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**THE IMPORTANCE OF LOSS OF FAITH IN CONVENTIONAL
RELIGION AS A FEATURE OF PETER SHAFFER'S MAJOR
WORKS**

by

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2. THE ROYAL HUNT OF THE SUN	26
CHAPTER 3. SHRIVINGS	76
CHAPTER 4. EQUUS	132
CHAPTER 5. AMADEUS	200
CHAPTER 6. YONADAB	265
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION	314
BIBLIOGRAPHY	323
ABSTRACT	349

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Peter Shaffer, though perhaps not the most influential writer of the twentieth century, can definitely be categorized as among the foremost dramatists of our times. The remarkable range of topics he has examined in his works extends from ethics, through realism, philosophy, faith and religion, and psychology to theology. His effort to reach out for intellectually demanding themes along with his use of innovative theatrical stagings challenges many of the ideas held in literary circles. He is the realist probing the psychological and social issues of our age. He is also the metaphysician looking for answers to universal enigmas as well as reasons for the trite behaviour of his fellow human beings. His ability to connect 'serious' drama to the world of popular acclaim makes him a major author of our times. His plays contain characters that exist in society, whether accepted by its norms or not. All these characters, in their mental and intellectual capacity, are capable of perpetual renovation.¹

¹ Joan F. Dean's, "Peter Shaffer's Recurrent Character Type" (*Modern Drama*, Vol. xxi, 1978: 297-305) is one of the many examples of the detailed account of his characters in their need of belief and the crisis of faith they are faced with.

As Shaffer is a man of diverse talents, his style is thoroughly original. He is among those few driven by their own consciences whose exceptional individuality makes them choose their own paths. That is why Shaffer can easily be seen as one of those people who are associated with fundamental revolt against mendaciousness. One of the many critics who definitely understand Shaffer's point of view is Plunka. He believes that the reputation Shaffer gets from some of his critics does not do him the justice that he deserves (1988: 14).

... a playwright adept at the theatrical gimmicks and stage conventions of all sorts yet one whose ideas are shallow, muddled and trite.

There is nothing superfluous about his creations despite what these critics intend us to believe. As Hinden so rightly puts it (1985: 14):

... no one writing for today's stage is better able to visualize a dramatic moment than Peter Shaffer.

His observation seems appropriate when he describes Shaffer as too fastidious a craftsman; his wood is finished so expertly that sometimes we can miss the grain. (1985: 14) Shaffer tries to understand the events around him rather than deplore them. In the process he reveals the recesses of his characters' psyches from within, and the pressures of society from without. The emergence of these conflicting and rather controversial themes reveals a lot about people in general, making the dramatist most enigmatic. Of course, like all revelations, his revealing of some facts has a simultaneous effect of concealing others. Nevertheless, Shaffer's attentiveness to the "philosophical unveiling" (Bach 1995: 351) of these

ideas, constantly challenges and threatens all that mankind has believed in. Critical thinking of any kind, whether self-critical or all critical, is not popular, as it requires swimming against the current. As a result, the effort to grasp the truth behind the revelations becomes even more a battle of conflicting beliefs.

The reason for the success of his writing does not lie only in his capacity to tell a good story, but also in the choice of an assortment of contentious issues and beliefs. He has created legendary conflicting personalities like Louis and Stanley, Atahualpa and Pizarro, Mark and Gideon, Alan and Dysart, Salieri and Mozart. All these widely divergent characters, in their oddity, epitomize paradoxical ethnic and poignant social forces and hierarchies. Nevertheless, they are individuals and are parts of a social fabric. We see that their destinies are determined by their own actions; they are not there merely to provide an answer or even a criticism. All they provide is a commentary, which might have unsettling implications as well. The climax of each story places the dilemma in a wider human context, but with compassion, exoneration, and love for both sides. No matter how oblique the situation gets through the chain of events – the ending of each play shows Shaffer's firm faith in human dignity and grace. In addition, just like God, he has hope for and faith in mankind. His characters, like Dysart and Pizarro, are excellent examples of the hope he carries in his heart for a better world with better human beings. That is why he creates all the conflicting personalities in an effort to bring out the ultimate good in people. A good example here can be the character of Pizarro in *The Royal*

Hunt of the Sun. The ending of the play does not leave us mourning the death of Atahualpa. We are horrified by the disillusionment it has brought to Pizarro who has accidentally found new hope and faith, which transforms him in to a better human being. This is a great *coup de théâtre*² showing the deepened and broadened conflict within the play and at the same time implanting the ideas in the minds of the audience.

Although critics have tried to compare his style with those of writers like Brecht, Artaud, Shaw, O'Neill, and many others, Shaffer cannot completely be considered as belonging to one style only. Shaffer himself gives some insight into the intriguing question of his kaleidoscopic style:

Obviously, the greatest pleasure I have had in theatre is in Shakespeare because, apart from the language, which I glory in more than anything else, I have always enjoyed the variety of his characters and the immensity of his themes.... the way the characters reveal themselves in action, in what they do, rather than sitting around talking about the past all the time.... I love the mimetic and gestural side of Brecht's theatre, although I don't like the didactic side. Chekhov I like enormously. I don't think that he has influenced my writings (quoted in Plunka 1988: 36)

² This kind of unexpected and theatrically startling event, which twists the plot and action, became a part of Shaffer's writing style as he produced the rest of his serious plays.

Unlike Artaud, he does not deplore psychological drama, but like him, he is fascinated by mime, incantations, sounds, and ritual. He is not a disciple of The Theatre of Cruelty in its entirety. The only part of it that fascinates him is the spectacle of theatre with all the possible theatricality. He presents his own Theatre of Reason without subordinating his text to the *mise-en-scène*. Unlike Artaud, he would not compromise or abandon psychology in favour of pure sensation. That is why his Theatre of Cruelty combines his belief in compassion for protagonists like Dysart and Salieri³. Theatre for him is as much a medium to express the unconscious as the conscious itself. Thus, he creates a theatre as spontaneous, and as up-to-date as can be – “perfectly proportioned, perfectly just, perfectly terrifying!” (Kerr 1984: 121). True that in real life it is highly unusual for a boy to blind horses as is done in *Equus*, but the bizarre is a part of real life. Destruction of our belief and faith has caught his attention and he observes people confronting God and the institution of religion. His work shows that such a confrontation can ultimately raise barriers between human beings and the object of their worship. The resultant frenzy and unrest not only surface in his serious plays but are also seen in the characters of his protagonists. We often come across such characters or read about them in the newspapers. These protagonists do not have a superhuman quality about them, but they still try to create their own realities to survive the real world without losing control of reason.

³ These aspects of his work will duly be discussed in detail the coming chapters.

Our first impression of Shaffer, just as with Chekhov, is not of simplicity but of bewilderment. However, where Chekhov had the power and talent to observe God as a part of human existence, Shaffer has the unifying idea of God living in human beings. Even with all the diversity of his work, critics still charge him with being anti-religious. According to Gianakaris (1991a: ix), Peter Shaffer inspires contradictory responses from drama critics. These critics find his ideas pedestrian, but this does not change the fact that Shaffer still tickles their fancy. In an age of unmistakably individual and personal drama, he seems to be resolutely impersonal. That is why, when critics like Brustein or Simon charge him with superficiality, they are overlooking the subtlety and power of his themes. They allege that this effort to achieve profundity is beyond his own intellectual capacity. According to Brendan Gill (1974: 123),

Mr. Shaffer offers his big, bowwow speculations about the nature of contemporary life in the midst of a melodrama continuously thrilling on its own terms...

Jack Richardson (1975: 78), commenting on *Equus*, has pronounced his effort as nothing more than “all middle class whines and whimpers...”. This incongruence of the critical reaction towards Shaffer’s plays does not do him justice. Such charges of an over-zealous use of theatrical devices and verbalization, not to mention his lack of talent for larger-than-life concepts, seem incriminating, yet they also invite scholarly attention. The only thing he seems to be guilty of is his love of oratory. Hinden (1985: 17) believes:

It is possible that some have confused command of rhetoric and spectacle with easy resolution of a theme. Perhaps there are (also) those who simply dislike Shaffer.

Lack of profundity in thought and morality is a serious allegation, particularly when his work examines the attitudes of the faithful and faithless with regard to the nature of the divine and the human need for worship. According to many, Shaffer confuses normality with dullness, abandoning reason for passion. Yet, as Hinden (1985: 17) believes, so to argue is to over simplify Shaffer's balanced treatment of the complex theme of a religious quest throughout his work. A search for a worship leads to severe spiritual distress. The quest for wholeness is an inexhaustible theme. Shaffer explores a number of its dimensions including politics, sexuality, and professional fulfilment, with religion as the focal point. All these demand intellectual dexterity. Nevertheless, the accusations made by critics against his work are enough to prove that even the most serious drama critics cannot ignore him.

