more horrible than if it had been done realistically. A huge blood-stained cloth symbolizes the beginning of the death of a civilization. The stage directions describe "The Mime of the Great Massacre":\(^5\)

(To a savage MUSIC, wave upon wave of Indians are slaughtered and rise again to protect their Lord, who stands bewildered in their midst. It is all in vain. Relentlessly the Spanish Soldiers hew their way through the ranks of feathered Attendants towards their quarry. They surround him. Salinas snatches the crown off his head and tosses it up to Pizarro, who catches it, and to a great shout crowns himself. All the Indians cry out in horror. The DRUM hammers on relentlessly while Atahuallpa is led off at sword-point by the whole band of Spaniards. At the same time, dragged from the middle of the sun by howling Indians, a vast bloodstained cloth bellies out over the Stage. All rush off; their screams fill the theatre. The LIGHTS fade out slowly [Light Cue 22] on the rippling cloth of blood.)
the Cinderella tale—so topical that its Prince Charming wore a spacesuit. London audiences must have been surprised when they first viewed *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. Nothing in Shaffer's previous work had prepared them for such total theatre—ballet, mimes and masks, magic and ritual—to tell the story of the massacre of three thousand Incas. A prominent critic noted, "*The Royal Hunt of the Sun* is as unlike his other works (*)Five-Finger Exercise*, *The Public Eye*, *The Private Ear*) as chalk from cheese." Once again, technique and content had been changed; theatrical presentation and philosophical statements were combined. It is not surprising to find that Shaffer's last major production was again different. *The Battle of Shrivings* is about the New York student riots in 1969 and the intellectual questions at the core of the battle between students and Establishment.

Since his first play was produced in London's West End in 1958, Shaffer has largely been acclaimed as a playwright one should watch. Osborne, Wesker, Pinter and others who grew up during this same period in London and who write, as the critics would state, "angry plays," "kitchen-sink drama" and "Jewish East End thematic plays" have been more prolific. But most serious critics are hard-pressed to discuss their plays without identifying them with some movement. No such device is operative for Peter Shaffer's plays.
Once Atahuallpa is a prisoner the stage becomes hushed and quiet. His nobles attend him and the music changes from clashing to hushed chimes.\(^{52}\)

(Slowly the great cloth of blood is dragged off by Two Indians as Atahuallpa appears. He advances to the middle of the Stage. He claps his hands, once. [Effects Cue 46.] Immediately a gentle HUM is heard and Indians appear with new clothing. From their wrists hang tiny gold cymbals and small bells; to the soft clash and tinkle of these little instruments his servants remove the Inca's bloodstained garments and put on him clean ones.)

Shaffer attests his major characters with the proper necessities and symbolizes through music and dance that which would have been impossible to reproduce realistically.

Sad and frightening scenes, the "Second Gold Procession" and "The Rape of the Sun," are mimed and the contrasting civilizations, the victor with his spoils, the victim with his wounds, are theatrical and moving.\(^{53}\)

(Another line of Indian Porters comes in, bearing gold objects. Like the first, this installment of treasure is guarded by Spanish soldiers, but they are less disinclined now. Two of them assault an Indian and grab his headdress. Domingo enters with a necklace. Rodas tries to snatch it. They clash swords briefly. The music chatters. Above, in the chamber, the treasure is piled up as before. Diego and the Chavez brothers are seen supervising. They begin to explore the sun itself, leaning out of the chamber and prodding at the petals with their halberds. Suddenly Diego gives a cry of triumph}
drives his halberd into a slot in one of the rays, and pulls out the gold inlay. The Sun gives a deep groan, like the sound of a great animal being wounded. With greedy yelps, all the Soldiers below rush at the sun and start pulling it to bits; they tear out the gold inlays and fling them on the ground, while terrible groans fill the air. In a moment only the great gold frame remains; a broken blackened sun.

The Royal Hunt of the Sun is a play that combines philosophy with mime; death with dance. It celebrates the art of the theatre and the playwright by utilizing fully everyone involved in a play: director, technicians, actors, and audience. It does what Shaffer in his own words describes as the function of total theatre should do. It is:

... Theatre that is gestural as well as verbal—hallucinatory as well as cerebral—magical, if that word isn't now too debased to use.

Yet, none of this means that Mr. Shaffer is not concerned with the dramatic content and words of the play. He says:

However, none of this means that the words do not come first. With me, they do always—and on a bare stage they become even more important. In this play they have to convey the sights and sense of stupendous achievement: the conquest by 167 men of an empire of 24 million; the ruin of a civilization; gold lust, Church lust, military cruelty and national conceit. In other words, History. In other words, Us.

After the lights have dimmed on Shaffer's gilded masks and his wild, sad birdcries of Peru have faded into
silence, his message rings loud and clear: "to see the soul of a man is to be blinded by the sun."
Footnotes for Chapter IV


4. Shaffer, Hunt, p. 98.


6. Shaffer, "To See the Soul . . ."

7. Shaffer, Hunt, p. 5.

8. Shaffer, Hunt, p. 5.


He argues the combination of Medieval and Renaissance values which make up the personality of the conquistador.

32 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 33.
33 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 68.
34 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 90.
35 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 25.
36 De la Vega, The Incas.
37 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 67.
38 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 34.
39 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 69.
40 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 93.
41 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 93.
42 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 94.

44 Ibid.
45 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 98.


47 Peter Levin Shaffer, jacket note for Marc Wilkinson (composer), The Original Music from the National Theatre of Great Britain (Decca Records, 1968).
48 Shaffer, note for Music.
49 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 4.
50 Shaffer, Hunt, p. 24.
51 Shaffer, *Hunt*, p. 54.


54 Shaffer, "To See the Soul . . . ."

55 Shaffer, "To See the Soul . . . ."

56 Quoted by Shaffer, playbill for *Hunt*, 1964.
CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE OF SHRIVINGS

AN ATTEMPT AT PHILOSOPHY

The Battle of Shrivings, which Shaffer wrote after Black Comedy and White Lies, was produced at the Lyric Theatre, London, in 1970, and was greeted by what one might call a cool press.\(^1\) Unlike the rest of his work, this piece never reached New York. It closed in London after only six months, and David Merrick, Shaffer's American producer did not bring it to Broadway. The reasons for the short run given by the author, and the leading actor, Sir John Gielgud, are defensive.\(^2\) Gielgud said that "it was not British enough," and that Shaffer "was becoming too American to reach the British theatre-goer."\(^3\) Mr. Shaffer believes that the quick closing was due "to the cost of production, the confusion of the hasty rewrites demanded by some of the actors, and to bad publicity."\(^4\) Whatever the case might be, a critical analysis reveals a fascinating study by Shaffer of "the question of human perfectibility."\(^5\)

This play will be more difficult to examine than Shaffer's other works for three major reasons:
1. There is no published script for *The Battle of Shrivings*; I shall be using the version Shaffer rewrote to be presented in New York, titled *Shrivings*. 6

2. Reviews of the London production are limited; I must depend on interviews with an actor, Sir John Gielgud, who dislikes the play for personal reasons; and instead of textual comparisons of the differences between the original and the revised script, I must base my comparisons on statements the author made to me during an interview in 1970.

3. It is a work that must be examined in a different context than Shaffer's other plays. *The Battle of Shrivings* failed commercially and critically while none of the author's other works did.

With these facts in mind, I suggest that the greater part of proof for any critical hypothesis or statements that I make concerning the play be based on the extensive use of quotations from the rewritten script, *Shrivings*.

*The Battle of Shrivings* was begun by Shaffer while he was living in New York in 1968 and 1969. Of his stay there he said: "It was impossible not to be churned
up violently by the tensions of an immense and growing society. It was a passionate experience." He adds that "the riots at Columbia University were one of the major starting points of the play." Like most people in this country during those years of anti-war demonstrations, Shaffer was affected by the unrest and social change reflected in riots on college and university campuses all across the nation. For the first time, one of his plays was going to be based on current political and social events.

Another interesting fact concerning the play is that the central character, Sir Gideon Petrie, philosopher and humanist, has more than a touch of Bertrand Russell in him. Creating the character of Sir Gideon in the wake of Russell's death, placed a great deal of critical pressure on Sir John Gielgud, who acted the role. The philosophical debate, so central to the play, was elaborated into three acts and ran just over three and one half hours when produced. It is longer than Shaffer's other plays and the first three-act that he wrote. As the author said, "It is very long but I've cut and cut. I just hope audiences will have endurance." Unfortunately, they did not.
Peter Shaffer will admit to only the most superficial and self-evident parallels between the facts and emotions of his own life and the contents of his plays. He is hesitant to acknowledge that his early environment, family or education had any significant effect on his writing. He has often been spoken of as the fastest writer of plays in London today, or as the best "rewrite man" in London. Some of his works have been made into movies (The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Five-Finger Exercise). His last work closed because of the lack of audiences (The Battle of Shrivings). All of his work presents us with variety, stimulation, and entertainment. Shaffer's achievements in the British theatre are his sense of theatricality and his thematic diversity.
In this play, Shaffer was concerned with moral and philosophical questions which plague all men. These problems were present, to some degree, in The Royal Hunt of the Sun and they were touched on in his one-acts and Five-Finger Exercise, but in the latter plays they were never pursued without some theatrical support: interesting plots, elaborate settings, concise and witty dialogue. For Shrivings, he selects as his topic one of the oldest debates in the world, the "perfectibility of man" and presents it, as he says, in the disguise of:

... a debate between a man who insists that life lived rationally, with some attempt to control one's destiny, to conquer the roots of violence and hatred, can slowly produce, for the first time, a real MAN—not something sunk in nature, half-animal, run by adrenalin and instincts. He is opposed by a man who says humans can never change, that that is what the old religious sages meant by Original Sin, that men may shuffle the elements around, seem to change, create the illusion of progress, but illusion is all that it is.

In The Battle of Shrivings the sounds, colors, and history of The Royal Hunt of the Sun are missing; the rhetorical precision and clarity of Five-Finger Exercise give way to lengthy and self-indulgent monologues. Nevertheless, this dramatic undertaking is to be admired as an example of the ability of Peter Shaffer to experiment with a new dramatic theme and form.
The story takes place at Shrivings, the Cotswold home of Sir Gideon Petrie. He is a man pledged to the case of universal peace, who has become the figurehead in anti-armament demonstrations and speaks for the "Peace Movement" as a whole. He has set up a miniature society in his home and surrounds himself with young and adoring acolytes who do not fully understand the vows of chastity and poverty that their master has made in the name of peace. Vegetarianism and pacifism are the obligations of all who come to his home. It is no small coincidence that he should be named Gideon. His namesake is Gideon of the Old Testament, a judge of Israel (Exodus 2:15-22) and a man who was a conqueror of the Midianites and Philistines (Judges 6-8).

The house that serves as a peace center and commune is called Shrivings; the meaning and use of the word at once become obvious. According to its Latin and Old English etymological origins, this is a word that denotes penance and confession. Shaffer deliberately named Petrie's house Shrivings and during an interview said, "It means 'Confession.' 'Confession and Absolution.'" What will come to Sir Gideon, who has been chaste for twenty-seven years, and to those who live with him, is obvious.
It all begins as Mark Askelon, a former student, now a famous poet, returns from a long exile on Corfu to accept an award from Oxford for his poetry on the same day that Sir Gideon will receive his peace prize. The name Askelon is also symbolic. The Askelon was a river in Jordan that flowed near the city of Philistia. The obvious link between Mark Askelon and "Philistine" is trite but unavoidable. As one might expect, Mark, even before his entry into the monastic milieu of Shrivings, lives primarily on meat and whisky. Unlike his peaceful mentor, he has lost his love for humanity and is now succumbing to the dangers of Roman Catholicism. He arrives ready to destroy the contentment of his old friend.

The two men strike a bargain and Mark delivers his ultimatum: if Gideon manages not to throw him out of the house before the "award" weekend is over, then he will return to the humanist faith. From that point on, the poet gleefully tries to make life impossible for his host. His list of misdeeds reads more like the script for an afternoon melodrama than for the action of a play about serious philosophical questions; he re-enacts a death game in which he lacerates his dead wife with insults; he plays a game he has read about in which he forces the others to electrocute him
symbolically, thus releasing their hostilities; he seduces the girlfriend of his own son; he reveals Gideon's past, filled with stories of pederasty and bisexual encounters; finally, he announces publicly that his son is a bastard child and was never really loved by his mother. No one in the house remains untouched.

The questions raised by each man are really dialectic in form, demanding hypotheses, but Mr. Shaffer attempts to weave them into a plot filled with dramatic twists and turns, of exposed truths and shattered dreams. There is neither thesis nor antithesis. The result is bad dialectic and poor theatre. Eventually Gideon wins his bet and Mark offers to return to the fold. But of course, it is too late. In reclaiming one lost sheep, Sir Gideon loses all he has established, including his own belief. The humanist simply exchanges roles with the Philistine.

The central question that Shaffer poses concerning man's perfectibility is a fascinating one, but the play fails not only because of the obviousness of the metaphors—Shrivings, Gideon, Askelon—but, more importantly because it seems set in a different world from the subjects it is ostensibly discussing. The terms of a play like this dictate that the machinery of surprise and
reversal, and the intellectual interest of the plot, will eventually come to a solution. No solution on the enormous issues which this play raises can be reached by such means. The level of debate might have been a good deal higher and Shaffer, explaining the failure of the London production, said: "I didn't like the Ibsenite elements in it. At the last moment, instead of keeping the argument on the rails, I let the play veer off into one of those confrontation scenes so beloved of audiences—but not, however, beloved by me!" Mr. Shaffer should have followed his own theatrical persuasions.

When he rewrote it for the proposed New York production, he tried to make several changes that he thought would solve the problem. He told me during an interview that in the original *The Battle of Shrivings*, "Sir Gideon's wife was a major character who live[d] and love[d] two men—both of whom are embodied in her husband." In the rewritten version, she does not appear, but we do learn from Mark that Enid has gone off with an accountant (with Gideon's blessing). In the original production, much of the argument about perfectibility revolved around Lois, the young American, and Sir Gideon. In the *Shrivings* version, the argument goes from Lois, to David, her boyfriend and Mark's son, to Sir Gideon. They all have a more balanced share in it. Mark and Gideon, in
several intimate scenes, argue more abstractly than in the original. But even these rewrites do not appear to help the theatricality of the production substantially, and the drama remains long and devoid of significant action. Missing is the superb use of the interloper, Walter Langer, and the subtleness of a character like Cristoforou in *The Public Eve*. The overwhelming philosophical question overshadows character development and strong stage rhetoric. A close look at portions of the dialogue will validate this negative reaction.