Born one of twins, Peter Shaffer found his calling as a dramatist around the age of twenty-four, but social pressures demanded he do something "serious" and respectable, which he himself deemed as foolish in the later years of his life as it kept him from the joys of writing. He had already worked in coalmines in Yorkshire and Kent as a required stint of war service. While in Cambridge he was in the immense world of learning and freedom along with some great literary names like E. M. Forster and Bertrand Russell, yet he remained on "the fringes" (Shaffer quoted in Plunka 1988: 17) of things. He "slightly bought the lie that there is something essentially indulgent about being connected with art..."(Shaffer

quoted in Plunka 1988: 17). It made him feel as though “there were lots of Peter Shaffers living all together in one body”(Shaffer quoted in Plunka 1988: 17). The feeling stayed with him even after he left Cambridge and came to choose a career for himself; society’s teachings told him not to do anything frivolous like theatre or literature. He calls himself a “...Puritan of an extreme kind” (Shaffer quoted in Plunka 1988: 17) for giving in to societal belief. After graduating, he worked for his father and tried to find some sort of creative work, but failed. Then he migrated to America, where he worked first as a salesman, then in an airline terminal, and later even in a departmental store, finding nothing satisfactory in any of the work but developing an ulcer, which “like all ulcers, [was] brought on by pure frustration” (Shaffer quoted in Gelb 1965: 4). Then he worked at the New York Public Library, but it did not help and he returned to London and there found with music publishers the first job that he enjoyed. He even worked for *TRUTH* magazine as a literary critic from 1956-1957.

The real breakthrough that brought out the appreciation of critics for Peter Shaffer was his play *Five Finger Exercise* (1958). Putting all his emphasis on family relationships, he shows how conjugal dissension instigates devastating psychological consequences in the life of the Harrington family and the young German tutor staying with them. He skilfully proves to the reader and the audience that any kind of outside incursion can easily destroy precarious relationships. The critical success of the work gave him courage to make theatre his only vocation. “I became real to myself for the first time” (Shaffer quoted from Plunka 1988: 20). The next theatrical

successes were the 1962 twin set of one-act plays “*The Public Eye*” and “*The Private Ear*” followed by *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. The play made “a special kind of theatrical history” (Shaffer 1982: x) as Shaffer had unconsciously discovered his dramatic style. This highly theatrical spectacle paved the way for his immortal narrators like Yonadab, Salieri and Dysart. Through these narrators Shaffer controlled the chain of events in his future plays, providing his work with the intellectual and scholastic diversity of meaning that they deserved. Thus, the soaring career took its flight. He had found his calling, as he himself puts it:

I knew then that it was my task in life to make elaborate pieces of theatre – to create things seen to be done, like justice, *yet also to invoke the substance of things unseen like faith*. [Emphasis my own]. (Shaffer 1982: xi)

The next well-received works were *Black Comedy* and *The White Liars*. *The Battle of Shrivings* (revised as *Shrivings* later on) came in 1970 and was all idealistic parley on the stage for the critics, as it lacked the theatrical element. The failure of the play on stage did not make him lose heart. Instead he wrote *Equus* (1973), which was an enormous success. *Amadeus* (1979) followed to the same enthusiastic reception. Most recent was *Yonadab* (1986), which got mild reviews.

The above-mentioned works are not the expressions of a sensationalist’s stagecraft; these works are the sweat and blood of an individual conscious mind trying to figure out his concept of God and man’s relationship to this

Being. The unconscious lucidity of recurrence of the same theme in these serious plays with the carefully planned dialogue and language has since become the signature of the playwright.

Drama, for Shaffer has become a kind of religious expression of the human state, as he believes that religion is what makes us into who we are. That is why we see him celebrating ritualistic worship where men abase themselves before their ultimate, supremely powerful god as is done in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Equus*, or on another level we see him trying to assert human dignity and independence through Salieri in *Amadeus*, showing a defiance and protest against a superior power, or a bit of both as is done in *Yonadab*.

As in Jung's work, traditional notions of religion do not fare well in Shaffer's plays. Throughout these major works, we see him battle with the mystery of the existence of God (as it is portrayed by conventional religion) along with the resultant loss of passion this query has brought. Stacy calls it Shaffer's "common theme" (Stacey 1976: 96) of the human need for worship. Some critics even go as far as calling him a purveyor of homoeroticism. John Simon is one of those who severely attack him on charges of preaching homosexuality. For him the main concern of Shaffer's plays is nothing more than "Shaffer's continuous lament over his own

mediocrity and inability to break with convention".⁴

His struggle with the Apollonian and Dionysian, ecstasy and order, is a conflict that is interpreted by J. Simon as homoeroticism and perversion. The social problems of his heroes with primitive instincts make them suffer sexual inadequacies leading to sterility and even homosexuality, but their inner dilemma is the loss of identity, loss of ecstasy and spirit, which is caused by the external conformity to values others have created for them. And as Dean Ebner (1982: 29) puts it, these pressures can affect

.... worship, sexual enjoyment, coming of age during adolescence, professional menopause, middle age crisis, the agonies of parenting, and the issue of social conformity.

Shaffer himself commented on this issue calling these pressures "sides of interpreting life" and referring to his own search to find a link between "violence of instinct" and "order and restraint", thus indicating perhaps the strongest Jungian tension in his work:

There is in me a continuous tension between what I suppose I could loosely call the Apollonian and the Dionysiac sides of interpreting ... I don't really see it in those dry, intellectual terms. I just feel in myself that there is a constant debate going on between the violence of

4 John Simon, in "The Blindness is Within" in *New York Magazine* (November 1974): 118, and in "Hippodrama at the Psychodrome" in *Hudson Review* 28 (Spring, 1975): 97 – 106 and he also gives vent to his serious criticism of *Amadeus* in "Bizet's Carmen, Shaffer's *Amadeus*," *National Review*, 36 (20)1984: 55-57

instinct on the one hand and the desire in my mind for order and restraint. Between the secular side of me the fact that I have never actually been able to buy anything of official religion — and the inescapable fact that to me a life without a sense of the divine is perfectly meaningless (quoted in Jones 1987: 152).

Thus, it can safely be asserted that the critics might be trying a bit too hard to find an “underlying idea” that was never there. Therefore, it may be that, when the critics see that Shaffer’s leading characters are men without dogma, all accusations against him become proven facts for them. However, the interesting thing is that he is not trying to create these characters without a code of belief. His is an effort to investigate the nature of conformity and its effect on people. When we look around, even casually, we see such people all around us in their absolute naturalness. All that we can blame Shaffer for is that he is eager to show us that they exist. This raises two questions. Should we consider him an agnostic advocate of faith in search of the ultimate form of worship and people’s relationship to this search as human beings? Or do we see him as just another disseminator of perversion, as is proclaimed by many critics? The answer should definitely be the first of the two suggested paradigms.

The rebel in Shaffer is fighting for lost passion. He is fighting against all sorts of institutionalisation at the root of this passionless existence. He is not an iconoclast; he is against the twisted institutionalised form of superciliousness in the name of religion, devoid of intensity and humility. His quest is the ultimate spiritual freedom, and the path he undertakes is

contradictory but logical. The question asked here is what does religion have to do with “socially acceptable attitudes and beliefs”? (Plunka 1988: 166) Shaffer seeks an answer to this question with fearlessly. He knows that fear cannot make one revere religion any more than it can make a child love and respect a strict parent. Shaffer does not describe the meaning, experience or the reality of faith; he tries to see it for what it really is. For him belief shapes the course of life and of existence. All he tries to question is who is shaping whom or what. Does faith shape people as it should, or do people shape faith and, if both kinds of thing happen, what might be the result?

His search for the ultimate nature of Faith and Passion helps him find some kind of an answer to the dilemma of modern man’s sense of loss. The scholastic disputation suggests to him that society values everything determined by the generic value term *normal*. Whatever is against this value is rejected or discouraged. Many other kinds of Faith can be found in this category of *normal*. These different interpretations of God and worship change belief into disbelief. Therefore, others can easily reject one’s belief system as “abnormal”.

His early works present us with the study of the madness of the modern world with its loss of passion from human life. Later on, we see his inquiry turning into the most thematically substantial discussion of the concept of the nature of God and our human relationship to it. It should not be seen as just another foray of unexpected ideas and a new perception of the fusty

stronghold of convention. One can easily detect a pattern in his writing of these plays. The exploration starts with *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, where he shows us the first entry of institutionalised normal religion into the life of the shamans who are full of confidence and passion that come with their belief. Then it moves to *Shrivings* where a debate follows about passion, faith, and belief. *Equus* gives birth to the Lord of reason, that is a jealous god. And then comes *Amadeus*, where we see Salieri in open war with God. Not to mention the fact pointed out by Richard A. Blake (1984: 210), referring to *Amadeus*:

For Peter Shaffer.... the human condition is one of helpless madness.
God descends incarnate to redeem His people and is devoured by
them...

Now, why does he end up here? The answer lies in history and the times he lived in while writing those plays. Almost from the beginning of his literary career, Shaffer's interest in institutions ranging from family to the major organizations of the state, like the church, was obvious. He observed that law, commercialism, family, approved sex; adulthood, psychiatry, professionalism, conformity, and ultimately approved religion were playing a major part in determining society's philosophical foundations. Yet, for Shaffer the key word for every concept or institution was and still is "Approved". By "Approved", he means the overlay of artificialities imposed upon human nature in the name of civilization by human beings themselves. The self-created urbane and civilized behaviour that has been acquired through centuries of hiding from psychological self-realization can

easily be crumbled by curiosity as such behaviour reflects a lack of freethinking liberalism. Institutionalisation of everything has brought more harm to people than good, leading to the worship of the false idols of “Approved Religion”. Shaffer understands that his function in this whole scenario is to demonstrate the reality of the human soul and the mercilessly relentless conditions under which it lives.

Collectively these themes depict a full range of value systems operating within modern society. He describes all these themes with subtle artistry, but unlike Chekhov, he refuses to use any kind of restraint in thought and expression. He creates a tense realism with his vision of modern life and its impact not only on art and morality but on our beliefs as well.

Generally speaking, we are living in an age of bogus idealism. Theodore Adorno (1973: 23) echoes Shaffer’s point of view:

The system is the belly turned mind, and rage is the mark of each idealism.

System is the matrix in which the mind unfolds itself, creating its own reality. This reality has enslaved the soul and has broken it to bits. Reading the plays, one feels that Shaffer, in quite an indirect way of his own, deconstructs the reality of the brokenness of the human soul created by all the theological barriers and rational idealism of the times that we live in. It is passion, he believes, that can fulfil a human soul. His quest is to condemn the lack of passion whether that passion is missing on the conscious or the unconscious level. Moreover, it is simplistic attitudes

towards religion which he abhors for he definitely believes passion to be a part of our being. His is more a constant struggle with the question of theodicy than the mere anti-religious propaganda claimed by some critics.

Primarily, the commencement of religion was supposed to bring balance in human life. Curiosity has been fundamental to human nature. It has urged people on to investigate the truth about creation and to find out who we are and where we came from. The age-old debate has kept on going and different answers have been found during different periods of our history. Eventually, everything and every answer have become so complicated that people feel totally lost in the web of their own explanations.

Lowe (1993) believes that the clergy have ritualised the interpretation of religion and belief to such an extent that faith got lost in the process. People started believing that satisfying the church was more important than one's need to communicate with God Himself. During this time, religion lost a lot of its passionate appeal, as it became more profitable to the church as an institution than to the subjects and the God it was supposed to represent.⁵

Lowe also expressly believes that rational inquiry into religious questions in the twentieth century was born amid the darkness of the two World Wars.

⁵ For a more detailed explanation of these ideas see *Theology and difference: The*

Wound of Reason 1993: 1-32.

According to him, the experience was so destructive that the struggle to emerge from the dark took people through psychic reasoning and massive questioning about everything that they ever believed in. The result was different from what was expected as this time the psychic hunger and urgency made many utterly renounce ready-made enlightenment and made them feel more enlightened. Confusing times led them to confusing conclusions.

Lowe's approach seems to be in agreement with Shaffer's thoughts concerning the question of faith and religion. Though the purpose of this study is not to point out the difference between the two forms of enlightenment, it seems appropriate to mention that those who received true enlightenment were few. They kept struggling for a psychic space as they thought it was a part of the religious quest that they had undertaken. They carried on with their search, coming across conflicting ideas. The ones who took ready-made enlightenment as truth became enslaved in the simplification that came with it – there were no alternatives and what was written in black and white got approval from their society. Shaffer deciphers this trend as the human need to join a band and it will duly be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Shaffer believes that a mind or a reason that is aware of its own brokenness might prove a better guide than one committed to *normal* and *approved* healthy-mindedness. What we find in Shaffer is this determination: his search for the truth beyond these terms about belief and the kind of faith

such truth brings. For many critics, this means that Shaffer lacks profundity of thought and understanding according to their own set of values and standards. His conviction that there are definitely limits to what can be rationalized raises the question of whether it is possible to surrender control or not. In addition, in case one decides to surrender it, will it be for the deity that one serves or will it be a sacrifice made to honour the institution that has taken over that deity. He takes soul as the kernel of one's existence and feels that its instrumentality in the name of an all-embracing control of mind actually targets itself (i.e. the soul), targets even the spirit of the soul.

Shaffer understands that debate about faith and belief is difficult. However, this does not stop him from summoning his troops of characters to come to question the issue, and to defend it in their way. Intuitive knowledge of human emotions gives his stories a spiritual shape. This debate is about finding one's own identity and that of the others with whom one shares one's existence. Metz (quoted in Lowe 1993: 5) said,

Man's consciousness of his own identity has become weaker and more damaged in the course of human progress. Man ...feels that he is caught up in the waves of an anonymous process of evolution sweeping pitilessly over everyone. A new culture of apathy and lack of feeling is being prepared for him in view of his experience of the fragile identity.

The question Shaffer asks is how this identity has been lost when the sole reason for believing is to restore identity and strengthen it. What kind of

human progress aims to deprive human beings of their sense of belonging and identity? Moreover, if identity is lost, why do we consider ourselves advanced? What kind of evolution is it that has taken the feeling out of human beings, leaving vagueness and a void that has engulfed them with doubt? This brings more questions. One may ask whether we should regard this as a tragedy on the part of humankind or as an extraordinary congruence of genius and era.

To try to fathom the mystery of this lost identity along with faith in God and humanity, Shaffer creates themes that directly deal with the problems at hand. His characters are neither conventional nor shallow and they certainly are not the undersized adults that some critics reckon them to be.⁶ The dialogue, which makes them flesh and blood, is not jaded. In fact, his handling of the dialogue shows the creative ability of the dramatist. No matter how sweeping the emotion is, Shaffer paints the tragic beauty in the flight of the human spirit as his interpretation of life. Even the use of brutalism becomes a just response to the particular human condition he is contemplating. This brutalism is a revelation of the very soul of the great people these characters are, and how, in all their tragic glory, they pause to ventilate their souls. These characters are eloquent in their silence; they are

⁶ For further information see Benedict Nightingale, "The Royal Hunt of the Sun at Chichester", *Guardian* (Manchester) 8 July, 1964: p.7; Janet Larson talks about moral objections and characterization in "'Amadeus': Shaffer's Hollow Men." in *Christian Century* 98:18(May 1981), p.580; Steve Grant's review, "Equus", *Plays and Players*, 23:9 (June 1976), p.29

full of wonder and surprise and thus generate a live wire kind of creative vitality on the stage. Shaffer's protagonists, in their final predicament, feel trapped between reason and faith. They are like large groups of modern men and women Jung discusses in his essay *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* who "cannot believe ... cannot compel themselves to believe, however happy they deem the man who has a belief". Their chief problem remains "finding a religious outlook on life" (Jones 1987: 152). These protagonists are unfulfilled, unproductive, inefficient individuals whose life remains dreamlike in their lack of purpose and direction. Shaffer's insight into this human condition commands respect.

For critics like Jules Glenn, Shaffer tries to achieve this insight into the human condition by creating twin characters in his plays.⁷ However, this structure has more to do with the twin sides of reality and truth, the negative and the positive with which the whole world was created, than it does with the influence of his being a twin in real life. His way of presenting the two sides of a picture provides a helping hand in his attempt to resolve the ultimate conflict presented to his characters. As it is not fashionable, the uniqueness with which this is accomplished attracts much

⁷ Jules Glenn, "Twins in Disguise: A Psychoanalytic Essay on *Sleuth* and *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*", *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 43 (1974) April: 288-302. This aspect will be dealt with in the coming chapters in more detail along with Shaffer's disagreeing comments on the subject.

criticism along with pure appreciation from critics and public alike.⁸ He has achieved this versatility through the sure foundation of a technique that is not immediately obvious. He does not go for the outwardly obvious wit and intelligence that everyone seems to demand of him in the name of criticism. Instead, he ignores the demands of the critics and does what his story requires.

The twin characters that he has created are conflicting human beings who have more in common than the usually depicted characters within a conflict. These characters help him lay the foundation of the ins and outs along with the whys and wherefores of the questions needing to be answered. He goes on the offensive to prove his line of reasoning concerning the conflicts faced by these protagonists as opposed to the unyielding beliefs of their alter egos. What makes these twins different is that one of them is seen while the other remains hidden from sight until he shocks the rest of us, though both are still human. Vandembroucke (1975: 131) said,

The Greek tragedies presented characters of superhuman, regal, stature. But modern would-be egalitarian Western men are bereft of larger-than-life heroes and models to emulate. The modern myth must present its middle-class audiences a hero of its own proportion with which it may identify – a Willy Loman, a Martin Dysart.

⁸ Critics like Joan Dean associate his characterization with youth and age, primitive and modern, leading ultimately to the spiritual inclination. Joan F. Dean, "Peter Shaffer's Recurrent Character Type", *Modern Drama*, 26 (Sept. 1979): 297-305.

It seems true indeed, but what about those people who do not make the list, as they are neither superhuman by classical Greek standards nor acceptable by normal middle-class standards? That is where people like Pizarro and Alan Strang appear. His heroes are not Herculean and prodigious beings. They are better than them; they are individuals. They are contemporary beings that can be unusually weird and even mad, but their apparent insignificance brings out their greatness. Shaffer seeks this greatness. By portraying the conflict in religion, he is not belittling it; he is aiming at a greater purpose. He attempts to make people understand the meaning and rationale of faith as he sees it, to tell them that sometimes it is better to open the Pandora's box for self-understanding to save one's soul, as soul is the core forerunner of all faiths and beliefs. That is exactly what he portrays in plays like *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Equus*.

Religion today is trying to free itself of ready-made enlightenment and is groping for a sanctuary along with those who want to find the truth about it. Shaffer seems to believe that this shelter, if found, is supposed to build the basis from which to critique this whole structure. However, the system has unfortunately destroyed the psychic space that was to provide this sheltered sanctuary for the soul. With its destruction, how can one search for a criterion to redefine religion when this impulse has been reduced to a business and become a kind of commodity that calls itself meditation? Where will the answers be found when this inversion describes the *normal* way of belief?