Sir Gideon nicknames people with birdnames: David, as the more intellectual of Sir Gideon's followers is "the owl," and Lois who finally does attack the philosopher is "the falcon." When he enters the stage, Gideon ascends to a handcarved wooden throne that David has made for him. Is this to symbolize a judge's chair? His philosophical statements are more at the level of a civil servant than those of a philosopher. Rehearsing his speech for a large protest march, he says:

> We know more and more about our Aggressions. We can't ever hope to remove them by reason alone: but if we don't make the attempt, not merely to concentrate their fury on to ever-lessening objects, but absolutely to starve them to death, we are doomed. Let me simplify it for you the point of a crazy imperative. The Drug Children of Today cry: 'Unite with Nature!' I say: Resist her. Spit out the anger in your daddy's sperm! The bile in your mother's milk! The more you starve out aggression, the more you will begin yourselves!
In pitched battle with Mark about the question of love and peace he rants and raves about the room shouting:

You speak of love all the time. But what will you honour? ... Everyone says Love; you've got to fight for your love. Alright! But what does that mean? Do you think silence can't be fight? Do you judge a love only by the bashing you do for it? (Bitterly) Oh yes! Stand up! Square up! Come outside! Come on the battlefield! History of the World! Put your fists where your faith is! Marvellous! ... (Harshly) And that's what you want too, with all your long hair, sweet looks! ... All of you, just the same ... 

And how profound is the philosopher's weighty discovery in the third act, that "You have to stand there and take it."?[17]

Mark Askelon is Gideon's opponent, but he is presented without much imagination or subtlety. His vivid stories intended to corrupt the lives of those around him are melodramatic and hardly credible. Rather than coming naturally from the man's personality, they serve only to demonstrate Shaffer's inability to integrate characters and theme. Mark worships a small portable shrine that has an image of his wife, Giulia, inside of it. He had it made as a personal reminder that he caused her death. He laments and swears to her spirit, in Italian, that he will go back to Corfu and harm no one. It is as if the author is attempting to demonstrate that there is kindness beneath Mark's granite exterior. In a scene describing the riots which took
place in New York while he was there recovering from the death of his wife, he spews forth in some overindulgent metaphors. To declaim poems to College students, written twenty years before they were born . . . They were in fact swarming all over the City the day I arrived: yet again protesting the Vietnam War,—in this instance, the invasion of Cambodia. Isn't it amazing the way the Young simply won't give up? There they all were, in their velvets and zippy boots—haircuts like so many liberty bells—still handing out pamphlets, still squeaking 'Stop Killing' in desperate little voices. And the next day their elders—as if the murder of four children in Ohio that week had not been enough—decided to punish their impertinence in New York . . .

Neither his rhetoric nor his poetry is convincing enough to present him as a real character instead of as a spokesman for one side in the author's debate. In a scene describing one of the students hurt in the riot, he gives Gideon a "pollen poem" in order to gain sympathy:

... That boy sat glued to the earth, with the pollen twirling round his red scalp—clouds of glinting dust—round and round the blood patch like flies, I leant out, and it flew up to my mouth. I breathed it. I chewed it. It entered my stomach like a powdered drug: dead Spring—round, dead, unalterable Spring, with its meaningless glints of hope! On and on we glared at each other, and on and on this blood dripped into the drain, and the pollen twirled inside me, and the years turned, till I was sick. Till I vomited down the side of that smart new building, I saw my sick running down the glass walls, and the boy began to laugh.

Mark's story reveals Shaffer's inadequacy at creating original poetry to give his character the viability he
needs as a returning "prize poet." It is poetry filled with obvious metaphors and inadequate images.

His affair with Lois, designed to hurt both Gideon and his son David, is neither moving nor monumental in terms of understanding his character or his motivation. Mark chastises the girl for her hypocrisy: "Your mouth all day long shouts Equality! But your eyes keep singing Uniqueness! You won't hear them [David and Gideon] demanding Equal Eyes for All Women! If I could once make them in a poem, I'd never open my mouth again. Consider that!" And as he breaks the news of his conquest to Mark and Gideon he says, "It's not only Vigils that make man hungry." Poets should be made of sterner stuff.

Even the characters of Lois and David do not compare with any of Shaffer's acutely developed character studies in the one-acts. Lois, an enthusiastic American girl in love with the "movement," worships Sir Gideon and seeks her salvation in him. Her one liners are questions better suited to a freshman in an Introduction to Philosophy class. To add to the ineptness, they are always preceded with "Why," "This is silly," or "Hey." She eventually sleeps with Mark because she is fascinated by his viciousness and also needs the attention. But when she is discovered all she can do is grab a
bottle of liquor and attack Gideon with ideas and arguments she learned from Mark. 22

... It was like nothing! No wonder she left you, your wife. No wonder she just got out, poor stupid Enid. She found out what a phoney she was hitched to. What a phoney! Christ, at least he's alive up there! No dead—as good as dead!—Dead thing! Dead old thing! Dead! Boring—dead!—ridiculous—Dead! phoney—Dead!—old—dead! dead! dead! DEAD!

She quickly knows she has done wrong and with the concluding whisper, "Don't ever forgive me," she rejoins the philosopher of Shrivings.

David, "the chosen one" and sometimes "the owl" depending on his situation or closeness to "Giddy" (Gideon's nickname), recognizes the love/hate relationship between himself and his father, but he can never really express his feelings. He rants and raves; he screams in frustration when he is verbally attacked; and he keeps asking Gideon to stop "the thing" in his father's voice that indicates destruction. He goes through the maze of hate and debate without really becoming involved until the last scene with his father. It is a moving scene; although one has not been prepared for it by David's actions or rhetoric up to this point: 23

(His hands fly up, join violently above his head. For a long moment they stay up there, poised to smash his father down. Then he begins to tremble. Slowly his arms are lowered over his father's head. He pulls MARK to him, and kisses him on the face. They stay still.)
Footnotes for Introduction

1 Peter Levin Shaffer, in an interview on 18 September 1970. Unless otherwise specified, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted by Wayne P. Lawson. All interviews with Mr. Shaffer occurred at his London home, 18 Earls Terrace, W2.


5 The National Theatre, in the theatre brochure for August Strindberg, Miss Julie, and Peter Shaffer, Black Comedy (July, 1965).


8 Interview with Shaffer, 19 September 1970.
David runs away, returns, hugs his father, goes back to loving Gideon, but never does one have the feeling that he understands any of it. He is overshadowed by the larger issues at hand.

Shaffer’s Shrivings, with its philosophical debate, ends in a rather sophomoric exchange between the poet and the philosopher. After David and Lois have returned to the fold, the only one who has lost is Gideon. The roles become reversed and each man signifies his new awareness:

GIDEON: Dust.

(Appalled, MARK sits down at the table. He takes up a spoon. He dips it in the soup, and presents it to GIDEON.)

MARK: Peace!

(GIDEON sits rigid . . . A long pause. Then, very slowly, GIDEON begins to lower his head to the spoon held before him. He does not look at MARK. He opens his mouth, and drinks.)

The ending or the solution is out of touch with the problems that Shaffer had originally proposed.

It seems that in this play Shaffer was unable to do what he said a good play should be able to do: "to tell a story of action and of character, not just a story of one or the other." For the first time, Mr. Shaffer concentrated on the dramatic and ignored the theatrical. He concentrated on the philosophies of two men, but was unable to make those men believable.
as real people. His characters are "... people pouring out drinks and spouting lines: what they say they believe. These are really external things. As opposed to what's inside their heads". That statement cannot be applied to characters in his other plays.

Nevertheless, credit should be given to Mr. Shaffer for his attempts at a philosophical play so different in form from his other works. His willingness to write this long three-act philosophical debate into dramatic form adds breadth and scope to his work. The play, whether it failed or not, is a sign of a dedicated artist of the theatre.
Footnotes for Chapter V


2Interview with Shaffer, 18 September 1970.

3Interview with Shaffer, 19 September 1970.

4Interview with Gielgud, 19 September 1970.

5Loney, p. 22.

6All references to The Battle of Shrivings are to an unpublished typescript of the last version of the play, a script revised by the author for the projected Broadway production which was never staged. Citations are to act, scene and page. Mr. Shaffer very kindly sent me this typescript in 1971.


9Interview with Gielgud, 19 September 1970.

10Loney, p. 23.

11Loney, p. 23.

12Loney, p. 23.

13Loney, p. 22.

14Interview with Shaffer, 19 September 1970.

15Shaffer, Shrivings, I.ii.31.

16Shaffer, Shrivings, III.19.
17 Shaffer, Shriving, III.20.
18 Shaffer, Shriving, I.ii.22.
19 Shaffer, Shriving, I.ii.38.
20 Shaffer, Shriving, III.2.
21 Shaffer, Shriving, III.7.
22 Shaffer, Shriving, III.23.
23 Shaffer, Shriving, III.24.
24 Shaffer, Shriving, III.26.
25 Loney, p. 22.
26 Loney, p. 22.
CONCLUSIONS

The plays of Peter Shaffer vary in dramatic scope and theatrical form. They range from the simplicity of his early television dramas to The Royal Hunt of the Sun to his attempt at dialectic in The Battle of Shrivings. In this dissertation I have examined only those works which reached the stages of London's West End or Broadway. The early plays and those works written in partnership with his brother, Anthony, have not been considered. Such a decision was deliberate since I wished to limit this study to those plays written after 1956 when critics began labelling British drama as "new." The selection indicates no personal preference for one play or another.

Five-Finger Exercise states that middle-class families, like lower-class families, do experience domestic crises. In his first "well-made" play, by critics' judgment, Shaffer expresses the conviction that the important emotional crises in the lives of most urban dwellers take place in living rooms, and as he says, "it is the height of confused snobbery to admit this as a legitimate setting only when the room happens to be the front parlor of a working-class house." In the
context of post-1956 British drama. Mr. Shaffer used his skill as an artist of the theatre by writing about an old theme: the mysterious interloper. He also selected a well-known and traditional stage setting, the drawing-room or parlor, for his place of action. The play is successful because the characters, particularly the interloper Walter Langer, are well-drawn. Langer's character takes shape through his relationship to each of the four. Their rhetoric is sensitive and reveals Shaffer's keen ear for the human dilemma. Shaffer adds a somewhat chilling tone to this old plot. The ability of the Harrington family to endure as individuals and to try to understand one another becomes more than a family problem. It involves the question of communication with others, a question with which we are all concerned.

Shaffer's one-acts are examples of the pleasure which brevity, conciseness, and coherency can bring to the theatre. They have well-developed and clear plot lines that exercise the playwright's skill at examining problems of communication within a limited artistic form. They present, and often combine, humor, farce, poignancy, and the dubious joys of self-revealing confrontations. Shaffer makes us laugh and entertains us. These plays do not need to be overly problematic or
philosophical; although several include perceptive character studies, each is constructed of strong enough theatrical elements to survive the test of good entertainment. These one-acts demonstrate witty, tight, and believable dialogue that brings the characters into our immediate focus and reveals the humanity of the playwright.

The Royal Hunt of the Sun is different in almost every aspect from Shaffer's previous work and from the plays that followed it. Set, song, mime, dance, and characters are from a different world than those in which the Harrington's and Cristoforou found themselves. Based on myths of sixteenth century Peru and Spain, the play portrays a conflict which nearly all human beings must experience at one time or another in their lives: the question of faith.

This play gained a place for Shaffer in the repertory of the National Theatre of Great Britain and its acceptance speaks well of Shaffer's ability and reputation when one considers the experimental nature of such a production and the many ways in which it might not have succeeded. Mr. Shaffer seems to have recognized what Charles Marowitz calls "one of the most dynamic factors in any stage performance; [that is] the theatre ritual itself: the existence of an audience that comes
to a playhouse with certain prescribed attitudes and anticipations." Many theatre historians call this recognition the basis for "total theatre." Directors, actors, technicians, and audience all become engaged in the spectacle and the realization of the fact that theatre possesses unique qualities common to no other art form. Peter Shaffer captures the experimental nature of this type of theatre.

It may be that Peter Shaffer was pleased that his play, *The Battle of Shrivings*, did not "fit" into the context of success which I have used as one basis for evaluation of his work in this study. The difference between his previous successes and this failure should be seen as a demonstration of the author's consistent pursuit of variety in the theatre. The dialectic inherent in the philosophical problems that Shaffer introduces in his long three-act drama is inconsistent with the play's characters and setting as the playwright presents them. There is an obvious thematic heaviness that overshadows character development and the opportunity for the realistic and dynamic stage rhetoric that one finds in his other plays. The author did not succeed in his attempt at philosophy.

Finally, brief attention must be given to Shaffer's newest production, *Equus*. It was produced in London
after I had completed the final chapter of this dissertation, and therefore I can refer only to the reviews of the play in The London Times. There is no published script.

If Irving Wardle is correct in his review of Equus, then Shaffer has once again demonstrated by success on the stage his conviction that labels are not for playwrights. The setting, which changes from a psychiatrist's office to the stables of a British estate, differs remarkably from the drawing-room of the Harrington house and the darkness of the artist's loft in Black Comedy. The theme of the play centers around a seventeen year old boy who puts out the eyes of six horses with an iron spike. Shaffer presents a dramatic retelling of the story by relating through interviews with the psychiatrist the boy's childhood and the manner in which the young man deals with the consequences of his act. Wardle gives a resume of the story:

... Son of a pious mother and atheist father, Alan developed an early obsession with Christian sadomasochism; while a wild ride on the sea coast gave him a parallel fixation on horses. The two obsessions merge in his private cult of 'Equus,' and on taking a weekend stable job, he consummates his worship in orgiastic night riding. But when a girl takes him back to the stable to make love, he sees this as an act of sacrilege; and believing that the eyes of Equus will reduce him to permanent impotence, he blinds every horse in the stable.
In both writing and staging, the author apparently uses theatrical techniques whose consistent purpose is to evoke the primal magic of the theatre as ritual. The nuptial union of boy and horse in the sexually-oriented rides evokes the momentary illusion of the centaur. The boy’s union with his god, whom he must then destroy to save his own humanity, is certainly on a dramatic level with the remarkable attraction between Atahuallpa, man and Sun-God, and Pizarro, who in a terrible moment of human frustration allows the destruction of the one being who has given his unfulfilled life meaning. By using the unearthly masks, unusual musical effects and elaborate mime, in The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Shaffer produced a picture of the Incan civilization larger than life. He uses the same "total" effect in Equus.  

The effect is totally stylized (while also fitting in with the centaur imagery), but it secures in full the magical transformation which is the special province of the mask. In the night ride on a manhandled revolve, and in the climactic blinding, with silvery muzzles converging questioningly from the shadows of the stable, the play instantly fills the theatre with the sense of a potent and ancient force returning to life.