The coming chapters provide a poised and logical discussion about faith and reason. The same approach will be applied to the debate on religion.

This thesis is an attempt to establish how Shaffer's plays show that life may be possible without an institutionalised form of religion but that it is not possible without belief in something (like a superior power) that controls the emotional and the rational impulses of people. For Shaffer, belief is the progression of understanding theology and its effect on human life. By examining Shaffer's particular pattern in the above mentioned plays, with the help of which he has tried to find the basis of the human foundations of belief and faith, this thesis will establish that the need to hold on to faith even when conventional religion has failed us, is the most persistent struggle for human beings.

Instead of investigating what others believe in, his works make an actual effort to seek the divine. He searches for it first in *nature*, then *art* and finally in the abstract and the ineffable embrace of *love*. His is not an effort to dismiss the existence of God or turn against it with all possible vehemence (as is often implied). He attempts to fathom the reality of the ultimate truth about God through his characters. No doubt, originality of a strong voice attracts criticism and so it has done in his case, but the truth of the matter must be analysed.

The coming chapters examine his perseverance with religious themes in his major plays, and pay particular attention to the array of theatrical devices.

In this way the study will show its suggested premise as substantiated fact. To achieve this goal, the terms *passion*, *normal* and *approved* will be used constantly with reference to *faith*, *religion*, and *belief* and will be defined accordingly as well. The playwright's *intent* will be of the utmost importance, as that will provide this study with its basic premise. These terms may sometimes be used less strictly but the response must not be overlooked or disregarded, as it might be the vital strategic reference to the pattern or the unique relationship it refers to in the context of a certain play. Shaffer's revisions of his works will also provide a clearer indication of his ideas of faith and religion. Over the years, he has been generous in giving interviews as well. His own words and thoughts will be resources to prove the points under discussion.

There is no denying that between the two greatest puzzles of *Life and Death* and *Love and Hate* lies the greatest puzzle of all – *The Puzzle of God*. As a child, he used to solve puzzles (Plunka 1988). First, this developed into the writing of detective novels, and ultimately led him to search for the answer to the greatest puzzle of all. Life without a sense of Divine leads to a hollow and abysmal, dismal existence. The death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving religious instinct is the root cause of the controversy about the existence of God and the way He works. Shaffer constantly seems to be asking whether everything needs to be done a certain way to be accepted. He feels that human values such as order, consistency, virtue, duty, or logic cannot be the only way to describe the way God operates. Organized

religion, to him, only keeps adding to the ethical and psychological void. Thus, the study will focus on the following plays in the sequence in which they appeared and developed the subject matter of the above-mentioned questions:

1. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964)
2. *Shrivings* (originally performed as *The Battle of Shrivings* in 1970)
3. *Equus* (1973)
4. *Amadeus* (1979)
5. *Yonadab* (1985)

This should provide a new insight into the plays. Through its examination of the role of religion in these plays, the thesis should also show how Shaffer gives us a better understanding of the word religion, the nature of the Divine, and the human need for worship.

CHAPTER 2

THE ROYAL HUNT OF THE SUN

I do not think that I ever enjoyed doing anything so much as *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*--and the wonderful thing was that hordes of people shared my intoxication.... *I knew then it was my task in life* to make elaborate pieces of theatre--to create things seen to be done, like justice, yet also *to invoke the substance of things unseen, like faith.. [Emphasis my own]* (Shaffer 1982: xi).

The most wonderful thing about a Shaffer play is not what is transmitted by the words, but what is hidden under them, in the pauses, in the glance of the actors, in the emanation of the characters' inner-most feelings. This can also be one way to describe *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. It is a chronicle play covering a period of over four years and many thousands of miles' journey, but it turned out to be a spectacular drama of sophisticated workmanship in elaborate literary terms.

As Shaffer was "Haunted by the ideas of God"(Winegarten quoted in Smith 1982: 458), his vital thought process behind the play was the search for God. This provided a picture of the Incas in a nighttime vigil, awaiting the resurrection of Atahuallpa, their Sun god. As has already been said, in

the middle of the puzzles of *Life and Death* and *Love and Hate* rests the greatest puzzle of all times – the *Puzzle of God*. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* took its thematic beginning from the *Puzzle of Death*, which happened to be Pizarro's greatest fear. Shaffer is going to lead us, in his own quest for an understanding of the nature of God, through his protagonist's mental trepidation concerning death. During the course of the action, we will see Pizarro experiencing strong emotions of love and hate before finding the ultimate solution and answer to the puzzle that *Death* is and has always been [*emphasis my own*] in his life.

Though, as the precedent of the theme of the knowledge of God and human effort (on the part of the hero) to seek how far man can attain God's powers and become God – if indeed He exists, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* does not match the structure of his early drama. Nevertheless, the early structure still provided the framework for what we encounter in Atahualpa, and later on in Alan, or Mozart. Shaffer's ongoing concern about individual freedom and structured institutionalised behaviour made them inherit Clive Harrington, Bob, and Belinda's problems in a more complex way. They were the forerunners of the gods that have appeared in the later plays in the form of the sun, horses, and the music.

Shaffer was working on the play before the writing of *Five Finger Exercise* in 1958. Acknowledging the fact that realism alone would not be enough to attract the attention of the critics or the audience of the fifties, he realised that the right time for the launch was a vital factor. The theatre scene of the

fifties⁹ did not require writings about gods and grand aspirations, orators and ecstasies. However, this did not discourage him from experimenting with the idea. The style of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* was unusual. The vivid visual and aural spectacle exploring the metaphysical “first questions” of being, identity, freedom, and a “sense of the divine” made the effort greater and even heroic. Nevertheless, he lived in the philosophical climate of those times without associating with any particular school of metaphysical thought (Lounsberry 1991: 76). The theatre world in the fifties still required plays representing the social scene. So instead he launched his career with *Five Finger Exercise* in 1958, even when the first draft of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* existed. After a lot of rewriting, the final draft gained the clarity and simplicity with which Shaffer intended to surprise the theatre world. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* was produced in 1964. Exercising his dramatic licence to improve the literary quality of the play, Shaffer had changed the tradition of the well-written plays he had crafted earlier in his career and created a new sort of drama with the same content and ideas as were presented in the earlier plays. In his earlier works, he had spoken on the institution of family, yet this was the first time he attacked the institutionalised power of the Church and religion in particular. The latent desires of the individual restricted by society’s institutionalised set-up, as opposed to the liberated primitive, provided the pattern of his later works, as we see in plays such as *Equus*, *Amadeus*, and even *Shrivings*, which will duly be discussed in the

⁹ He elaborates on it in detail in his Introduction to *The Collected Plays of Peter Shaffer* (1982).

coming chapters. With *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Shaffer went on record for his dislike not of the institution, but of how the institution forces the individual to play roles.

Shaffer's unique incorporation of the Shakespearean way with history, and the Brechtian epic theatre, along with a few techniques from the Kabuki, helped him turn the play into a rare spectacle for the stage. The director John Dexter discovered and produced it in the National Theatre. Undaunted by the size of the production, he turned it into one of their most remarkable and popular successes. The great work put in by the director, designer, choreographer, costumer, sound technicians, and actors turned it into the spectacle Shaffer intended it to be. The immense latitude that only theatre can provide, along with Shaffer's imagination, thus, turned the play into a noble quest drama. The theatricality of the realism of this "noble quest drama" led to the quest for noble drama for Shaffer with *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*.

The first run of the play received mixed reviews by the critics although most approved the play. The physical production was almost a universal success, in the eyes of the audience. The staging of a play of this magnitude and epic proportion aroused many questions in the minds of critics. It had to be decided whether the play had any depth of philosophy or was a mere theatre spectacle. Those who had something to say about the play could not find a lot to criticize in the great performances of the actors on stage. It was obvious that the play depended for its effectiveness on the physical

presentation, an aspect on which many of the critics commented. Critics like Benedict Nightingale and Malcolm Rutherford thought it to be ambitious and lacking in character (Plunka 1988: 96). For J.C. Trewin (1964), the play's visual effect was far more than the written effect, but he had to admit that the piece must have moved the dramatist himself in the majesty and terror of the theme. For John Russell Taylor, the play was dangerously close to loquaciousness, were it not saved by the physical staging (Taylor 1974: 21). Shaffer himself had commented upon the theatrical element of the play:

This is a large-scale chronicle of the Fall of the Inca Empire in the 16th century.... I aim for the immediacy of effect, combined with high theatricality of a Bach passion. (quoted in Marriott 1958: 8)

This type of "total theatre" (Plunka 1988: 23) was the sort of drama that Shaffer longed to create and associate with as a playwright.

Based on the conquest of Peru, the play deals with many social and philosophical concepts, but the nature of God and man's relationship to it takes precedence over all the rest. Despite its historical setting, the play has nothing to do with history. According to Chambers, the best way to describe it would be, "what Bernard Levin might describe as 'life force'" (1980: 12), and adds "history, like Shaffer's divinity is beyond our reach, so we need not feel guilty" (1980: 13). Although it is set in a different historical time, Shaffer tried to give the play a contemporary dimension of a twentieth century myth. However, later on he found out that most people

took it at its face value, as an account of past events in history. He believes that there are such events and there are such legendary heroes as Atahualpa and Pizarro in our age too.

Shaffer got the idea of writing this play from Artaud, as Artaud was planning to write a play about the conquest of Peru. He intended it to be the first of the great spectacles of his Theatre of Cruelty.

Out of this clash of moral disorder and Catholic monarchy with pagan order, the subject can set off [sic] explosions of forces and images.
(Artaud quoted in Podol 1984: 121)

The Conquest of Mexico had great potential to demonstrate the possibilities of a theatre spectacle. Shaffer might have used Artaud's proposal as his source of information, yet William Prescott's book, *The Conquest of Peru*, was what triggered the play for him.

... the trajectory of the action in the historical events between the invasion of Peru and the death of Atahualpa provided a natural play. (Shaffer quoted in Armitstead 1987: 6)

The whole drama presented the confrontation between two different ways of life. Shaffer describes it as "Catholic individualism of the invaders and the complete communist society of the Incas".¹⁰ However, we should keep in mind that

¹⁰ More detail in Peter Shaffer's 'In Search of a God.' *Plays and Players* (1964 b. 22).

... in the end, Shaffer is no more a theologian than he is a historian.

The tragedy is a personal one (Smith 1982: 458).

Borrowing liberally from Prescott's account of the historical events, he showed a contrast between the pagans and the Christians — in particular emphasising the hypocrisy of the Spanish, who supposedly killed the pagans in the name of Christ. Thus in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, the spiritual issues take precedence over material concerns of the commonalities¹¹. With perverse fineness, Shaffer makes the audience see how a small number of people make enormous things happen. Yet, what are these enormous things? The perversity of this enormity lies in the insularity of the so-called religious people who, as a small band, bring about the enormous destruction of millions of people. The social institutions of state, army, church prove to be false idols created specifically for the material gain of the band members. They corrupt and destroy the real values they profess to uphold.

This play was also the beginning of the creation of a series of protagonists who, in the process of finding themselves, feel trapped in their onerous roles. These characters cannot adjust to change, as they need to free themselves from dependence on what others think about them. These

¹¹ The term has been used by Watson (7) and critics like Plunka with reference to Shaffer's term "mediocrities". In later plays like *Equus* and *Amadeus*, this concept regarding the Inca population and common public in general turned into his concept of "mediocrities" and their relationship to the spiritual world.

protagonists are carriers of society's "prevailing values" (Chambers 1980: 12) and double standards concerning *right* and *wrong*. Pizarro starts out as 'the pillaging Christian' and bearer of these values. His 'opposite' is blessed with a transcendental quality; his fulfilling life as an expression of some kind of divinity is not reducible to any time or place or any moral or religious system. These contradictions unite in the main image of the play, yet they never get resolved. The ambiguity of Atahualpa's immortality helps Shaffer explore the effects of the loss of worship from a mystical point of view and its effect on contemporary society. His focus stays on the feeling of being lost. Shaffer's intent is to raise the questions yet offer comfort for our shortcomings. He himself has said that he is not influenced by anything specific "save my own inadequacy" (Shaffer quoted from Chambers 1980: 13). It is this lack of an exact knowledge of who he is that allows him full dramatic licence in working out his own legend on stage. The acceptance of one's own shortcomings matters to him. Shaffer has summarised the theme of the play repeatedly in interviews. Shortly before its production, he described the play as being "about two men: one of them is an atheist, and the other is a god" (in an interview with Taylor 1964: 12):

... the theme which lies behind their relationship is the search for God
 — the search for a definition of the idea of God. In fact, the play is an attempt to define the concept of God. (1964: 12)

The play appeared to be a formal attack on institutionalised behaviour giving usurping powers to church and state. Some took it as a critique on the Resurrection (Hinden 1985), while others called it a parody of

crucifixion (Rutherford 1964: 82) or a dialectical argument against Christianity and the Catholic Church. Shaffer has always been critical of institutions and their perpetual and demeaning oligarchy with which they debase and control individual behaviour.¹² The fact remains that his focus is always on how certain *individuals* (like Valverde and Estete), insist on conforming to established guidelines. However, he is not exploring the inner manoeuvrings of the established organisation. Instead, he is more interested in the individual and how the individual conforms to group or peer pressure. The institution's involvement thus becomes secondary as compared to the effects of the code of behaviour that it demands of people. Shaffer's concern, however, is not political but social when he criticises the institution's codifying individual behaviour into a specified pattern. Society puts stress on the liberated or uninhibited individual to be more predictable about everything, about belief system and faith, including God. Nevertheless, there are occasions where the standards of society do not let the individual see eye to eye with these inscribed rules of behaviour. Shaffer attempts to break from such inhibitions through his play about the conquest of Peru; raising the question as to whether it was a conquest on the part of the Christianity, or a defeat of everything that it stood for? In other words, for him, the strong intent of the conquerors to overpower the

12 For example see Barbara Gelb, "... And Its Author", the *New York Times*, 14 November 1965. P.2; Barry Pree, "Peter Shaffer," *The Transatlantic Review*, 1963: 64; and Renee Winegarten, in *Midstream* (1966) suggested that it was a Jewish writer making a statement against organised religion and not against Christianity per se.

people in order to have gold defeated the stronger guilt they should have felt.

In order to explore the question, he divided the play in two acts; Act I, entitled “The Hunt” and Act II entitled “The Kill”. These acts are divided into twelve “sections”(1964a: i) as Shaffer calls them in the script of the play.¹³ This takes us to the next aspect of criticism Shaffer has suffered — controversy on dramaturgical grounds. Shaffer’s preferred “big sweeping theatre” (quoted in Gianakaris 1991b: 07) improves the philosophical content of his play, instead of overwhelming it.

Though Shaffer has repeatedly been criticized for being overly theatrical, he does not apologize for it. Believing that the spirit of the play lies in its theatrical side, Shaffer sees no reason not to exploit the medium of theatre for all it is worth. He believes that

...people go to the theatre to be surprised, to watch the colour and effect, to have their imaginative muscle worked. It is not very much worked, the imagination. I think it is one of our jobs, as playwrights, to exercise that muscle (Shaffer quoted in Colvin 1986).

In an interview with Armitstead, he reiterates the fact that “exercising the imaginative muscle of ... [an] audience through narrative ... is what theatre is based on”(1987: 6). Theatre’s association with craft and hammering to get

¹³ It is important to note here that Shaffer wants the action to be continuous despite this division as he wants no interruption in the audience’s response.

it right is what being a playwright is all about. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* exploits his same skill as a storyteller.

The theatrical devices in Shaffer are there to involve the audience in the action. In order to achieve an audience relationship of detachment and objectivity, Shaffer used the clever distancing device of his character narrator, Old Martin. The audience members must weigh everything that they witness through his cleverly constructed multiple perspectives. Thus establishing the deceitful nature of life and world through the carefully monitored eyes of the audience, Shaffer presents the more serious principle themes between Atahualpa and Pizarro, and in the reactions of the two Martins.

Although his narrator does create a measure of objectivity and detachment, this figure also creates a bond between the action of the play and the audience. Though the narrator actively participates in the story, he keeps coming back with clarifying commentary on the plot in order to take it further. The strategy here is to move ahead in time and action and control the advent of the events as suited to the plot and the theme. Thus the audience themselves are turned into gods (Gillespie 1981).

Shaffer's intent is to create "a ceremony to be ultimately created by the audience" whose task will be to create for themselves "... the fantastic apparition of the pre-Columbian world, and a terrible magnificence of the Conquistador" (Shaffer 1965b: 3). The mixing of the narrative mode with

traditional realism gives Old Martin's character a chorus-like quality. He also gets the audience's immediate attention. The Shakespearean narrators like Richard the Second and Iago made the audience a part of the action. Greek drama often speaks directly to spectator. Robert Bolt in *A Man for All Seasons*, for instance, also uses a narrator who both participates in the action of the play and stands outside it. However, Bolt admitted that he fails to draw the audience into the play. Shaffer, on the other hand, has developed the narrator as the storyteller and part of the action. Shaffer's making us feel involved with Martin draws us into the play, but also keeps us slightly detached from the main action involving Atahualpa and Pizarro, and so enables us to preserve a measure of objectivity as far as that is concerned. Though Old Martin ends up being the casualty of the actions of others, this also separates him from such uses. The journey, which started with the highest of aspirations, ends up in destruction of all he has ever believed in. Nonetheless, Martin remains the first step into the characters of the coming great narrators from Dysart and Salieri to Yonadab, giving them the tragic hero quality of the classical drama. Old Martin immediately wins the audience's attention from his opening lines. Through the flashbacks of the past Old Martin entices the audience into the inner plot of the world of Pizarro and Atahualpa.