The text, however, does no such thing. The image of the horse is poetically inexhaustible, and Mr. Shaffer draws on its ambiguity (dominion and servitude) to link his pagan and Christian material.
CHAPTER I
THEATRE IN GREAT BRITAIN: THE FIFTIES

Most theatre students, critics, and serious playgoers are well aware of the importance of May 8, 1956, and John Osborne's Look Back in Anger. Both the shocking entrance of this "new drama" into London's West End as well as the history of the "angry young playwrights" who followed Osborne have been well documented. Such well-known and popular critics as John Russell Taylor, Martin Esslin, and Charles Marowitz have dissected the dramatic contents of the plays; the artistic and aesthetic effects of the movement have been discussed both philosophically and practically by Peter Brook, Ronald Haymon, and John Russell Brown; theatre historian Allardyce Nicoll has documented the movement's historical consequences and has predicted the influences on future dramatic works. Within two years after the auspicious opening at the Royal Court Theatre, a series of books, articles, and interviews about Look Back in Anger were written. Playwrights who created Jimmy Porter characters could slam doors loudly against the drawing-room drama of writers like Terence Rattigan and Graham Greene and were
As I stated in Chapter I, Shaffer's principal intention as a playwright is to entertain. He seems to have furthered that intention by this integration of theatrical effects with a theme that evolves through the characters of psychiatrist and subject and the question of impotency and the conflict between rational and emotional forces within the psychiatrist and young man in the play.

Shaffer asks not to be labelled and prefers to do many different kinds of things in the theatre. His totem animal, he says, is the chameleon, and his work should be seen in that light. His talent as a playwright is best stimulated when he seeks to appeal to all kinds and manners of men with variety in theatrical form and setting. One can never predict what kind of piece he will write next. This diversity, demonstrated in the author's major works, is evidence that Shaffer is a writer of formidable intelligence and imagination.

If Shaffer's stylistic diversity is unpredictable, this dissertation, with analyses of all his major plays, not only supports that fact but demonstrates something that perhaps Mr. Shaffer would be unwilling to admit: his theme remains constant. Whether he is discussing Christian and Incan cultures in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* or the differences between a philosopher and an anarchistic poet in *The Battle of Shrivings*, the author
is repeatedly presenting his audience with the problems of communication. While he insists upon his "Theory of Indeterminancy" and refuses labels, there is a growing tendency on his part to develop his theme of communication to a deeper degree in each play. *Equus* apparently follows in this vein as it examines the self-perceptions of boy and psychiatrist and their problems of communication (boy—horse, boy—girl, psychiatrist—wife, psychiatrist—boy and finally each with the world as he seems to see it). In the not too distant future as he produces additional experiments in theatre, it might be that Shaffer's works will have to be reevaluated in a new critical light, one based on thematic treatment rather than on theatrical craftsmanship.

The dramatic hunt of Peter Shaffer is a search for fulfillment as a playwright. He has attracted large audiences over a number of years and he has gained the approbation of a majority of critics. Evidence of fulfillment as a playwright for the writer of *Five-Finger Exercise*, *The Private Ear*, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Black Comedy* and now *Equus* can best be seen in the fact that he has gained the right to develop in his own fashion: to experiment, to entertain, to engage his public and critics dramatically.
Footnotes for Conclusion


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quickly so categorized by the critics. Although *Look Back in Anger* belongs structurally to the realistic tradition and has a conventional well-made plot, it was rapturously accepted as "new" because of the first-time-on-the-stage powerful vituperation against the staid and stolid middle-class British home. Historically, what was happening to the British theatre had happened thirty-five years earlier on the Continent. There, the "revolution" was called *avant-garde*; the vituperation against the bourgeoisie took the form of Dadaism and Expressionism. The comparison, while not exact, is meant to demonstrate the concepts of revolution in the theatre. The earlier movement dealt more with form; the "angry" movement of the Fifties was more concerned with theme and language.

The First World War eroded old conventions and preconceptions throughout the world. The Russian revolutions of 1917 showed even further that the most sacred structures could be subject to violent change. The theatre of the post-World War I era was charged socially, politically, and psychologically as well as artistically. Yet while most of the continent of Europe was deeply affected and the artistic revolt of the twenties took its shape in the form of Dadaism, Expressionism and Surrealism, England quietly emerged without the actor-
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manager system that had been in existence for over 120 years but with little else in the way of "avant-garde" or "revolutionary" theatre. Commercial producers and the "long run" policy saturated the country with popular entertainment. During the Great War and immediately following the armistice, states Allardyce Nicoll, most of the "commercial houses were being given over to revues and musical comedies." Attempts were being made toward the "establishment of dozens of theatre societies and play-producing clubs, together with the first approaches towards the building up of a 'repertory' movement." The old "actor-managers had been taught to accept plays written in the new styles made popular by Pinero and Jones." Hence, although there was movement in the English theatre, there were no playwrights or theatre "revolutions" like those on the Continent. Although the theatre of social consciousness had its conception in the late nineteenth century, the actual patron saints of the theatrical revolutionists of the between-wars period, Freud and Lenin, made little impact on the theatre movement in England. The implosions and explosions which characterized the Continental theatre, the dreams and resolutions of European artists, the conquest of the irrational and the triumph of the proletariat lent form and substance to the work of people like Brecht and
Toller in Germany and Pirandello in Italy. The arts in England were slow in recognizing and accepting the changes that were taking place.

That the theatre in England was changing in the Twenties and Thirties is true, but it was a change that could hardly be called revolutionary. Most of what was taking place was academic in nature—the writing of theatre history and the presentation of the classics. It was not until the dawn of World War II that England began to regain prominence as a home for important new drama.

While the works of Priestley, Bridie, Eliot, Fry, Coward, and Rattigan emphasized the "realistic" movement of the past, the poetic over the prosaic, and the drawing-room over the streets, England was building a permanent company of actors inhabiting their own playhouse and producing the finest classical and contemporary plays at reasonable prices. By 1939 the Old Vic was the most respected troupe in England and set a standard in theatre for the rest of the country. The establishment of summer festivals and the growth of provincial troupes were also notable. The Stratford-upon-Avon seasons of Shakespeare's plays regained prestige after the First World War, and England began to breed a new crop of actors and actresses—Sybil Thorndike, Edith Evans,
John Gielgud, Peggy Ashcroft, Alec Guinness—who would later come to symbolize the epitome of great acting for the entire English-speaking world. With the assistance of the government and with young actors like Laurence Olivier, England was on its way to establishing a National Theatre.

The war did little to change the academic nature of the theatre in England. Caste and class in English society still remained an important factor in governing the arts. The example of Eugene Scribe, the French playwright, continued to function as the modus operandi for British playwrights. As J. R. Taylor asserts, Scribe "... saw that all drama, in performance, is an experience in time, and therefore the first essential is to keep one's audience attentive from one minute to the next... His plays inculcated, not the overall construction of drama such as Racine would have understood it, but at least the spacing and preparation of effects so that an audience should be kept expectant from beginning to end." One only needs to read Priestley or Rattigan to understand the Frenchman's influence. Scribe believed that the story, however preposterous, should be treated "... so that there is not one moment in the whole evening when the audience is not in a state of eager expectation, waiting for something to happen, for some secret to be uncovered, some
identity revealed, some inevitable confrontation actually to occur." For theatregoers, England inevitably remained the drawing-room of its middle and upper-middle class homes; the majority of theatres were controlled by the producers who wanted to make money and who could "close any play which fell below a specified weekly income."

What Lenin and Freud did to change the theatre of continental Europe in the first twenty-five years of this century, the political events and economic conditions of the Fifties did to change the theatre of England. The British theatre, states critic Gordon Rogoff, "had to change in the fifties because British life, British assumptions, and British positions were shifting, mercurially, forcing responses from people who had made lack of response a condition of survival." Just as World War I and World War II laid waste the resources and people of central and eastern Europe, the events of the Fifties psychologically devastated the people of England. They had waited in fear for the Germans to cross the channel; by some accounts over 350,000 men on the warfront and 150,000 civilians at home died during this time. After the war, India and Pakistan became independent countries within the Commonwealth. In 1948 Ceylon acquired its freedom from the Commonwealth, followed by Burma and Ireland outside the Commonwealth.
The kingdom was losing its colonies at a fast pace. In the Near East, Great Britain gave up its League of Nations mandate in Palestine as Israel was born. Cyprus, South Africa, and all colonies in West Africa gained independence. In 1956 Great Britain, France, and Israel attacked Egypt after the Egyptians had nationalized the Suez Canal. Due to United Nations pressure and the threat of Russian intervention, the fighting finally ended. After the Suez affair, an economic crisis hit Great Britain because of the disruption of shipping. During this period, one prime minister resigned and another retired.

How could the British theatre's depiction of the marital and financial problems of the bourgeoisie be relevant during such times? As Gordon Rogoff has pointed out, the British were being forced to face the reality of their lives in new ways:

When India finally severed itself from Britain's imperial grasp, the appearance of the first 'angry' plays was only a matter of incidental time. The sceptered isle, the precious realm, that earth so long a powerful world unto itself, was at last compelled to join the world. The beginning of painful, yet splendidly alive, discovery, it was also the beginning of fresh perceptions, a new awareness, an unavoidable sense that the fragmented world outside was a useful mirror in which to view the new, emerging, terrifyingly real Britain. By the time of Look Back in Anger, long before the Profumo scandal, the breakdown was complete. This is not to say that men didn't move mountainous obstructions into their minds in order to ignore it. But they did so only at the cost of increased isolation. Their masquerades, built
on the scrapheap of past glory, had nothing to do with the present. 'We are Great Britain again,' said one of the headlines during the Suez crisis in 1956. In the event, the triumph was an illusion. The old, mannered, parasitic greatness was disappearing against a litany of nostalgic whimpers. That may be serviceable behavior for a dying social order, but it is hopelessly corruptive to art. Indeed, a theatre that whimpers has lost the name of theatre. Thus, Mr. Osborne's resounding bang, while limited as art, was the first necessary war cry in the battle to save an art.

The revolution of which Rogoff speaks was sown on the ground of two producing organizations, The English Stage Company and The Theatre Workshop. The former was founded in 1956 under the direction of George Devine who had directed the Young Vic after the war. His hopes for a revitalized theatre centered around finding playwrights who would not mind experimenting— even making drastic changes if need be. The response to his search was meagre: a young playwright named John Osborne submitted a play called Look Back in Anger. It seemed to fit Mr. Devine's definition of experimental. Most commercial houses would have refused it on the grounds "that it departed too far from their estimate of public taste to warrant the gamble of production."9

The play that started the "revolution" was, ironically, reviewed badly by the critics. A brief look at the reviews demonstrates the unwillingness of the major critics to accept the play for its content. In the Observer, Kenneth Rynan wrote that "Osborne's moral
position goes off the deep end but that is not a vice in a theatre that rarely sticks a toe in the water. Look Back presents post-war youth as it really is . . . You could never mobilize him [Jimmy Porter] and his kind into a lynching mob, since the art he lives for, jazz, was invented by Negroes; and if you gave him a razor, he would do nothing with it but shave . . . "10 Cecil Wilson of the Daily Mail called Jimmy Porter "a young neurotic full of intellectual frustration who lives like a pig and furiously finds the whole world out of step except himself."11 The critics and their negative reviews did not stop the revolution.

The success of the play was in the fact that it not only represented the youthful minority of the country, but also gave hope and courage to the new young writers who were subsequently able to submit their plays to The English Stage Company or The Theatre Workshop with a fair chance of acceptance. Before 1956 this was hardly possible. The reason so many new playwrights emerged at once is that suddenly there was a willingness to stage plays written by unknown writers. There was money in it and anyone at all with the slightest desire to write could try his or her luck.

At the Royal Court Theatre, The English Stage Company brought forward a number of other writers, with
dramatic repudiations emerging in various aesthetic forms. Directors and playwrights alike seemed to take their cue from Osborne. These included N. F. Simpson, Ann Jellicoe, and John Arden. Simpson attracted attention with his "absurdist-like" The Resounding Tinkle, but his other works were not big critical successes. Ann Jellicoe received mixed responses with her The Sport of My Mad Mother and then found great favor with The Knack.

The English Stage Company played a large part in encouraging new young dramatists to come forward with their creative and philosophical ideas. George Devine "made the most of two warring worlds: the Playwright with his eye on the future, and the audience with its collective feet firmly planted in the mid-air of the past." Devine initiated the new theatre, but it was The Theatre Workshop that proved to be the real crusader in this revolution in English Theatre.

More than anyone else, Joan Littlewood and her husband, Ewen Macoll, saw theatre as more than just entertainment. Ms. Littlewood felt that the theatre was for the people and was just as serious an art form as music or dance. Before World War II she and her husband formed The Theatre Union and set out on a tour through rural and industrial districts with their productions. After the war, her group got together again and
formed The Theatre Workshop. After touring Europe, the group finally settled into the old Theatre Royal in London's East End with a repertory ranging from *Volpone* to *A Taste of Honey*. The company believed in variety and produced not only new playwrights, but Chekhov, Marlowe, Lope de Vega, and Aristophanes as well. The group's breakthrough began with a production of Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* in 1956. It received mixed reviews and was followed by *A Taste of Honey*, written by Shelagh Delaney, a nineteen-year-old working-class girl. The plays produced were filled with topical material never before considered appropriate to the stage. As the critics implied, magnificent rhetoric, angry monologues, and the personal involvement of the author, whether autobiographically or morally as a commentator, now gave strength and relevance to the British Theatre Movement. What began as innovative and experimental drama was classified by London critics as a movement.

London began to wake up to the presence of these young playwrights and actors and imaginative producers. Joan Littlewood's objectives were sensitivity and cohesive art, not perfection for her players. For Littlewood, perfection was not possible unless it was defined as something that could change and improve.
She deplored the huge commercial theatre because it lured members of her group away and many times this idea of theatre for money destroyed her faith in what she was doing. Her players were encouraged to "do their own thing" and to improvise lines during a performance. She aimed at creating a local theatre, refusing to raise prices any higher than the local residents could easily afford. She hoped that in spite of success, The Theatre Workshop would remain true to her ideal that the theatre should not only be grand, but also vulgar, simple, and pathetic. With Littlewood and Devine the British Theatre and its new wave of playwrights became the avant-garde of the late Fifties and early Sixties.

Peter Shaffer entered the English theatre in 1958, two years after Osborne's _Look Back in Anger_ in 1956, a time when labels were being liberally bestowed upon those playwrights who gave evidence of abusive and angry rhetoric and controversial themes. Shaffer received no label for his first full-length play, _Five-Finger Exercise_, and refused to allow the critics to place the plays that followed into a neat pigeonhole. Thomas Wiseman in the _Evening Standard_ wrote, "Mr. Shaffer has proved once and for all that the rich have as much right to unhappiness as the poor." Mr. Wiseman continued:
THE DRAMATIC HUNT: A CRITICAL EVALUATION
OF PETER SHAFFER'S PLAYS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Wayne Paul Lawson, B.A., M.A.