The next device to achieve theatricality is the iconography. As he is extremely particular about the special effects on stage in his general notes on the playing of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, one notices that there is nothing general about the way everything, even the movement of the characters, is

specified by Shaffer. These presentational techniques suggest the power in the illustrative scenes like the rape of the sun, and ascent to the Andes. This is Total Theatre of the epic proportion that he loves in Brechtian and Artaudian drama. Yet Watson is right in his observation that Shaffer is not cruel enough to be Artaudian, but then he is not political enough to be Brechtian either. His work has a level of effectiveness that stays unidentifiable through standard critical methods. Instead of being drawn into the dogmatism of either Artaudian or Brechtian styles, Shaffer has given *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* originality of style without committing himself to the left or right wing. Shaffer, thus, has maintained a sturdy liberal independence in his craftsmanship as a dramatist. Pizarro and Atahualpa become spokesmen for Spanish and Incan myths in his own kind of “total theatre”. Where Pizarro is seen struggling with Spanish myths of conquest, capitalism, chivalry, and utopia, Atahualpa is seen as standing with the Incan myths of commonality with all living things, communism, and spirituality. To present themes of such epic proportions effectively on stage the theatrical aspect is more suitable than the dramatic. Shaffer fulfilled the requirements of the play by turning it into a theatre spectacle, yet he never once compromised the thematic contents of the play. Describing it as a “giant drama”, one of London’s most highly respected drama critics, Bernard Levin, in his review for the *Daily Mail* wrote:

... a third seeing confirms and strengthens my belief that no greater play has been written and produced in our language in my lifetime.
(quoted in Plunka 1988: 97)

He has continued to use such non-verbal mimetic theatre in almost all his later serious dramas. This kind of technical and dramatic virtuosity makes Shaffer worthy of serious scholarly attention.

Vandenbroucke (1975: 132) believes that in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* "Mr. Shaffer sought after the images and ritual to capture the essence of religious conflict, internal strife and self-crucifixion". Shaffer uses the ritualistic aspect of the play in the evaluation of beliefs, providing a means of identifying the mysteries within the ordered world. Ritual is "to the believer or the artistically hungry man of culture an end in itself" (Malinowski quoted in Watson 1987: 35); it is the affirmation of the ultimate value people put on it even though they are unable to express its purpose. Ritual gives them a sense of partnership with the great mysteries of the universe and being, and thus helps them come to terms with the universe. The Questions of being and existence of God lie beyond rational knowledge. However, critics like Robert Brustein accuse such treatment of *The Conquest of Mexico* (as Artaud intended it to be) a sentimental version of Artaud's ideas. Sontag (quoted in Podol 1983: 518) believes that Artaud's influence on theatre might be overrated for at least two reasons. Firstly, it is not completely original, as before his idea of 'cosmic cruelty', Nietzsche's concept of the metaphysical role of theatre existed. Secondly, the less arguable fact she states is that "Artaud's ideal theatre was essentially unrealizable". Though the primitive ritual suggested through 'The Hunt' and 'The Kill' is essentially Artaudian, it is the dialogue that is of paramount importance to the essence of the work. Moreover, Shaffer has

never declared himself an ardent disciple of Artaud. He chooses to exercise his own free licence to use his own ideas in practise as he wants. As Frederick Lumely (1972: 286) puts it:

Whatever the merits of Artaud's theories might be, they are not the only ones.

M. Hinden (1985) has even noted that use of extended monologues through mime, split protagonist masks and spectacle are, to name but a few, theatrical techniques Shaffer shares even with O'Neill.

In the same way, Shaffer's sense of characterization has also been queried and condemned by some critics. John Gassner found *Atahualpa*, "the dramatic dud"(1968: 611), particularly lacking as an appropriate antithesis for Pizarro. In his direct criticism of the profundity of the subject matter, Irving Wardle (1964: 7) pronounced it to be

... little more than an easy argument at the expense of Roman Catholicism ... a rigged situation rather than a fundamental debate....

Richardson's (1975: 77) verdict on Shaffer's attempt at the conquest of Peru was that

... he turned the conquest of Peru into public school history pageant and made a conflict of cultures an exercise in English badinage.

Hayman found *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* "seriously overrated"(1970: 61), failing to produce sixteenth century dialogue. Nonetheless, the play expanded the narrow horizons of the theatre world and its limited

imagination. As mentioned earlier, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* is the first of the series of plays in which Shaffer criticises institutions like state and church. The incorporation of ritual in theatre enhanced Shaffer's effort, helping him restore the possibility of religious experience in a world that has abandoned faith. Dealing with the conflict of men and civilizations, he succeeded in achieving a distinguished result that was dignified and thoughtful.

Helping him achieve this goal are the two opposing character types of his plays — the primitive (Atahualpa) and the role-player (Pizarro). They are mirror images of each other, yet there is always a direct communication between the two. Their direct exploration of each other's world broadens their understanding instead of encapsulating it. This helps specify Shaffer's intent as well as an understanding of the effects the play has on the audience. The play also portrays two middle-aged men in a crisis of faith. Pizarro and Martin Ruiz experience profound dissatisfaction with their cultures and their existence. That is why, when contact with primitive culture proves vital, it exacerbates this crisis of faith and "fuels their need for worship":

The failure of modern society to provide a constructive vehicle for man's religious impulses and need for ritualistic worship, the decrepitude of Western religion, and the resultant fragmentation of personality form an important thematic nexus among Shaffer's recent works. (Dean 1978: 297)

Though Watson, in his dissertation, speaks about Shaffer's theme of the nature of God and human relationship to it, he makes it clear that his goal is to understand the effect of Shaffer's plays, with their ritual, on the observer rather than to go into specifying the playwright's intent. Intent is important to this study as it provides the reason to create the mood of the individualistic piece. As Shaffer's intent here is to seek the basic truths, he uses ritual to portray primitive modes of behaviour. He is aware of the fact that "drama-as-ritual restores the possibility of religious experience in a world that has abandoned faith", yet it is Shaffer's *intent* that has been keeping the critics in an indecisive mode (Michael Anderson quoted in Watson 1987: 28).

The unsatisfied primitive impulse to create worship is modern man's dilemma. Shaffer's intent is to find out what can re-ignite man's spiritual nature and turn religion into passion. Shaffer is not the first to feel this way. Ionesco has said in the same context that he is "desperate at not having some faith or other" (Ionesco quoted in Stacy from Hayman 1991: 98). O'Neill, sharing the same kind of philosophical concern, felt the same way. Michael Hinden (1982: 51) quoted O'Neill on his belief that,

...the playwrights today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it — the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving religious instinct to find a meaning for life ...

Joining their ranks, Shaffer tries to establish that, despite the harsh reality that the meaning of life, death, and the existence of God are almost impossible to fathom, we still seek meaning and worship in these poignant paradoxes. He himself has said (quoted in Lounsberry 1991: 81):

...I have never actually been able to buy anything of the official religion --- and the inescapable fact that to me a life without a sense of the divine is perfectly meaningless.

In order to fathom the complexity of this whole theme, a deeper analysis of the play might help one see that Shaffer's is an attempt to prove that a sense of divinity is essential for meaningful existence. It is his prerogative as a playwright to explore the human psyche through his characters. Shaffer's is an attempt to answer to the dilemma of modern man's sense of loss in the current play, and the passionless existence this loss has brought about. His belief that passion can fulfil the human soul has made him undertake the quest to condemn a lack of passion at conscious and unconscious levels. The two characters, namely Pizarro and Atahualpa, provide the platform for the age-old debate here, the only difference being that it is seen and heard through the eyes and ears of Old/Young Martin.

In an interview with Barry Pree, Shaffer admitted the inclination with which he created the character of the conqueror of Peru, Pizarro, "*as a man who explores who and what he is*", [*emphasis my own*] (Shaffer quoted in Pree 1963: 64). He is a Catholic turned atheist and his disillusionment with life is not a secret. Explaining it in more detail, Shaffer stated:

... When the Church is revealed to him as being wicked and suspect, and loyalty, friendship, is revealed as being suspect and wicked, he has a feeling of the meaninglessness of life. It is this: what can one ultimately find to give one strength and stability? (Shaffer, *in an interview with Barry Pree* 1963: 64)

While Atahualpa is created as “the giver of all life” (Shaffer quoted in Taylor 1964: 12), Pizarro’s vague belief in God is

... something right outside the universe and essentially irrelevant to it and to everyday dealings in its world (Shaffer *quoted* in Taylor 1964: 12).

In his strange relationship with Atahualpa, the god he has caught in his net, Pizarro the protagonist encounters his Alter Ego, in a far off land, away from all civilization in Peru. Pizarro’s mental and spiritual development, thus, becomes the central thread of the drama. Atahualpa, his mirror image, has many surprises amassed for Pizarro. As the protagonist of the play, Pizarro does not revolt or rebel to initiate change when confronted by his alter ego. Instead, he achieves a sense of understanding from his alter ego. This newly gained awakening will never bring a liberated state of awareness as opposed to the stolid existence of his former self. He wants to make the change, but he is incapable of doing so. He cannot become one with his rival. All he is capable of is the feeling of envy of this primitive alter ego’s independence.

The other most important character of the play is Atahualpa. Being the primitive, he is supposed to unmask and humble the protagonist. Though he is a very different character from Pizarro, in many ways he is the same as Pizarro. Both bastards, both usurpers, both unscrupulous and illiterate, they are almost spitting images of each other. The relationship formed between the two of them is intense and involved as one of these two men is the prisoner of the other, yet remains obscure.

The greatest conflict of the play thus is presented through the characters of Atahualpa and Pizarro. We must remember that Pizarro is portrayed as a cynic when it comes to the normative behaviour society imposes on people from the beginning of the play. The metaphysical conflict of religion, faith, and envy is seen taking hold of Pizarro from the moment he sets foot in Peru. The simplicity of the faith that Atahualpa is the Son of the Sun who will be resurrected after death is the envy of Pizarro, as he is incapable of entrusting himself into the hands of anything or anyone, on both the physical and the metaphysical levels. Atahualpa's ability to believe arouses in Pizarro an admiration for this man and his people. Atahualpa, on the other hand is attracted to Pizarro's struggle for worship and immortality. Thus, the relationship formed by these two provides the foundation for the thought-provoking theme of the loss of faith in conventional religion and the destruction of gods of the new religion that could have provided some meaning to the life of the protagonist, if not that of the common people.