The Ohio State University
1973

Reading Committee:
Marta Frosch
George P. Crepeau
Charles L. Babcock
Roy H. Bowen

Approved by
Roy H. Bowen
Adviser
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There is a surface conventionality about his play which angers the angries: the drawing-room setting, the French windows leading off, the daughter in jodphurs. This is where we walked out, one might justifiably think, recalling the innumerable dreary plays with similar settings.

But Mr. Shaffer keeps us in our seats because he rapidly peels away the conventional exteriors of these people and gets to their somewhat defective hearts.

The majority of critics gave the play favorable reviews and Shaffer was given the Evening Standard Award for the Most Promising Playwright of 1958. No one said that the play was angry or East-End oriented. All agreed with the critic of the Journal American who wrote that "... the theme was certainly universal: the inability of people to unburden themselves honestly to one another." Five-Finger Exercise was simply found to be effective theatre.

The one-act plays which followed varied in theme and style from Five-Finger Exercise. The Private Ear and The Public Ear were presented at the Globe Theatre in 1962; obviously Peter Shaffer was capable of more than well-made plots and serious drama. It is interesting that in the theatre of the last two decades or thereabouts no dramatist made the one-act play anything more than de rigueur. Peter Shaffer proved to theatre audiences in America and England that the one-act play is not only a tolerable, but an exciting form of
entertainment. Rather than follow the road of his contemporary playwrights in England and rather than attempting to write something about which he knew little—the lower class or anti-Establishment feelings of that same class—Peter Shaffer seems to have dipped into his intellectual background, his Cambridge days, and to have used his mental abilities to write two plays of high comedy. They are gay, sophisticated, and wise. In these plays he preaches the enjoyment of both life and love while one is lucky enough to have them. In the Villager of October 31, 1963, the reviewer writes that "Peter Shaffer is a playwright with an unerring ear for dialogue and a superb sense of characterization."16

One should note that the new drama since 1956, with inverse snobbery, was theoretically opposed to this kind of boulevard entertainment designed to amuse audiences. Yet, in a movement that had to design most of its own critical apparatus as it went along because of what seemed like a hopeless divergence between artistic intention and critical response, few of the playwrights since Look Back in Anger were writing angry plays.

Each play in Shaffer's sequence of works is significantly different from its companions. The distinguished theatre critic, Bernard Levin, called
The Royal Hunt of the Sun "the greatest play of our generation."\(^{17}\) Theatre audiences must have been greatly surprised after Five-Finger Exercise and the two one-acts to enter the theatre and see a story about the Spaniards of sixteenth century Spain and the gifts of greed, hunger, and the Cross they brought to the Incas; a proud, simple people, and of the vast booty of gold the Spaniards brought back to despoil their own land. This tale about Pizarro and his men and the conquest of the Incas departed radically in time, in form, and in subject and attitude from his previous plays. It contained the elements of the masque, pageant, and dance to support the theme.

Black Comedy, written after The Royal Hunt of the Sun, was mime and illusion and fun. Taken from an episode in a fourteenth-century folk tale, and adapted from the repertoire of the Peking Opera, the play centers around a group of people who convey the illusion of darkness on a brilliantly lit stage. As Mr. Shaffer, himself says, "It was for fun—and it is great fun; to direct, to act in, to see. It is a comedy of illusion. Nothing spectacularly didactic; nothing particularly philosophical; just fun."\(^{18}\) But this idea of "just fun" did not deter him from writing a companion piece that was different. He presented the public with White Lies.
another short one-act comedy that is a studied, artfully constructed play. It is centered around three characters, tightly wrapped in their own little worlds—worlds of self-deception and false fronts—a fact that is skillfully enunciated even if not sharply dramatized by Shaffer. Here the author combined somberness with sophisticated irony and humor. A haughty fortune teller really does see the future and destroys the illusions of her young customers.

The author's last play, The Battle of Shrivings, did not have as great a commercial or critical success as did his other plays. In this play there is neither mime nor masque, no cute one-act gags nor farce play. The intention of the playwright is serious and revolves around a philosophical debate between a poet and a philosopher. The setting is an English country house and the discussions that take place there reveal no similarities to the plots of Shaffer's one-acts or to the history in The Royal Hunt of the Sun.

It must have seemed curious to the critics that in none of his plays was Mr. Shaffer angry nor were his plays following any particular pattern; they did not fit into an "-ism" category. Unlike Robert Brustein's dramatists of revolt,19 Shaffer did not have a single consuming idea or attitude that repeated itself in each
one of his plays. In this sense, he was unsuited to critics' labels. Because he is neither cryptic nor fiery, critics tend to place him in the same category with Robert Bolt, somewhere slightly beneath Arden, Osborne, Pinter, and Wesker. He appears to be somewhat contaminated in the view of many critics because he leans towards the Rattigan-like script. Unfortunately, to define Shaffer's position in this way is to minimize his achievements. His special assets, stated in the preface and those on which I shall elaborate in the remaining chapters of this work, are an undoctrinaire sense of what can be created in the special world of the stage, and a thematic diversity in doing so.

Theatre critic and historian Allardyce Nicoll has said that theatre history suggests that the "theatres in the past which encouraged the greatest and longest enduring dramas were those which, like Shakespeare's Globe, appealed to the most broadly representative body of spectators." He continues with this observation: "Naturally, the true creative power rests in the shaping imaginative genius of the dramatist, but the full opportunity for the expressing of this genius and the stimulation of its widest potentialities seem to come when the practicing playwright has the task of appealing to all kinds and manners of men." It seems to me that
this is exactly the approach that Shaffer has taken with his wide and varied stories, styles, and theatrical devices. Certainly, this comparison is not to equate his accomplishment with that of Shakespeare—no critic would dare—but it is to enforce the idea that the author of *Five-Finger Exercise*, *The Public Eye*, *The Private Far*, *Black Comedy*, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, and *The Battle of Shrivings*, seems to have the genius similarly to appeal to "all kinds and manners of men."

In the *New York Times* Shaffer was interviewed about his play *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* in an article called "To See the Soul of a Man." What he said can be applied to his concept of theatre in general and perhaps lend some insight as to why this man is not one to be categorized in a conventional way. He states:

*The creation of this kind of event seems to me more and more to be one of the few real obligations of a playwright. He is not, after all, a movie or television writer; he is creating a text for live people to display to other live people. He is facing the real with the real—not facing the dozy eye of a movie public jaded with the unreal, repeatable shadows of cinema players (that eye which for years now has closed indifferently on calvary charges, cataclysms and conversions to Christianity). He is, with the fully committed help of everyone involved in his play, exercising the imaginative muscle of his audience—today, its most under-worked possession—and if he isn't, he damned well should be. People go to the theatre for many reasons, but mainly, I think, to be surprised. Surprised by things and into things: by beauty and into beauty; by rite and into reality.*
I am not talking about mere novelty; fad is the death of art. I am referring to a need in man as fundamental as sex: the need to work his imagination, and feed his hunger for revelation.

If he goes sun-bathing in his ambitious "total" excursion among the Incas, in his other plays he goes hunting for an audience with his imagination, magic, and variety. Shaffer says:23

The prime responsibility of a playwright is to be theatrical. It's no accident that people talk of going to a 'show.' In a way, by artifice, the theatre seeks to make a more real world. Through it one tries to give people new perceptions which you wouldn't get anywhere else. I hope to write plays that everyone can understand. As someone said, there's still a great deal of music to be written in C Major.

Few critics of the theatre or serious theatre historians would deny that Peter Shaffer is writing in a time when theatre has greatly changed. Movements, labels, and inflexible critical judgments seem to identify every playwright since the war. Most analyses reduce the success of all British playwrights since 1956 to whether or not they are capable of being "kitchen-sink" material. The success or joy of a Shaffer play is hard to accept, when one must place it into a ready-made critical niche. How does one map out in scheme or system every aspect of an author's mind and his plays? Primal episodes that psychologically determine a playwright's entry into the world are sometimes very
important. But one does not necessarily become riveted to that primal movement.

Not one reviewer that I have researched, nor one writer or serious commentator on the theatre since 1956, has mentioned Shaffer as part of a system or movement. Rather than inferring that Shaffer is somehow inferior on this basis, despite his obvious talents, I suggest that there is a critical misinterpretation that masks his major asset. It is surely no backhanded compliment to credit Shaffer with a search for new ideas and varying styles which seem to be never ending. For the milieu of his plays, he has chosen the middle-class country home, the office of a business man, the house of a fortune teller, and the mountains of Peru. From the list of plays he has written come theories of complex philosophies, simple questions about communication, and the laughter that can be had in the darkness of a room filled with people like any of us. "The theatre, an art more broadly based than poetry or abstract painting without being, like the mass media, the collective product of corporations, is the point of intersection where the deeper trends of changing thought first reach a larger public." 24

Few poems or prose works were ever created by the direct application of a fixed system of rules and
formulae. Theorizing and criticizing literature always means attempting to systematize the diverse literary dispositions that are characteristic of a particular period. The dramatist, like any writer of literature, works and lives in the literary climate of his age. He assimilates into his writing certain general presuppositions about the form and function of various types of politics, social change, and literature. Rather than plant the literary author into a groundwork of formulae and set ideas, one should ask the question: How did the artist succeed in producing a unique work in the conventional literary milieu created for him by cultural traditions?

There are a variety of attitudes which exemplify the evident change within the commercial playhouses in the last twenty-five years. None is reflective of the total mood, but each at least gives a possible way in which one can approach the contemporary theatre. Martin Esslin, expert historian and critic of the Theatre of the Absurd, declares that in essence this movement:  

... does not reflect despair or a return to dark irrational forces but expresses modern man's endeavor to come to terms with the world in which he lives. It attempts to make him face up to the human condition as it really is, to free him from illusions that are bound to cause constant maladjustment and disappointment. There are enormous pressures in our world that seek to induce mankind to bear the loss of faith and moral certainties by being drugged into oblivion—by mass entertainments, shallow material
satisfaction, pseudo-explanations of reality, and cheap ideologies. At the end of that roar lies Huxley's Brave New World of senseless euphoric automata. Today, when death and old age are increasingly concealed behind euphemisms and comforting baby talk, and life is threatened with being smothered in the mass consumption of hypnotic mechanized vulgarity, the need to confront man with the reality of his situation is greater than ever. For the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions—and to laugh at it.

Esslin's conviction clearly is that the aim of this kind of theatre is to teach and strengthen the spectators by creating a frank confrontation with the enormities of present-day existence.

In 1964, Noel Coward's special introduction for a television version of Blithe Spirit set forth another mission for the theatre. He said that he knew in his teens that the world was full of hatred, cruelty, vice, unrequited love, despair, destruction and murder. I also knew at the same time that it was filled with kindness, pleasure, joy, requited love, fun, excitement, generosity, laughter and friends. And through all my years I have never changed in my mind the balance of these absurd phenomena.

I do become increasingly exasperated, however, when in my own beloved profession everything that I have been brought up and trained to believe in is now decried. Nowadays a well-constructed play with a beginning, a middle and an end is despised, and a light comedy whose sole purpose is to amuse is dismissed as being trivial and insignificant. Since when has laughter been so insignificant?
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my appreciation to Mr. Peter Shaffer for his time and effort during interviews in 1970. Also, a note of appreciation is due to Lilly Lodge Marcus, New York, who introduced me to her friends in England who knew Sir John Gielgud and Sir Laurence Olivier.

Thank you to the Theatre Department, The Ohio State University. Without the study grants I received from them, I would not have been able to personally meet the author whose plays constitute the core of this dissertation.

For their support and interest in this work I would like to thank the following individuals: Dr. Robert Boyer, for his scholarly advice and friendship; Dr. Thomas Minnick, for his expert notes on my work; Dr. John Morrow, in whose seminar it all began; Toni, Abbe, and all those at the office who were there when I needed them; my students, for their inspiration and excitement. Their contributions to this study have been invaluable.
Sir Noel's assumption is that the theatre's business is to entertain. The argument about the purpose of the theatre, central to Coward's position, has been debated since the time of Aristotle, Horace, and Longinus, and every critic labels and reflects the trends which he feels ought to be presented or those which do get presented on the stage.

Where then does one place an author like Peter Shaffer whose age and theatrical environment situate him quite coincidentally in a chronological relationship to the school which Osborne initiated in 1956 in *Look Back in Anger?* Osborne implied the word angry in his title and the "angry young man" stayed in fashion as a catch-phrase for a long time. Anger has to be directed against something and Osborne's Jimmy Porter's anger is aimed against the Establishment: 27

Well, you've never heard so many well-bred commonplaces come from beneath the same bowler hat. The platitude from Outer Space—that's brother Nigel. He'll end up in the Cabinet one day, make no mistake. But somewhere in the back of that mind is the vague knowledge that he and his pals have been plundering and fooling everybody for generations. Now Nigel is just about as vague as you can get without being actually invisible. And invisible politicians aren't much use to anyone—not even to his supporters! And nothing is more vague about Nigel than his knowledge. His knowledge of life and ordinary human beings is so hazy, he really deserves some sort of decoration for it—a medal inscribed 'For Vaguery in the Field.' But it wouldn't do for him to be troubled by any stabs of conscience, however vague. Besides
he's a patriot and an Englishman, and he doesn't like the idea that he may have been selling out his countrymen all these years, so what does he do? The only thing he can do—seek sanctuary in his own stupidity. The only way to keep things as much like they have always been as possible, is to make any alternative too much for your poor, tiny brain to grasp. It takes some doing nowadays. It really does. But they knew all about character building at Nigel's school, and he'll make it all right. Don't you worry, he'll make it. And what's more, he'll do it better than anybody else.

Jimmy's outrage directed against his wife Allison is the image of one man fighting singlehanded against his country, his century, but not very interested in the issues that make the fight necessary. The mood of disgust is clear and the gesture of reflection is clear, but the reasons for them are not. It is difficult to distinguish the number of playwrights who were writing for the public from the ones who were writing for the "movement."

Reliable and lasting tools for the analysis of dramatic movements, as they manifest themselves in the theatre, are not available as some critics would have us believe. The principles and concepts of a Stanislavski or Aristotle as transmitted to us by successive generations of critics and scholars, the "innovations" of angry new playwrights are explained to us by contemporary critics and the impressions of an Esslin or a Coward are indispensable, but they cannot be instantly comprehensive. Theatre critics and historians, like biographers,
are not divinely inspired in their judgments. This is not to imply that theatre movements or criticisms of them can be as mobile as a character in a novel or as fleeting as a metaphorical image in a poem. Theatre is associated with history and as such retains a chronological pattern, not necessarily simple, but complete and involved. There is always an idea of space between the birth of a movement (the first play) and the death of the period for which it was written—usually progressive—and definitions (criticism of the progress) will have to persist. The good critic, biographer, or historian will offer not only explanations but also speculations, conjectures, and hypotheses to his public for use in their own critical digestion. The author, in the final analysis, does what he will.

What began as innovative and experimental drama with Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* was classified by the London critics and the academic scholars like Taylor and Brown. Unfortunately they could not employ one of the most important criteria for objective criticism—if that is possible—the perspective of time. In an age that has experienced shock after shock, there is no longer any point in shocking the bourgeoisie or anyone else. The economic and social structure which is England and America or at least urban America and England
appears to be changing completely. One finds oneself standing back a little, afraid to be mowed down by the avalanche. It is impossible for the tools of criticism to remain the same. Excepting their historical context, most of the plays in the last ten years do not belong or fit into any particular category just as most of the plays in the years since Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* do not belong or fit into the nineteenth century categories of Romance, Tragedy, or Comedy. In criticizing works of art, in this case dramas, one must redefine the attitudes of the past. Out of many particular views and passing attitudes, each playwright, playgoer, and reader must create his own broad vision of theatre.

Creative power is as versatile as dramatic criticism is subjective. Critical statements with "must" or "should" in their predicates are either pedantries or tautologies depending on whether they are taken seriously or not. Drama has to be distinguished from the systematic study of it which is criticism. One learns acting, movement, how to write a good "action" story, but one does not learn drama; one learns the criticism of drama. Drama, unlike acting, is an object of study, not a subject of study. The critic, like the playwright or author, should be able to construct and dwell in a conceptual, as well as a normative, universe of his own.
John Russell Brown, in his introduction to *Modern British Dramatists*, disclaims the kind of categorization from which Shaffer suffers, and yet lists three areas that the "new British playwrights" have in common. Mr. Brown says that all of these writers are young and started writing for the theatre early; they are likely to be sensational—shocking, surprising, and outrageous: homosexuality, violent deaths and callow humor are all part and parcel of these writers; they select popular, vulgar, very obvious subjects.\(^{28}\)

Allardyce Nicoll states basically the same premise, that the contemporary British dramatists are moving away from drawing-room drama towards the kitchen; they are moving from the comfortable middle-class environment towards those environments which appeal to the repertory playwrights. Violence, sexual frustration, menace and a sense of loss are all common in these plays.\(^{29}\) Like Brown, he says "most of the young playwrights who have been active during the past decade clearly are animated by a deep sense of purpose and, in particular, by a mood of baffled anger."\(^{30}\) Yet, like Brown and others, he continues by saying that this mood has led them in various directions.

Critics, like writers, do not necessarily have God-given secrets that direct their observations and
feeling about drama. The major journalistic and academic critics of British drama—Levin, Brown, Taylor, Marowitz, Nicoll, Gassner, and others—seem to feel that it is necessary to define British drama after 1956 as modern and to use Osborne as the magic point of departure from the dramatists that came before. It would be unfair to say that these men do not attempt to be open-minded and ready to disclaim categorization. John Russell Brown states, "In their exploitation of theatrical possibilities they [the new playwrights] show every sign of intellectual and responsible involvement. As I have said before, they are always eluding critical labels; and they are remarkably diverse in their achievements."

Nicoll echoes this liberal statement about new playwrights when he says that "danger arises only when they become narrowly and crudely doctrinaire, so that one group refuses to see little or nothing in entertaining save triviality and surface excitement, while the other becomes so intent upon confronting man with the reality of his situation that scenes of violence, in their mounting repetition, cease to make any deep impact."

Yet with all their open opinions and "objectivity" men like these continue to place labels and movements upon the playwrights in traditional critical fashion. Peter Shaffer does not fit into their particular historical categories and has given the critics nothing
but anticipatory headaches because each of his plays, both in style and content, has been different. He said in the February, 1960 issue, of Theatre Arts that he was "beginning to be uneasy about a climate of belief that makes me feel a slight guilt because I want to do many different kinds of things in the theatre." His work, therefore, needs to be evaluated by more flexible criteria—either objective and simple or subjective and complex—to determine exactly how it is that this man and his plays are still a vital part of the London and New York stage. Perhaps a paraphrased quotation by Avden best summarizes the reasons for Shaffer's continued success: Once the minor artist has reached maturity and found himself he ceases to have a history; the major artist, on the other hand, is always refinding himself so that the history of his works recapitulates or mirrors the history of art.

The purpose of the chapters that follow is to examine the playwright Peter Shaffer and his works in the most indeterminate, critical way possible and to establish the importance of Mr. Shaffer to the British theatre without attempting further labels. The study is primarily a critical overview of Shaffer's major plays and an examination of their place in the theatre in England since 1958. While the plays will be the central
focus of the study, careful emphasis will be placed on their reception in the theatre. The general critical method of this examination indicates no pretensions at original critical methodology, but seeks rather to establish for Peter Shaffer and his plays an identity in the British theatre that depends on the merits of the material itself: its theatricality and its diversity.
Footnotes for Chapter I


11. Rogoff, p. 34.

12. Rogoff, p. 34.


21 Nicoll, Viewpoint, p. 158.


26 Nicoll, Viewpoint, p. 156.


29 Nicoll, Viewpoint, p. 137.

30 Nicoll, Viewpoint, p. 137.

31 Brown, Dramatists, p. 5.
To Professor Roy H. Bowen, adviser, colleague, and friend, I give my most heartfelt thanks for his critical appraisal, his patience, and his friendship. To Marta Frosch, my severest critic and friend, I owe more thanks than is possible. To Doris Lambert and Charles Babcock, I give a special thanks because they endured from beginning to end with moral support, friendship, and sound advice.


CHAPTER II
THE BEGINNING: CALM AND QUIET

Five-Finger Exercise was produced at the Comedy Theatre in London on 16 July 1958 by Sir John Gielgud. Unlike Osborne's critics, Mr. Shaffer's London, and later, American critics praised his production without a dissenting voice. London critic W. A. Darlington, writing for the New York Times said, "the praise might seem extravagant, considering that Mr. Shaffer has shown us only one play and there is no certainty that he will deliver another. Still, one feels that even the most extravagant panegyrists may find themselves justified in the end, for an impressive thing about Mr. Shaffer, on top of his ability to bring characters to life, is his mastery of theatrical technique, which too many of his contemporaries effect to despise."

One year later, the play travelled to America and Walter Kerr wrote that "it is playwright Peter Shaffer's very special virtue that he has been able to find, and in some curious way to share, the blind spot that makes each of his characters hopelessly ignorant of the others." The Shaffer play was the first trans-Atlantic
success since John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in 1957 (the American production following The Royal Court production by one year). 4  *Five-Finger Exercise* received lavish praise and played to standing room audiences in New York.

One would easily assume that the play demonstrated that Shaffer was a good playwright (at least with his first major production) and that he deserved a place in the history of British drama after 1956. If, as Kogoff said, Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* was "a resounding bang, while limited as art, and the first necessary war cry in the battle to save the English Theatre," 5 then Shaffer's play was one that needed the cry to battle. Yet, only five years after *Look Back in Anger*, when critics of dramatic literature began to record the relevance of what was happening on the British stage, Shaffer's work was given only cursory attention. Marowitz and Trussler do not mention him in their work on the Modern British Theatre; 6 the famous critic and writer John Gassner discusses *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, but none of the other Shaffer plays, in *Dramatic Soundings*; Allardyce Nicoll and Martin Esslin mention his name but once. Only John Russell Taylor writes on the play called "the first trans-Atlantic success since John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*." And even he gives
it a back-handed compliment. In *Anger and After* he writes that the play "is put together with the theatrical aplomb of a Pinero, well provided with dialogue of remarkable crispness and articulacy, and technically very much part of the mainstream tradition of British drama; it would have been written in much the same way (though perhaps it would not have found such ready backing) if John Osborne and the rest had never lived."7

While writers who are little heard of outside England--John Mortimer, Clive Exton, Alun Owen--are reviewed in depth, Peter Shaffer and his work are summarized in one brief paragraph: "the plays are the work of a good, solid, workmanlike talent and have no pretensions to be anything more. They confirm Shaffer's dramatic gifts, but his personality is still elusive. The enigma remains."8 It is almost as if all of these major dramatic critics refuse to acknowledge anything that falls short of "war-cry" quality. The lack of anger, political rhetoric, or social causes in Shaffer's dramatic content, the lack of "black" comedy, bizarre sets, or a new theatrical language in Shaffer's dramatic dialogue seem to give critics, like Taylor, whether unintentionally or unconsciously, the right to label Shaffer an enigma. Perhaps it is because *Five-Finger Exercise* contains certain elements of Rattigan and
Scribe, against whom the playwrights after Osborne were supposed to be revolting. The reader of dramatic criticism must be careful to keep in mind the fact that critics writing only five years after the presentation of Look Back in Anger may be too close in time to reach any final judgment on the playwrights and their plays. Allardyce Nicoll says that "movements in the theatre are often apt to resemble changes in fashion; when a new mode is introduced, yesterday's clothes frequently seem to be more antiquated than those belonging to a distant past, so that the designers may be prepared to imitate or, with modifications, to exploit the styles of by-gone decades even while they have nothing but contempt for what was being worn the day before." Perhaps Shaffer's play is too close to the day before to be considered worthwhile. Newspaper critic Darlington and other journalists writing about the English and New York productions said that Shaffer "had no avant-garde theories to work out, and no anger against society to get off his chest. He just had an eye for human nature and an ear for human speech, and [wrote] good plays."10

It would be a difficult task to refute the critics who have written on the new British Theatre, since it is to them that one must go to gain some kind of comprehension of, or feeling for, the movement as a whole.
It would also be ridiculous to use only those selections from their writings which serve my purposes while disclaiming the viability and academic facts presented in these plays. This is not my purpose. Much of the critical material quoted in this study is taken from these texts and, indeed, for the most part, I believe it is material without which most interested theatre scholars would be in the dark. My desire is not to disclaim, but to utilize this material critically so that an aspect of British Theatre until now neglected, Peter Shaffer's plays, may be included in modern criticism. Taylor and the other critics are conscientious, but not complete in their works. Generally speaking, they are more at home with tanks and battle cries than with foot soldiers. Let me modify their views by going directly to the playwright.

In an interview in 1970, I asked him why he was not usually listed in works about the British Drama after 1956. He replied that it "was probably because he was apolitical, non-religious, and unable to be placed in a category." He said that Five-Finger Exercise is too well-made for most critics looking for "the new," and "the new" then meant "angry" or "political." But, then he said that he really did not care, because he liked writing and he knew people were coming to see
what he had written, and after all: is it not the audience
who finally makes the decision as to whether a play is
successful or not?  

Five-Finger Exercise does not follow the avant-
garde theories nor seek notoriety with angry characters
who would scream at the audience. There are no politi-
cal diatribes, no speeches of outrage against social
injustice, no new tricks with language. It is a play
about five characters. Four of them might well be an
ordinary family at fairly ordinary domestic odds: a
stiff father, a culture-starved mother with a strong
influence on her sensitive son, and an attractive young
daughter. Placed into the middle of it all is the fifth
character, a young German tutor hired to teach the
daughter languages. The conflict begins at the tutor's
intrusion. Each character rings true to himself, and
there is a mastery of technique in the use of the well-
made plot that Shaffer's contemporaries must have
despised. Afterall, as Taylor reveals in Anger and
After, theatre in the Fifties demonstrated that young
playwrights in England were rebelling against the staid
and old drama of the drawing-room. Five-Finger Exercise
was the real beginning of Shaffer's career as a writer
for the London and New York stages--a beginning that was
both successful and quiet. It is with Five-Finger
Exercise that one discovers the reasons for Shaffer's continued successes with his one-acts, *Black Comedy*, and finally the epic drama--*The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. There is no reason why Shaffer should be omitted from or even slighted in the dramatic criticism of this period.

In the course of the last few years, the use of the term "angry young playwrights" has been so widely extended that it is very difficult to establish a connection between the original meaning of the word and its derivatives. This semantic procreation has been favored by the inherent ambiguity of the term, which from the very start, denoted a non-existent angry content on the one hand and a vituperative rhetoric on the other. The "angry" revolution was conceived to be something quite different from the ordinary world of British theatre on the one hand and yet part of it on the other. Sometimes these plays contained angry characters who were rebelling against society, sometimes the central characters ranted and raved, like Jimmy Porter--but whatever the phenomenon was, it was not totally angry, not totally revolutionary. It was labelled and categorized quickly. Somewhere in the middle of it all was a very successful playwright whose simplicity of style, conviction of theatrical dignity, and dramatic creativity were making him well known to audiences in England and New York.
"Peter Shaffer's writing in Five-Finger Exercise is quiet," wrote Frank Aston.13 Unlike Osborne's Jimmy Porter, with his vindictive rhetoric aimed at the glass walls of the English middle classes, Shaffer's German tutor, Walter Langer, is a quiet individual who is able to act as catalyst for the illuminating discoveries that each member of the family makes about him/herself. The author plays his exercise on his five characters. Shaffer's dramatic tune is executed on a piano rather than being blown through a horn. Metaphors aside, piano playing was one of the author's major hobbies. One day, in his London flat the playwright picked up a book labelled "Five-Finger Exercises"; later Shaffer recalled that it "was a book of pieces for the exercise of five interrelated elements and how they react one to another, and how they strengthen each other, or weaken each other, if you use them wrong."14 Beneath the stillness of the drama exists a subtlety of interrelated actions that reveal the secrets of family life.

Shaffer says that he "was using the stock properties of the artificial, untrue and boring family plays the English never seem to tire of in order that the audience would feel solid ground under its feet and so follow me more easily into my play."15 Serious naturalism
is the method Shaffer uses to capture his audience. This family, through lack of understanding, is about to destroy each other. There is conflict, splendid character drawing, and natural dialogue spiced with wit and knowledge of life.

Although the plays of Arden and Wesker are undoubtedly British in tone, in politics, and in setting, Shaffer's *Five-Finger Exercise* could be as easily set in Suffolk County, Long Island, as in Suffolk, England. Perhaps this is because of Mr. Shaffer's familiarity with America. After living in New York several years he said that "non-communication among members of the family with which *Five-Finger Exercise* is concerned with is much more of a truism in America than in England." Shaffer said that he could not think of anything in modern English dramatic literature comparable to the memorable American plays of divided families such as *Death of a Salesman*, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Shaffer's characters might as well be of the American middle-class as of the middle-class in England. The Harringtons have a weekend cottage in Suffolk to which they can escape from the city. Mr. and Mrs. Harrington and their family are "typical" rather than "different"
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PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Theatre History and Dramatic Literature. Professor John Morrow, The Ohio State University.
and reflect the mean rather than the extreme of solid class. Beneath a seemingly placid surface the mother and father of a family, Louise and Stanley Harrington, are at war with each other—completely incompatible, but sticking together. The children, Pamela and Clive, are really in revolt against their parents, who understand them no better than they understand the parents. There is conflict and it is the familiar family mix-up.