The only remaining important character is that of the Spanish *conquistador* Pizarro's page, Old Martin, who acts as a narrator for us giving the play dramatic beginning. We see the perspective of old age as he narrates the saga of his youth and the events that took place between him and Pizarro, and Atahualpa and Pizarro. Before the disillusionment, Old Martin confesses that Pizarro was "my alter, my bright image of salvation"(1). This trust in Pizarro's humanity has actually made him lose faith in everything he has ever believed in. Therefore, it must be safe to assume that as Young Martin, he is a part of the whole action, but the tedious and ugly process of learning the truth by disenchantment has made him renounce his ideals and face the harsh realities of life.

The rest of the characters are more *type* than *individual*. John Clair Watson in his dissertation, called the minor characters "underdeveloped"¹⁴(1987: 96). As underdeveloped as they might seem, these characters still help to develop the ideas in suggesting the conclusion Shaffer is trying to reach. Their typical character traits tell about the impact they are going to have on the outcome of the action of the play. Pizarro for example, praises the second in command, De Soto, at the outset of the play as "a great soldier" (3). Pizarro claims that "...no expedition he seconds can fail" (3). Throughout the play, De Soto is

14 Though in his dissertation Watson's main concern was with the unique ritualistic quality and meaning of a Shaffer play and its role in modern theatre, he did not overlook the emphasis that Shaffer laid on institutionalisation and faith. But it is still true to say that Shaffer's intention is more to try to understand the nature of God and our human relationship to it than only ritual as an answer to the problem at hand.

seen standing by his Captain and trying to help him out with the expedition. Salinas, the smith, tells Pizarro that he is not “against you”(2) when asked if he is ready to go with Pizarro, though towards the end he turns against him, creating havoc with the other soldiers. De Candia, the Venetian captain, is introduced as one whose mere walk “suggests danger” (6), and his jeering keenness to hang the Inca in the name of Spanish justice towards the end of the play proves that. Representing the institutions of state and religion are Estete and Valverde and De Nizza. Among these three, Shaffer gives individual characteristics to De Nizza only, as the one with far more serene temper and intellectual maturity than Valverde and Estete. These other two are the typical representatives of the systems they represent. Among all these *type* characters, these two are the ones who help Shaffer’s value analysis of the generic term *Normal* that they have created for the society, without suspecting that they will be the first victims of the establishment they have created. This resentment of all churches, in Shaffer, has stemmed from his observation of various institutions, which, to him, have never failed to “misuse... power” whether it is a Shrine, or a Church or a Synagogue (Shaffer quoted in Gelb 1965: 2). According to Shaffer,

the neurotic allegiance of Europe, the Churches and flags, the armies and parties, are villains of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. (1965b: 3)

His Spanish clergy are portrayed as men of narrow-minded hypocrisy, greed, and brutality. They cannot think or decide for themselves when it comes to the value systems surrounding them. Whether the organisation is State or Church, Shaffer’s main interest is not in these meagre characters

but the larger system that these individuals represent. This fusion of the Normal world with the world of the illogical to the Normal mind produces the striking theatrical effect.

The outset of the play shows the return of the derelict son, Pizarro, to the native town where he was raised in a “pigsty” (2). His first words are the bitter information of his being suckled by a sow. However, the fact remains that he comes back to Spain. Pizarro’s straightforward honesty, from the beginning of the play builds respect in the minds of the reader and the audience. Pizarro seems proud of the fact that

I got nothing and I gave nothing. And though, I groaned for that once,
I’m glad with it now. Because I owe nothing. (5)

We see Pizarro’s inner turmoil first in his conversation with De Soto and then with Young Martin, who brings out another side of the General’s harsh commanding personality. Though gathering forces to join him in his expedition to get unlimited riches and gold in the far off land of Peru, he is not after gold or wealth. He wants to be immortalised and remembered; especially by the same people who have always forsaken him. He has tried to get recognition all his life but has failed. This is his last effort to be remembered by them. Now, all he wants is respect, but the irony of it all is, he tells De Soto:

You inherited your honour — I have to root for mine like the pigs. (6)

Everyone else who joins the expedition is after gold, all but Young Martin, who is in it to uphold the traditions of glory and chivalry. Sharp contrasts to his beliefs are those of Pizarro, whose cynicism and bitterness about life show the depressive state of mind he is in. Though Pizarro's attitude seems quite harsh towards Young Martin in the beginning, soon we see it warming up into closeness. Despite his mocking the boy's service, and calling him a "groveller"(13), Pizarro tries to give the boy serious advice about the callousness underlying human behaviour. Pizarro sees himself in Young Martin's high aspirations and ideals, but age and maturity weigh heavily upon him. Death stays with him as a constant reminder of the time lost and a future that is unknown. His acknowledging the fact that Martin is a product of the useless institutions does not keep him from advising Martin to be his own man. He confides in Young Martin and reveals that his battle scars are branded realities of life that go far deeper than the skin. These taught him the meaninglessness of the words like honour, glory and tradition of service. Experience has taught Pizarro that

Its nothing but a nightmare game, played by brutes to give themselves
a reason. (8)

When Martin carries on with his romantic ideas, Pizarro's conclusion is

You will be taught, Not by me. By the forest. (8)

Old Martin specifies that the story is to be about ruin and gold, but riches have meant nothing to Pizarro. His quest, like Martin's, is not just for gold, but for something far more valuable than the "metal" as he calls it. Martin,

serving as a link between the two worlds, starts out as a religious conventionalist yet ends up being a non-believer. He represents Pizarro before and after the disillusionment. Bach (1995: 345), referring to the character of Pizarro, echoes Shaffer's view of him when she quotes Fromm: "the aim of life is the happiness of men" and "there is nothing more important or dignified than human existence and life".¹⁵ Shaffer describes Pizarro as a man "... without joy... lost through a lifetime of rejections: flag, sword, Cross" (1965b: 3). Reminiscing about his life, hopes, and disappointments, Pizarro claims Time to be the ultimate enemy of man and cheater of life. He wants immortality to beat Time. Peru presents a chance to recapture lost time. We see Pizarro telling DeSoto that life was once "fierce with feeling.... and Death — ah, death was going to make an exception in my case" (24) yet as the realization of the inevitability of death dawned, it left his soul "frostbitten". That is why he says to Young Martin in a moment of his most telling confession:

You own everything I've lost. I despise the keeping, and I loathe the losing. Where can a man live, between two hates? (14)

It is in this existential limbo of despair between two hates that Pizarro resides. However, one obvious thing throughout the act is the inevitability of the meeting between Pizarro and Atahualpa. Pizarro, when he hears about Atahualpa, initially starts with a professional interest, yet he has a foreboding that something fateful and unsettling will happen through the

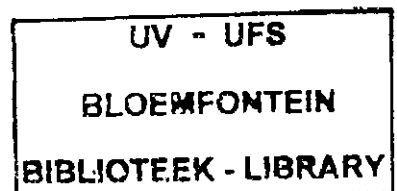
¹⁵ Susanne Bach, in her "Extending the Myths: Freud, Fromm, and the Plays of Peter Shaffer" (1995: 345) makes an effort to uncover the latent mythical dimensions of his earlier plays. She concentrates on Shaffer's artistic development.

clash. Pizarro has been a soldier all his life, yet Atahualpa is a special adversary:

Of all the meetings I have made in my life, this with him is the one that I have to make. *May be its my death. Or may be new life.* I feel just this. All my days have been a path to this one morning. [Emphasis my own] (25).

The emphasised words seem like an ironic answer to his own question about the fear of Death and its reality. The act develops its momentum and the forthcoming meeting looms closer. Atahualpa, the Inca god, *the son of the Sun*, meanwhile has been informed about the arrival of the intruders. Despite warnings by his Chief Priest, Villac Umu, he is keenly awaiting the return of “the [mythical] White God” (9). Here it is interesting that the metaphors used by Pizarro echo Incan prophecies. A good example will be the Chief Priest’s referring to the Spaniards as “small birds growing sharp claws” (9). Pizarro echoes the words of the prophecy in his ferocious but honest statement that he is not one of the “legitimate birds with claws trim on the perch their fathers left them”(13) and, if given a chance, would readily “tear them into gobbets to feed the cats”(13). And again Atahualpa’s invitation to meet him “behind the great mountains” (11) later on is echoed in Pizarro’s recounting of his childhood days when he used to look at the sun as an immortal deity, thinking, “...if only I could find the place where it sinks at night” (25), and challenges DeSoto:

What if it settled here ... somewhere in those great mountains like a God laid asleep? (25)



Their journey to Cajamarca, the meeting place of the two leaders, brings the Spaniards into contact with the Inca Empire and the unique philosophy it represents. It is a utopia where everyone is equal and content. Pizarro's quest for immortality has taken him to a realm where a god exists in flesh and blood. Atahualpa, the god, is the master who commands obedience of his subjects. He sets for them a pattern of life and they follow unquestioningly. The questions Pizarro has been asking all his life are moulded into one ultimate question – could one become a god and touch immortality? The beauty of the whole idea is the way in which it is dealt with. Shaffer changes the basic classical dramatic structure of human mortality vs. divine immortality into the existential worldview. The passion in Pizarro to find the answer to his question is quite Faustian¹⁶. By the end of the play, he gains hope from Atahualpa. In the harmonious union with nature, Time and death do not lead to destruction but promise new life. All this gives Pizarro's character the quality of a tragic hero.