Shaffer's first success is a series of theatrical subtleties which reflect his curiosity about the conscious level of life as well as the subconscious. Like all his plays that follow, this one stands at least partially on the strength of its rhetoric. Since Shaffer regards theatre as a medium of words, he believes that "grunts and shrugs are all right—in small doses. There is a cult of literalism in the theatre. You can listen to two people on a bus and it will be frightfully dull, although it is true that, if you listen long enough, you may hear something exquisite. But people on a stage should be able to say something besides 'My God, Jennifer.'" When Shaffer puts words into people's mouths he wants the language to be effective rhetorically.

Once Shaffer has secured his audience with a setting not unlike that of most pre-1956 middle-class drawing-rooms, he calmly presents the person around whom
the family malestrom will revolve—a young German tutor who holds the scales, Walter Langer. At a family breakfast, Mrs. Harrington questions her son's late night excursions into London, informs her husband that their daughter will be privately tutored, and with a final middle-class breath exudes disdain for her husband's lack of culture. While Mrs. Harrington is extolling the virtues of learning and of pampering the sensitivity of their son, the excitable young Pamela enters with Walter, who holds a bunch of wild flowers and tries to invoke the seriousness he thinks is necessary in his young student in a brief exchange of French phrases. Within minutes Shaffer reveals to his audience the comforts which money will bring: a second house, hunting as a hobby for the master of the house, and culture, bought from a young intelligent tutor.

The dialogue is sharp, witty, and revealing—disguised as it is by a conventional surface. The audience is quickly made aware that Walter—quiet Walter!—will in some way be the center of attention for each member of the family. Although Walter belongs to a long list of interlopers created for the stage and has dramatic counterparts in Inge's *Picnic*, Mauriac's *Asmodee*, and even Gorki's *Lower Depths*, his function as interloper in *Five-Finger Exercise* is quite different.
It is through a series of self-revealing tirades, usually directed at him, that the play progresses. These tirades—unlike Rattigan-type conversations which reveal clear stages in a dramatic argument—are used by Shaffer deliberately and slowly. Yet, instead of making the play seem lethargic, they contribute to the enormous power of the drama. The author regards the theatre as a medium of words and he gives his characters plenty to say. The author’s use of rhetoric also provides a solid basis for his climactic scenes, and once Shaffer moves in for the emotional kill, he achieves a forcefulness and sense of truth that are tremendously theatrical.

By the end of the first scene, the calm Harrington family has become a mother and daughter who have possibly fallen in love with Walter; a son, demonstrating latent homosexual yearnings, and turning towards Walter for help; and a father possibly more sensitive than the bully he is made out to be by his wife. Shaffer has caught our attention not only with the traditional virtues, which are considerable, that he has put before his audience, but if one looks at it more closely, with "an unusually skillful and unexpected foray of new ideas and new perceptions [placed] into the fustiest stronghold of convention; having convinced the old-fashioned West End playgoer that it is 'all right'—
not sordidly concerned with the kitchen-sink, and cer¬
tainly not in any way experimental, but just an ordinary
play about people like you and me--it proceeds bit by
bit to strip its characters and their way of life bare
with as much ruthlessness as Ionesco sets about rather
the same business in The Bald Soprano."18

In both short and long scenes, Shaffer reveals
through dialogue both the middle-class storms which are
brewing beneath the surface and the love which holds it
all together. Delightful brother and sister by-play
is charmingly funny. Needing some assistance with her
history lesson, Pamela goes to her brother's room:19

PAMELA: May I come in?

CLIVE: Well, if it's not little Daphne.
   Spike me cannon! How very kind of you to
call. Come in, me dear. Don't be afraid.

PAMELA: (mincing to the sofa) Thank you.

CLIVE: And how are you, eh? Eh?

PAMELA: Fine, thank you. (She stretches out
her left foot and points to it) And how's
the--(she whispers) you-know-what?

CLIVE: (in his normal voice) Do I?

PAMELA: (in her normal voice) Gout.

CLIVE: Ah. (In the general's voice) Oh, it come
and goes, y'know. Comes and goes.

PAMELA: (in Daphne's voice; gushing) I think
it's wonderful of you to take it so well.
I'm sure I'd be complaining all the time.
I'm a real silly-billy about pain.
CLIVE: Nonsense, me dear. Lord, though, how you remind me of yer dear mother. (He pulls a single hair from Pamela's head and holds it up to the light) Hair just like hers. Yellow as a cornflower, I always used to say.

PAMELA: (in her normal voice) There's something wrong about that.

CLIVE: (in his normal voice) Is there? What?

PAMELA: Cornflowers are blue.

CLIVE: Well, your mother certainly didn't have blue hair.

PAMELA: (archly) That's all you know. (She hands the list of questions to Clive) Anyway, you've got to test my history.

CLIVE: Your bow. (He fixes the bow on her hair)

Shaffer's ear for human speech is also seen in an inevitable dramatic confrontation between father and son. The playwright demonstrates his insights into the generation gap: the sensitive and idealistic son clashes with his hard working father.

STANLEY: Mr. Clark said you called them 'grotesque.' Is that right—grotesque?

CLIVE: I think they are, rather.

STANLEY: And I suppose you think that's clever.

(Louise enters from the kitchen)

That's being educated, I suppose; to go up to my manager in my own factory and tell him you think the stuff I'm turning out is shoddy and vulgar. (He pauses) Is it?

LOUISE: Just because you've got no taste, it doesn't mean we all have to follow suit. (She registers disapproval of the drink, crosses and puts the glass on the sideboard, then moves
to the sofa, picks up the copy of 'House and Garden,' sits on the sofa at the left end and opens it so that Stanley can see the title in time for his line)

STANLEY: Now, you listen to me. You get this through your head once and for all; I'm in business to make money. I give people what they want. I mean, ordinary people. Maybe they haven't got such wonderful taste as you and your mother: perhaps they don't read such good books--(he peers at Louise's magazine) what is it--(He reads) House and Gardens--but they know what they want.

(A passage is repeated on the piano off several times, then there is an irritated bang on the keys and the noise stops)

If they didn't want it, they wouldn't buy it, and I'd be out of business. Before you start sneering again, my boy, just remember one thing--you've always had enough to eat.

Clive's embarrassed quietness during this scene explodes during a scene with his father before the curtain comes down on Act I.

Mrs. Harrington's fascination with Walter, a need for love, almost brings disaster to the family. It is carefully plotted through her revealing conversation with Walter. After confessing her distaste for her husband, Louise entices Walter's sympathy:

LOUISE: I'm being vulgar, aren't I?

WALTER: You never could be.

LOUISE: Dear Hibou--you understand--you understand why I'm still here. The children. At least I could see that they weren't stifled, too. Do you condemn me?

WALTER: How could I condemn--in your house?
WALTER: Where I worked before I taught the children for two or three hours, and then was paid by their mothers, and back always to my small room— with my cooking, which is not so good.

LOUISE: My dear boy. Tell me about your family. Your people in Germany.

WALTER: I was an orphan. My parents died when I was too young to remember them. I was brought up by my uncle and his wife.

LOUISE: Were they good to you?

WALTER: Very good, yes.

LOUISE: And—that's all you want to say?

WALTER: There is nothing else.

LOUISE: Don't think I'm being inquisitive. It's only that you've come to mean so much to us all in the last two months. You know that.

WALTER: I do not deserve it.

LOUISE: You deserve far more. Far, far more. I knew as soon as I saw you at that cocktail party, standing all by yourself in the corner pretending to study the pictures. Do you remember? Before even I spoke to you I knew you were something quite exceptional. I remember thinking— "Such delicate hands—and that fair hair—it's the hair of a poet. And when he speaks, he'll have a soft voice that stammers a little from nervousness, and a lovely Viennese accent. . . ."

Louise pities, sympathizes with, and finally pulls the unsuspecting Walter towards her. Through her various
tirades against her husband and by her sympathetic response to Walter's loneliness, Louise's life is bared bit by bit.

Shaffer's dialogue is supported by the theatrical mysteriousness of Walter who says little during the play. Each member of the family reveals himself or herself to the tutor because Shaffer does not permit Walter to react sufficiently to spoil the imaginary picture of him which they are building in their minds. Walter becomes a silent antagonist in each person's individual drama, and at the same time, something of his own personality is projected before the audience. He cannot understand Pamela's colloquialisms and reacts quietly and seriously to her "See you anon, mastodon"; nor does he want anything more than "to become a British subject" while being seduced by Louise Harrington. In his concern for Clive, he cannot see the jealousy of Louise. His silence, his mysterious nature—Nazi parents whom he hated—and his need to be wanted provide the drama with a quiet core around which the family storm can brew.

Shaffer's rhetorical tirades lead logically and cleverly to an ending that left his audiences a bit shocked. In a scene that might well be compared to the final closing of the door in Look Back in Anger or
Croaker's sad lament at the end of Arden's *Live Like Pigs*, Shaffer prepares us for the final awakening of his characters by a very effective theatrical device: a groaning phonograph needle, caught in a groove, sounding a warning to an embattled, blind house. In the midst of a family argument between Clive and his mother, Stanley discovers Walter's attempted suicide:

LOUISE: (into the telephone) Hello . . . Hello . . . Three-Four-Two, please . . . (She waits and remains at the telephone until the end of the Act)

(Clive goes into the hall and up the stairs)

Stanley enters from Walter's room, dragging the unconscious Walter with him. He lowers Walter gently to the landing floor)

STANLEY: (kneeling over the body; rapidly and urgently) Dear God, let him live! Dear God, let him live—please—dear God—I'll never . . .

(Clive reaches the landing and kneels by Walter, next to Stanley)

CLIVE: Walter!

STANLEY: He's all right! He's all right!

WALTER: Schon gut. Mir fehlt nichts.

STANLEY: (joyfully) Thank God! Boy! (He hugs Walter to him)

PAMELA: What is it? What's the matter?

CLIVE: Nothing. It's all right. It's all right. Walter fell down and hurt himself. Like you did. Now, go back to bed. (Kindly) Go on. (He pushes Pamela gently to her bedroom)

(Pamela exits to her bedroom, and Clive closes the door. The lights slowly fade on the living-room, then on the landing)
(He faces the window; urgently) The courage.
For all of us. Oh, God--give it.

There is no "well-made" resolution, no ending that might satisfy the expectations of an audience that thought they were going to see the movements and life of an average middle-class British family. The audience is brought to an emotional peak by just a few brief words and by the clever use of a theatrical device.

The newspaper reviewers and, in a few instances, critics of dramatic literature have written that the play merited superlatives. Innovative? If one compares it to Osborne's angry rhetoric two years prior to its opening in 1958, no. But Shaffer's first West End production did demonstrate his willingness to experiment with dialogue; to use his imagination in presenting an "average" family and then in lighting the fire beneath their feet; and finally the play presents us with Shaffer's superb characterization of the mysterious Walter. Families who cannot communicate are no surprise to Britains nor to Americans. What was surprising was the manner in which the Harringtons were portrayed, the words they spoke and the results that took place because of their interaction. Peter Shaffer's characters are candidly, at times even mercilessly, portrayed. Their flaws are all visible. But in the end they are compassionately understood. The drama, the theatrics
Experimental Theatre, Directing and Production.  
Professor Roy H. Bowen, The Ohio State University.

Classical and Neo-Classical Criticism.  Professor Donald Glacy, The Ohio State University.

Contemporary Drama.  Professor Robert Canzoneri, The Ohio State University.

Educational Theatre.  Professor George Crepeau, The Ohio State University.
of the play, stem from these life-like portraits and their believable conflicts as individuals. Shaffer dramatizes the disorderly relationships between different generations; the views of life and the unconscious wrongs which members of the same family can inflict upon one another. He does so with a kind of paradoxically pitiless sympathy. Mr. Shaffer is not abrasive in his use of words.

It is in this play, the first success, that Shaffer himself finds one of his favorite characters. During an interview in 1970, he said that he thought he liked Walter the best because he saw himself in the young tutor. Shaffer also mentioned that the tightness of the play was something that stayed with him as he continued to write. Particularly significant is the silent understanding between Mr. Harrington and Walter. In many ways, the young tutor reflects the quiet sensitivity of the berated man. In the end, it is Mr. Harrington who comes to understand Walter and saves him from death. Had Shaffer been able to weave together his most recent play, The Battle of Shrivings, in the same way that he had woven together Five-Finger Exercise, it might have been a success. He admitted that he had learned a lot from the first play. While others were calling it too well-made and old-fashioned, Shaffer said he was calling
it simply good, workable drama centered around a lonely, mysterious boy.26

Like Osborne, Arden, Wesker, Jellicoe, and Pinter, Shaffer attempted to change, to experiment, and to grow in the theatre. Yet, his methods were different. With Five-Finger Exercise Shaffer, calmly and quietly began his dramatic hunt for fulfillment as a playwright by using the drawing-room setting despised by his contemporaries. His hope was to give the theatre dignity and excitement without angry rhetoric. His audience responded positively to his first major attempt.
Footnotes for Chapter II


11Interview with Shaffer, 19 September 1970.

12Interview with Shaffer, 19 September 1970.


18 Taylor, Anger, p. 250.

19 Peter Levin Shaffer, Five-Finger Exercise (London: Samuel French, 1958), p. 16. In this and all following quotations from Shaffer's work, stage directions have been deleted unless essential to the interpretation of the scene.

20 Shaffer, Exercise, p. 21.

21 Shaffer, Exercise, p. 29.

22 Shaffer, Exercise, p. 12.

23 Shaffer, Exercise, p. 36.

24 Shaffer, Exercise, p. 75.

25 Interview with Shaffer, 18 September 1970.

26 Interview with Shaffer, 18 September 1970.
CHAPTER III
THE ONE-ACTS: FOCUS AND ECONOMY

It is curious to note that most of the well-known one-acts which are frequently produced were written by playwrights who had already achieved success as dramatists when they turned to the one-act form. Strindberg, Pirandello, O'Casey, and Ionesco are only a few. The one-acts that have succeeded seldom exhibit the groping of immature writers. There is no place in the practice of this form for mechanical writing or bad characterization. There is nothing arbitrary about the writing, directing, or acting of a one-act. The shorter a play, the greater the discipline required. According to Samuel Moon, "The one-act is flexible and rich in potentialities; it is an art form precisely because it enables an extremely sensitive and complex expression of human variety."¹ The one-act is hardly a theatrical norm; it differs in identifiable and significant ways from longer plays that most audiences are used to viewing.

The action of a "well-made" one-act moves without interruption; it usually contains a single climax in contrast to the climactic movement within each act of a

66
longer play. Rather than using a structure which can lead an audience slowly through the beginning, middle, and end of a conflict, a one-act must define the conflict quickly and in other more efficient ways. The language used must rise to the full height of its power swiftly; spectacle and scene must be condensed; elusive ideas must be captured immediately; character studies must be quickly, yet firmly sketched. In brief, stage time determines action, character, and spectacle. The author imposes upon himself and his audiences a compression of ideas and presents them within the confines of one act. The vigor and intensity of a good one-act come partly from the demands of the one-act form itself for economy of means and narrowness of focus.

If a playwright's focus is going to be narrow—as in Pirandello's The Man with the Flower in His Mouth or in Anouilh's Cecile—it must also be profound to succeed. The playwright must have something human and personal to say, and if he can confine himself to one act, then there is the possibility that an audience will perceive the sense of major conflicts under pressure, as in Miss Julie by Strindberg.

The one-act in the hands of a good playwright can help an audience perceive a sense of the dramatic pressure involved. This does not mean that the playwright
must be limited in what he can create within that form. Characters, dialogue, and scenes do not necessarily have to be qualitatively restricted while being quantitatively measured. There are many examples that demonstrate how variously the concept of the one-act play may be filled out and stretched. In Samuel Moon's edition of *Short Plays of the Modern Theatre*, the selections vary from Archibald MacLeish's *This Music Crept by Me Upon the Waters* to Tennessee Williams' *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*. What the selection of plays demonstrates is the ability of a playwright to use the form of the one-act in a variety of ways. W. B. Yeats condenses the entire tragic action of *Purgatory* into seven pages of verse while Strindberg's *Miss Julie* usually runs over an hour, for the author refuses to break the action of his play for the sake of a naturalistic unity of time. Thornton Wilder in *Pullman Car Hiawatha* stages his play by a logical development of an abstract theme. He neither pursues a plot nor explores character, but fills the stage with figures representing the towns and fields, the hours and planets, and the kaleidoscope of individuals that surround this pullman car and its dying woman. MacLeish attempts to dramatize what is essentially non-dramatic: a religious, mystical experience in *This Music Crept by Me Upon the Waters*. And compared to the
abstractions of Wilder and MacLeish, Pirandello and Anouilh develop one character in depth while attempting to stretch the dramatic structure of the one-act. In the hands of a good playwright both depth and variety are possible.

Like other successful writers of one-acts, Peter Shaffer began writing in the shorter form after *Five-Finger Exercise*. He has said that there was no special incentive to do a bill of short plays; he "just got the notion that he wanted to try it."² *The Public Eye* and *The Private Ear*, in 1962, were his first attempts. After his next play, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* in 1964, he again tried the one-act form and produced two more: *White Lies* and *Black Comedy*. All four short plays had successful runs in London and New York and favorable reviews. Contrary to Moon's opinion that an atmosphere of "experimentation and innovation" is needed for one-acts to succeed, Shaffer's four plays were produced, directed, and reviewed on conventional London and Broadway stages.

There appear to be no other incentives to write any of these plays except to bring enjoyment to the theatre. During a newspaper interview in 1963 the author said: "I hope to write plays that everyone can understand. As someone said, there's still a great deal..."
of music to be written in C Major. A presentation of Mr. Shaffer's special assets, particularly his ability to use the one-act form and to use it with variety, will be useful in presenting a balanced and fair picture of the man and his works.

Shaffer with his one-acts reveals an undocctrinaire sense of what can be created in the special world of the theatre. It is a world where Shaffer wants people "to enjoy their lives more." He has compared today's theatre with Shakespeare's and said that "it's curious that we've almost come to the point where we're ashamed of wanting everybody to come. As far as we know everybody went to the Globe in Shakespeare's time." Shaffer proves his point by writing for both the prestigious, state-supported National Theatre as well as for the commercial theatres of Shaftesbury Avenue. *Black Comedy* was commissioned by Sir Laurence Olivier to be written for the National Theatre, and opened paired with Strindberg's *Miss Julie*.

During a time that the contemporary theatre in Britain was splattered with angry plays which plunged a coterie of enthusiasts into controversy, passionate hatred or effusive admiration, Peter Shaffer had concentrated on being a theatrical playwright. He wrote his plays to entertain as much of the public as he
could reach. He avoided labels and wrote *Five-Finger Exercise*. Continuing with the belief that "the prime responsibility of a playwright is to be theatrical"\(^6\) Shaffer used all the tricks of his trade that exult the art of the theatre and exercised his talent on one-acts.

Sir John Gielgud told me that Shaffer is the quickest rewrite man in London, and said that his favorite Shaffer play was *Black Comedy*. But he quickly added that his statement did not mean that he rejected the other one-acts. He said that Shaffer was good in tight situations and that is why he probably does so well with his short plays. They are tight situations. Gielgud's attitude was similar to the majority of reviewers in London and New York when they considered the plays. Shaffer was rated highly in the shorter form. The reviews were not as brilliant as those for *Five-Finger Exercise*, but the majority of them approved overwhelmingly the first two that he wrote in 1962—*The Private Ear* and *The Public Eye*.

Shaffer said that he "had in mind doing three, but I soon realized that three would make an impossibly long evening in the theatre."\(^7\) The two that were produced together both in London and also in New York seem to have some similarities in the way of bits of theatrical business and the themes of both appear to be
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the same: two persons trying to make over two others in their own image. Yet, said Shaffer, "they are so different in conception and execution that most audiences aren't aware of this." In these two plays, Shaffer pursues the idea of communication or non-communication that he began in Five-Finger Exercise with the Harringtons. During an interview with reporters in New York in 1963, he said:

There is so much communication of all sorts going on constantly that it's a wonder we don't grow eyelids as a protective measure to shut out some of it.

Your ears never get a rest. It isn't only a case of people talking to each other and not paying attention, but you can't go out in public places without voices or music blasting at you from radios or loud-speakers in stores, building lobbies and so on. Can't even get into an elevator without having music poured over you.

One of the most interesting facets of Shaffer's first attempts is that he uses comedies with ideas and substantial characterizations. Shaffer, feeling that all plays should add something to one's life, has called them life-enhancing. He has said that they should "seek to make a more real world. Through drama 'one tries to give people new perceptions which you wouldn't get anywhere else.'" The Public Eye and The Private Ear demonstrate Shaffer's basic belief in the theatre.
In both plays the lines of communication between characters need repair or must be opened. *The Public Eve* presents an unorthodox private detective who, for a month, trails the young wife of a middle aged accountant who suspects she is being unfaithful. She, in turn, is simply bored with her husband's attempts to make her over to fit his social station. She takes long walks, goes shopping or to the movies; she keeps herself occupied. In the process of busying herself, she finally realizes that she is being watched. A rapport slowly grows between detective and the wife, even though they never exchange a word. The detective finally confronts his client and instructs him that in order to stop his wife's gallivanting he must follow her just as the detective had done; he must share her interests at a distance and not say a word. The wife is also instructed not to speak. The result is that a communication between them is re-established.

While the plot seems to be simple enough for a one-act, a closer glance exposes Shaffer's tremendous theatrical power. It is high comedy that is sophisticated and wise. Shaffer's moral is nothing new, but his presentation of it is. He is preaching the enjoyment of life and love while one is lucky enough to have them. The style is fresh and the story inventive and amusing.
Shaffer begins by introducing his audience to a tiny Greek by the name of Julian Christoforou. He is hardly the usual detective type one finds in Agatha Christie novels. Instead, one discovers a humorous pixie: 11

He is a man in his middle thirties; his whole air breathes a gentle eccentricity, a nervousness combined with an air of almost meek self-disapprobation and a certain bright detachment. He is bundled in a white raincoat with many pockets . . . He puts down his Gladstone, leans against the back of the chair, which turns out to be hinged. Delightedly he flips it over. It turns into a ladder. He climbs up and sits on the top. Then he reaches into one pocket and extracts a large handkerchief, which he spreads over his knees; from another he produces a packet of raisins and pours them out; from a third a packet of nuts, and does likewise. From a fourth pocket he takes a saltcellar and liberally sprinkles the nuts. He has just begun to eat them when he cocks his ear, hastily stuffs the handkerchief away in a fifth pocket and sits upright and unconcerned as the inner door opens and Charles Sidley comes out.

Shaffer's detective picnics while he waits. One so different from the norm might well arouse the curiosity of an audience expecting the usual.

As the story progresses, Julian reveals that he has a reason for everything he does, no matter how lunatic it appears. If he opens his briefcase and begins eating the yogurt he has in it, it is because he has a nervous stomach and needs the calming effect of food. If he grits his teeth while eating the yogurt,
it is because his sugar container is empty and he has a sweet tooth. He describes himself as the third party who is always checking on the actions of the first and second parties.

Instead of an inspector from Scotland Yard, Shaffer presents a sort of guardian angel. Although he is earthy and laughs, perhaps he is really ethereal and only in human guise. It is in the creation of Christoforou that Shaffer demonstrates his superb sense of character and recalls Chaplinesque madcap antics. When all is said and done there is a method to the madness of Christoforou. The twist in the plot, some of the brightest lines in the play, and a magic spell of happiness all revolve around this pixie detective. He knows how to shadow a suspected wife, how to bring a suspicious husband to task, how to patch up a marriage, and how to send an accountant away on a second honeymoon while he takes over the office and administers to the tax problems of the British. Mr. Shaffer uses a reversal method that is not new to theatre, and he uses it effectively. We expect one action from our character but we see him do the reverse—the unexpected.

One half of the couple upon whom the detective works his charm is Charles Sidley. He is an upper-class gentleman, a chartered accountant, and is forty.
He is infatuated with a lovely woman eighteen years old called Belinda and persuades her to be his wife. As one might suspect, she is pretty, charming, extroverted, and now finds that she is bored. The situation is not a particularly unusual one to find anywhere. Shaffer crisply presents the initial problem while Sidley and his wife drift apart. Shaffer wisely chose not to lead us through the beginning of their story, but paints them at the time of their present impasse. From there he allows Christoforou to do the rest. The playwright's focus is placed on the detective. Although the strength of the play rests upon the characterization of Christoforou, the three of them make a harmonious whole. The detective is satisfied because he solves the problem presented to him; the wife goes back to her husband after she has a flirtation with Christoforou; Sidley regains the youthfulness he needs to keep his marriage together.

Besides this ability at characterization, Shaffer also demonstrates that he can master the free flowing quality of linguistic fantasy. The contrasting moods of Julian, Charles, and Belinda are tied together by Shaffer's superb dialogue. An extremely elusive idea is hidden well by the author until the end of the story,
when it becomes theatrically practical to reveal the
total effect of the story.

The compulsive eater of all health foods has found
pleasure in waiting for Charles to arrive in his office.
The fantasy begins as Julian introduces himself: 12

CHRISTOFOROU: Oh, please don't apologize.
It's a positive joy to wait in a room like
this. After all, it is a waiting room, isn't
it? There are so many delights to detain one.
Your reference books, for instance.

CHARLES: Thank you.
CHRISTOFOROU: I perceive you have a passion for
accuracy.
CHARLES: Let's say a respect for fact.
CHRISTOFOROU: Oh, let's indeed. I do admire
that. And in an accountant a first essential,
surely. Mind you, one must be careful. Facts
can become an obsession. I hope they aren't
with you.
CHARLES: I hope so, too. Now, if you don't
mind—perhaps I can make an appointment for
next week.
CHRISTOFOROU: Websters! Chambers! Whittakers
Almanack! Even the names have a certain
leathery beauty. And how imposing they look
on shelves.
CHARLES: Are you a salesman?
CHRISTOFOROU: Forgive me. I was lapsing. Yes,
I was once. But then I was everything once.
I had twenty-three positions before I was thirty.
CHARLES: Did you really?
CHRISTOFOROU: I know what you're thinking. A
striking record of failure. But you're wrong.
I never fail in jobs, they fail me.
CHARLES: Well, I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, even inadvertently. Are you having trouble with your tax?

CHRISTOFOROU: No.

CHARLES: Well, as I say I don't receive clients at the weekend. Now let me look in my secretary's book . . . What about next Tuesday?

CHRISTOFOROU: I don't really like Tuesdays. They're an indeterminate sort of day.

CHARLES: Well, you name it, Mr. --

CHRISTOFOROU: Christoforou.

CHARLES: Christoforou?

CHRISTOFOROU: Yes. With an "f", not a "ph." It's a little downbeat, I admit. Balkan cigarettes and conspiratorial moustaches. I don't care for it, but it's not to be avoided. My father was a Rhodes scholar. That is to say he was a scholar from Rhodes.

CHARLES: Oh, yes?

CHRISTOFOROU: Why don't you call me Julian? That's a good between-the-wars sort of name. Cricket pads and a secret passion for E. M. Forster. That's my mother's influence. She had connections with Bloomsbury. To be precise, a rooming house. (He takes out a banana, peels and starts to eat it.)

In several short statements the detective's lunatic-like actions are contrasted with the sedate Charles Sidley, and Shaffer cleverly makes fun of the establishment, but he does not lambaste it. Shaffer lightens the tenor of what would normally be an extremely delicate and serious situation.
Charles quickly and nervously explains his plight
and there is no need for further development by Shaffer.  

Yes . . . It was a curious courtship.
Without my demanding it she surrendered
her whole life to me for re-making. I
suppose it wasn't too surprising. She'd
lived in Northampton for the first eighteen
years, and that's enough to smother anybody.
Her father was in shoes. Her parents' ambi-
tions for her extended no further than a job
at the library and marriage to a local boy.
Very properly she ran away to London, where she
led the most extraordinary life, sharing a flat
with two artists, one of whom rode a bicycle
over his canvases, while the other spat his
paints directly on to the canvas from his mouth,
thereby expressing his contempt for society.
It's not surprising that she reacted to some
tactful reform on my part with enthusiasm,
since at the time she was comparing them
both to El Greco. For my part, I taught her
everything I could. I'm not an expert,
Mr. Christoforou. I'm that old-fashioned,
but I hope not too comical thing; a dillet-
ante. Of course the notion of an accountant
with what, in the days when Europe was the
world, used to be called a soul, probably strikes
you as ludicrous. I'm afraid there's a great
deal about this situation which is ludricous.
The moral, of course, is that men of forty
shouldn't marry girls of eighteen. It should
be a law of the Church like consanguinity:
only marry in your own generation. And yet it
began so well . . .

The playwright condenses Belinda's problem into one or
two comments. She enters her husband's office and
Shaffer permits her to chat about her Malayan. In
reality he contrasts her to Charles.
BELINDA: Aren't they [flowers] lovely? There was a man selling them at the corner. I think he was Malayan. At any rate he had topaz eyes, so I bought the lot. Two pounds ten with the greenery. The Malayan said if I bought everything there'd be no monsoon over my temple for a year. Wasn't that a sweet thing to say? (Puts her green feather hat on Charles' head.)

CHARLES: Rather uninspired, I should say. How can you wear this hat? (Puts hat on desk.) The gypsy who sold you one sprig of heather last week for five pounds did rather better.

BELINDA: That was because he belonged to a dying race and I couldn't bear it. How awful it must be to belong to a dying race! Like the Yaghan Indians. I read somewhere there were only nine Yaghans left, right at the bottom of the world. No, honest! South Chile. (Crosses below desk to ladder and gets book from bookcase.) Where's the Encyclopedia Britannica? After a while Nature says "scrap them" and they just fail, like crops. Isn't it sad? Imagine them. Nine little shrunken people, sitting on green water, waiting to die. (Sits on top of ladder.)

Concisely and coherently Shaffer trots out pleasant surprises, both in the brightness of his lines and in the twists of his plot. The hide-and-seek game of Julian and Belinda brings an added excitement to the story. The restoration of the spell that once united Belinda and Charles is captured by the unique and charming Julian Christoforou, detective and man of all trades. Before the play is over the audience discovers that this mender of broken marriages is smarter than he seems on the surface. Herein lies the secret of Shaffer's success.
and the underlying thread that ties the entire performance into a neat package of comedy.

Shaffer's superb sense of characterization is again also seen in the companion piece to The Public Eye, The Private Ear. Again, there are three characters, two men and a woman, and the problem centers around communication or the lack of it. In this piece, somewhat more serious than the other, Shaffer wasted no time in focusing in on the central figure. "Tchaik" (short for Tchaikowsky) has his problems with his wooing of a girl he has invited to his flat for the first time. There are similar motivations in each play: in both, the people try to make someone over in their own image. In The Private Ear, Shaffer’s central character is a naive young music lover. Unfortunately his character is not as well drawn as Julian Christoforou’s, but the dialogue is just as witty and concise as that found in The Public Eye. In comparison, the magic and linguistic fantasy surrounding Julian Christoforou and his solution to his client’s problem is missing. In its place there is the courtship of a naive young man upset by the reality of his friend’s philistine behavior.

Tchaik, a sincere and music-loving clerk, invites a nervous girl to dinner for the first time in his bedsitting room. The flat in which Shaffer places them is
INTRODUCTION

During an interview in 1970, Peter Levin Shaffer commented that “half of the making of a play is the audience; it must respond to what it is seeing by using its imaginative muscles.”¹ At the time, Mr. Shaffer was talking about the London theatre critics who, for the most part, had given his new play The Battle of Shrivings, starring Sir John Gielgud, fair to lukewarm reviews. The show had closed and Shaffer was beginning to rewrite segments of it for a planned New York production. The title of the interview might easily have been “The Role of Theatre Critics” or “Labels Are For Critics, Not For Playwrights.”

Unlike playwrights who accept the categorization of theatre critics, Peter Shaffer believes that his totem animal is the chameleon. In the February, 1960, issue of Theatre Arts he said:²

... At any rate, if I knew how to formulate it, I would like to propound an Artistic Theory of Indeterminancy. But it would probably sound like a heartless prescription for the Insincere way.
so small that the three of them (including Tchaik's friend, Ted) are in rather close quarters. The difference between Ted and Tchaik's personalities is obvious as they prepare for Doreen's entrance, and Ted discusses his latest find.  

**TCHAIK:** Where did you meet this one?  

**TED:** In the Whisky A Go-Go, last night, twisting herself giddy with some little nit. I sort of detached her. She only wanted a date for tonight, didn't she? But I said, 'Sorry, doll, no can do. I'm engaged for one night only, at great expense, as chef to my mate Tchaik, who is entertaining a bird of his own. Tres special occasion.' Come on! So be grateful. Greater love hath no man, than to pass us a bird like this for his mate. (Ted picks up photo from bed and leans it against vase on table.) Look at the way she holds herself. That's what they used to call carriage. You don't see too much of that nowadays. Most of the girls I meet think they've got it, ignorant little nits. That is the genuine article, that is. Miss Carriage.  

**TCHAIK:** (Who now has socks and one shoe on—going into the kitchen.) What's her name?  

**TED:** You won't believe me if I tell you. Lavinia.  

**TCHAIK:** Lavinia?  

**TED:** Honest. How's that for a sniff of class? The rest of it isn't so good. Botty. Lavinia Botty.  

**TCHAIK:** (Re-entering with tray on which are three knives, forks, spoons, napkins, place mats, tumblers, and a pitcher of water and a salt cellar.) She's beautiful.  

**TED:** Do you think so?  

**TCHAIK:** (Puts tray on chair above table.) Yes.
TED: She's going to go off fairly quickish. In three years she'll be all lumpy, like old porridge.

TCHAIK: (Crosses to dresser, gets tablecloth.) I don't know how you do it. I don't honest.

TED: (Raising the U. S. leaf of table.) Just don't promise them anything, that's all. Make no promises, they can't hang anything on you, can they? (As Tchaik lays the cloth, Ted picks up vase and photo, then replaces them on the cloth.)

TCHAIK: I wouldn't know.

TED: Well you're going to, after tonight.

TCHAIK: (Protesting.) Ted!

The shy Tchaik is given a lesson in the art of seduction by his knowledgeable friend. The problems of communication, the personalities of each young man, and the setting for the plot are woven together by Shaffer. Bachelor business is attended to before Doreen arrives. With great skill Shaffer shows the excited young men scurrying about the room ironing pants, preparing food, and doing the last minute clean-up.

Even before Doreen's entrance, one is made aware of the insensitivity of the brash Ted as contrasted with the sensitive Tchaik. Both characters are quite believable. When Doreen enters, it is not long before she gives herself away. She is hardly the ideal young "Venus" Tchaik took her for at the concert. Shaffer does not permit Tchaik the same insights into her
character as he gives the audience. With a dialogue that is a preparation for the finale, Doreen and Tchaik begin.16

TCHAIK: Do you mind it?

DOREEN: What?

TCHAIK: Doing the same thing, day in, day out.

DOREEN: Well there's not much choice, is there?

TCHAIK: You've got to earn your living, haven't you? Like my dad says, 'Money doesn't grow on trees.'

TCHAIK: No. Wouldn't they look funny if it did?

DOREEN: Pardon?

TCHAIK: The trees. The trees.

DOREEN: Oh, yes. (She looks at him nervously.)

TCHAIK: Oh—ashtray. (He crosses to the dresser and picks up the top of the Elastoplast tin—crosses to R. of Doreen and gives her the tin lid. Plunging on:) Like when people say unpunctuality's the thief of time—like your dad says. I always used to imagine unpunctuality as a mask—you know—with a sock labelled 'swag.' That's what comes of having a little mind. (He circles above Doreen and sits on the stool.) I remember I had awful trouble at school one day with that poem which says 'The child is father of the man.' I simply couldn't see it. I mean how could a child be a father?

DOREEN: I don't know.

TCHAIK: I couldn't get beyond that. I don't think imagination's a thing you can cultivate, though, do you? I mean, you're either born with it or you're not.

DOREEN: Oh yes, you're born with it.
TCHAIK: Or you're not.

DOREEN: No.

TCHAIK: Mind you, I think there ought to be a sign so parents can tell. There probably is, if we knew how to read it. I mean, all babies are born with blue eyes, aren't they?

DOREEN: Yes.

Doreen is obviously not ready for Tchaik's witty remarks nor does she bring much more to the apartment than her fake ocelot coat. Doreen's reactions throughout give her away for the fool that she is.

Ted's brashness and vulgarity are obvious, and Shaffer creates the appropriate scenes in which the young Romeo can reveal himself. While offering Doreen wine, he accents his appearance with a combination of foreign phrases. He asks Tchaik's "girl" if she would like wine: "A little chilled vino avant le diner?" Next to Tchaik Ted is overwhelmingly rude and his cliches fill the silences that appear between Tchaik and Doreen. Ted prepares to leave the room and says:

Well, waste not, want not, I say! (Drinks.) The servants you get these days! Well, the chicken awaits. I'd better go and wring its neck. (Exits into the kitchen, closing the door behind him.)

Even Tchaik's dinner music is distasteful to him and he says:

You know, how you stand that stuff, I'll never know. (Opera!) How so-called intelligent people
can listen to it I just can't imagine. I mean, who ever heard of people singing what they've got to say? (Pouring soup and singing to the tune of 'Toreador Song') 'Will you kindly pass the bread?' 'Have a bowl of soup?' 'Champignon'--'I must go and turn off the gas.' (Takes pan into kitchen, returns and sits R. of table.) Well for heaven's sake! If that's not a bloody silly way to go on, excuse language, I don't know what is. I wish someone would explain it to me, honest. I mean, I'm probably just dead ignorant.

Mr. Shaffer's ability and willingness to use theatrical devices is put to good use as soon as the three characters are introduced to the audience. Rather than chance overdoing the dramatic scenes between the men and the scenes between each man and Doreen, Shaffer freezes his characters at the dinner table and has a tape played summarizing the dinner conversation. The action continues quickly and unbroken; Tchaik's hopeless pursuit of Doreen is dramatically heightened.

While Tchaik is making coffee, Ted questions Doreen and it becomes apparent that Tchaik has made a mistake in believing that he has found the right girl.

TED: . . . What's with that, anyway? I don't get it. You're not the concerty type.

DOREEN: You know it all, don't you?

TED: Well, are you?

DOREEN: No, as a matter of fact, I was given the ticket by a girl friend. She couldn't go, and it seemed silly to waste it. Now he thinks I'm a music lover, and know about Ba. . . ?
TED: Bach.

DOREEN: Bach?

TED: Bach.

DOREEN: Bach, that's him. Actually it was ever so boring. I realized I shouldn't have said 'Yes' to him for tonight as soon as he asked me.

TED: What made you?

DOREEN: Well, I don't know. I don't get out that much. And he was ever so nice and courteous.

TED: I bet.

Ted entices Doreen with Tchaik's idea of her as the "perfect woman." 21

TED: Dreams. Visions. Ideas about perfect women. He's got one about you.

DOREEN: He hasn't.

TED: Of course he has. Why d'you think you're here? How many girls do you think he's invited here before?

DOREEN: I dunno.

TED: None. N-O-N-E.

DOREEN: Well, what's he want with me, then?


DOREEN: Who's she?

TED: He thinks that you are the living image of her.

DOREEN: She hasn't got any clothes on!—Oh, I haven't got a long neck like that.
TED: I know you haven't. Yours is the standard size, but he won't leave it at that. He's got to stretch it a bit. A long neck's a sign of a generous nature.

'DOREEN: He's a bit nutty, isn't he?

TED: Not really. It's just the old Celtic Twilight in his blood.

DOREEN: Twilight?

TED: Just a phrase.

DOREEN: You don't half have a way of putting things. You've got a gift for words, haven't you?

TED: Always had. Words, languages. It's why I took up French in the evenings.

DOREEN: I like that.

Doreen responds as we thought she might. There are no problems when she speaks to Ted. With a quick twist of the plot, Shaffer begins to weave his way to the end.

Many of the scenes are reminiscent of Clive and his inability to communicate with his father in *Five-Finger Exercise*. And Dorren could very well be a young Louise. Even Tchaik in his quiet way reminds one of Walter Langer, the tutor. Both are unable to relate their inner feelings. The strains of classical music are heard in both plays. But in *The Private Ear*, Shaffer moves more quickly and ironically towards his lesson. While the comic overtones remain throughout, it is a heartbreaking ending that the audience sees.
In a moving scene that reveals even more dramatically the difference between Ted and Tchaik, Shaffer begins his preparations for the confrontation between Tchaik and Doreen. Ted is asked to leave and Tchaik faces his ideal "Venus" alone. Tchaik has had too much to drink and the beginning of the end is in sight. In a slapstick scene which Shaffer controls through elaborate stage directions, the playwright describes the sexual advances of young Tchaik: 22

... As he is about to make contact, he pauses, wipes his lips with the back of his hand and finally—kisses her on the forehead! She opens her eyes in surprise. He jumps up and goes U.C. a few steps loosening his collar. He turns and she flaps the left side of her coat to show that she agrees that it is hot. He grabs her coat, starts to peel it off. She is still sitting and this move has the effect of pinioning her arms behind her. After some difficulty, they get the coat off and he drapes it over the back of the chair. She puts her cigarette out in the ashtray, and the ashtray on the floor. She rises, smooths her skirt, and sits again with her right leg under her. He dives at her from the L. (4 min 45 sec.) and kisses her, pressing her backwards over the arm of the chair. The chair begins to tip sideways and to prevent its going all the way he rights it again by placing both hands on the floor. He tips the chair upright again. He is now lying on top of her with her between his arms, and he is supporting his weight with both hands on the floor. She is struggling to get him off her and to free her trapped foot and leg. She pushes at him, and he puts his weight on the Upstage arm, lifting the Downstage one enough for her to break free.
She rises and attempts to put on her shoes,—manages one of them when he rises and comes toward her. She backs away to above L. of the table. He reaches her, puts his arms around her and they back toward the bed. Still struggling they fall across the bed. (5 min 10 sec.) She tries to free herself and eventually does. She rises, crosses D.C. and backs away R. toward the gramophone, he following. When he gets close to her she slaps his face.

The young man knows he has lost the game and begins to defend himself by pretending that he has a girl anyway. Her name is Lavinia; in reality she is the "bird" in Ted’s wallet photo.

The Chaplinesque conclusion, with Tchaik standing like a lost soul, is sad. Shaffer combines just the right touch of lightness with the bitterness of a lesson well learned as the curtain closes:

(He shuts the door. He turns and surveys the empty room. Then he walks almost aimlessly across it. He stops by the GRAMOPHONE. He puts it on. We hear the first strains of 'Madame Butterfly.' He stands by it as it plays. He looks down at the record turning. As Butterfly begins to sing, he kneels above the gramophone, lifts the arm from the record, and then very deliberately scratches the needle across the surface twice, making a terrible sound. He then puts the needle on the beginning of the record and we hear the music with a dreadful scratch noise running through it. As Butterfly begins to sing the LIGHTS fade out with a spot lingering on Tchaik's expressionless face. The Stage is black, leaving only the tubes of the gramophone glowing dimly in the darkness.)
In both *The Private Ear* and *The Public Eye*, Shaffer's characters are well developed and consistent. At least one critic condemned Shaffer for his inability to capture the atmosphere of the lower class in *Private Ear* and wrote that "Shaffer takes pain to exhibit a mastery of lower class idiom that he transparently hasn't got." Nevertheless, Shaffer's characters still maintain their dramatic credibility. Shaffer does not attempt to demonstrate the problems of a particular class so much as he desires to provide his audience with an insight into the difficulties of any two or three people trying to communicate. Whether one accepts the setting of the scene as authentic or not, there are other aspects of theatre business with which Shaffer deals sincerely and honestly. He examines his characters closely, focuses immediately on one in each play, and writes dialogue that ranges from believable fantasy to necessary pathos and sympathy. Both plays are a combination of the dramatic with the theatrical and give Shaffer the right to be called a disciplined and entertaining playwright.

In his first two one-acts Shaffer demonstrates his willingness to experiment, within a new dramatic form, with language, character, and tone. It is not surprising that several years later, after the success of his epic drama *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, he again turned to the