Shaffer broadens the horizons of this question with the subject matter ranging from psychology and sociology to theology and philosophy, making it even harder for critics to categorize him. This theological side of the play, in which the nature of God is considered, seems forced and manufactured to Podol:

¹⁶ In later plays, we see it turn in to a kind of Promethean hunger. Equus will be a good example of it.

It is as if Shaffer were seeking to impose a theme on the play which is not really integral to the spirit of the work. (1984: 122).

For Podol Shaffer employs a “pretentious and unnecessary religious symbolism” (1983: 523) and “contrived Psychology and theology”(1983: 524) which initially work to an extent but fail to withstand scrutiny. However, it would be unfair to suggest that Shaffer’s given answers are nothing more than easy answers and popular preconceptions.

Thus, Pizarro’s quest for immortality begins an intelligent battle between Atahualpa and Pizarro, exploring man’s struggle for meaning in a world dominated by death and devoid of a religion that gives and holds salvation. “Faithfulness is played against faithlessness” (Stern 1993: 596). Pizarro has neither faith nor, until the very end of the play, any love or passion. Church, court, and army, all of these institutions are “shelters against the bigness” and “loneliness” in a world where “men cannot just stand as men” because “its too big for them and they grow scared”(8). Opposed to this is the primitive, Atahualpa. His object of worship is a common pagan myth of an ancient religion. He is a passionate believer, worshipper, and a potential saviour for his people. Unlike the situation with the cynical non-believing Pizarro, his belief provides him with a probing spiritual life apart from the band. In order for Pizarro to find a worship like Atahualpa’s, he would have to rekindle a childhood fascination for the sun and accept the sun-ness of Atahualpa’s belief. This is the only common ground that can give him his last chance and hope to save his soul (in a manner of

speaking). Ultimately, the opportunity will present itself to Pizarro and he will stake everything on the sun's ability to resurrect Atahualpa, only to be cruelly disappointed.

Meanwhile, the journey to Cajamarca continues. Atahualpa keeps ignoring the advice of his Chief Priest to kill the Spaniards as their approach is monitored. On the other hand, reaching a deserted Cajamarca, the Spaniards plan an ambush. The Church blesses the destruction of God's enemies and Pizarro awaits the ultimate success of his endeavour. Recognizing the fact that their war is against one man, Pizarro shares the plan with his men and tells them to "snatch their [Inca's] God" with "God's help" and "the rest will collapse" (22).

None of his plays under discussion renounces the power of the catastrophe, and *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* is no exception. Eventually the Incas approach and lay down their weapons. Atahualpa, dressed in white, enters with flair of colour and music. Valverde confronts him with the Bible. He offers Atahualpa a chance to redeem himself through conversion to Christianity, but Atahualpa refuses. The Spaniards mercilessly slaughter innocent Incas in rivers of blood and capture him.

Act II, subtitled "The Kill" starts with Old Martin's narrative about the aftermath of the battle and the diminution of his own idealism. Martin shows the first signs of disillusionment after the merciless killing of thousands of unarmed Incas. He is "...eased out of kid's dream" (31), as

Pizarro has prophesied. His final disillusionment has to come with the realisation that Pizarro will go ahead with killing Atahualpa

I went into the night ...and sat down and dropped my first tears as a man. My first and last. That was my first and last worship, too. Devotion never came again. (49)

By the end of the play, he will lose his faith completely, turning into his hero, the “jaded Pizarro” (Plunka 1988: 105) who has been warning him all along of the pettiness of it all. Thus, the final destruction will not just be that of a civilization, it will also be a destruction of the two most *individual* characters of the play.

The first face-to-face meeting of Atahualpa and Pizarro follows. The whole act focuses on the development of their relationship during the time of the incarceration. Young Martin is appointed as the official interpreter and we see everything through his eyes from here. Pizarro and Atahualpa do not see eye to eye at the beginning of their encounters. Nevertheless, they strike a bargain. Atahualpa is guaranteed his freedom in exchange for a large room full of gold within two months. DeSoto is wary of the bargain and he voices his doubts by saying to Pizarro that “you can only give your word where you can keep it” (34). He has a feeling that Atahualpa is “capable to perform what he swears” (34). Pizarro, on the other hand, has his doubts; he tells De Soto that though he is bargaining for gold, “the metal”, it is a far more precious cargo that he is after. He wants Atahualpa alive. He admits that

He has some meaning for me, this man-God. An immortal man in whom all his people live completely. He has an answer for time. (35)

Yet De Soto knows that nothing good will come of it as “what you do now can never be undone” (35).

According to Podol, after the massacre Atahualpa, in direct confrontation with Pizarro, proves to be the stronger, the more certain of and astute in his convictions. Atahualpa’s way of life is in his being a part of nature. Though, as the ‘Son of the Sun’, he is a symbol of innocence, he is not without blemish: he has usurped the throne by killing his brother:

My Sky Father shouted: ‘Rise up! In you lives your Earth Father, Huayana the Warrior. Your brother is fit only to tend herds, but you were born to tend my people.’ So I killed him, and the land smiled.

(41)

It is as simple as that for him. His second blemish is his trust. His basic blindness towards the intentions of the Spaniards leads to his three thousand unarmed men’s merciless slaughter, but he does not give up his belief in Pizarro’s godlike nature.

When a month passes and the room is not full, Pizarro accuses Atahualpa of lying and breaking his word. He claims that the subjects of the Inca are setting up an ambush. Renewing his vow, Atahualpa calmly suggests that Pizarro send an expedition to his capital to see that no uprising is planned. Meanwhile, we see him trying to understand the God of his captors, and we also see how Shaffer attempts to make his point through Atahualpa’s very logical and insightful remarks about Christianity.

In spite of their exploitation of the Incas ("heathens", as they call them) for material gain through forcing "Christian salvation" upon them, the Spanish clergy regard Peru as the land of the Anti-Christ. Atahualpa's claim to be a god is proof enough for Valverde to pass judgement and, as for De Nizza, the Incan act of depriving his people of their right to hunger and suffering makes it a proven fact. Pizarro reproves them for their audacity in thinking that there is neither love nor salvation outside the Catholic Church. The old Soldier, in his down-to-earth expression, echoes Shaffer's attitude towards the institutionalised version of religion:

Dungballs to all churches that are or ever could be! How I hate you.

(55)

Once again, conventional religion not only fails to provide spiritual commitment, but also acts negatively to defeat or distort the spirit of the primitives when it cannot compete with it.

Atahualpa represents ancient Incan society, whereas DeNizza embodies and enunciates the spirit of sixteenth century Spain. Pizarro and Martin stand midway between them: both are spell-bound by their native country's vacuity and equally entranced by the vitality of the primitive world. This intimately associates them with the ancient culture. Cajamarca is their refuge from Western Europe. This civilization can fulfil their spiritual needs in a way that Western culture and Christianity cannot. Atahualpa's world in its microcosm is more fulfilling for Pizarro than the great Christian empire he has come from. The growing camaraderie between

Pizarro and Atahualpa makes them discover common ground in their illegitimacy and a basic attitude towards life. Atahualpa's observation that Pizarro does not believe in the Christian priests' teachings takes Pizarro by surprise. Offering him the rank of an honorary Inca nobleman, he initiates him into his religion. It is a "world of magic and ritual, primitivism and religious passion" (Stacey 1991: 95) that re-ignites his spiritual nature. We see the primitive alter egos coming out, unrestrictedly associating themselves with the primitive rituals. In the character of his role player, Pizarro, Shaffer tries to imply that Pizarro learns that the ceremonies of these primitives structured their lives. His envy of these liberated individuals makes him question his own inhibited existence and the rigidity with which it controls his identity, so he is obviously satisfied with Atahualpa's passionate belief in his being the son of the Sun. Thus, we see that the sun becomes a bigger symbol of the Eternal Deity for him as he logically asks Young Martin:

What else is a God but what we know we can't do without? (58)

And the sun is exactly that.

Shaffer leads his characters away from the emptiness of conventional societies and religions into deeper, primitive spiritual concerns. Most critics have overlooked this exploration of the need of man. He would conjure these same dark forces later in *Equus* in a more contemporary setting. While it is often regarded as a play dealing with comradeship, honour, greed or the meeting of two different cultures, these concepts do not constitute the central theme of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. Robert Brustein

(1969: 115) adds to the list of themes an element of homosexuality in the relationship between Pizarro and Atahualpa. However, there is only one gesture of affection that can be construed as homosexual. It occurs in Act II sc.v, when they go off together hand in hand. Shaffer does not seem to be concerned with this idea here, but his later plays give a more thorough analysis of the theme of homosexuality or perversion. The sexual theme is used in a more complex way in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. Contrary to the behaviour and relationship of the two men, basic human greed turns the Spaniards into “robber finches” who literally tear the gold from the sun, and destroy and corrupt souls. Their rape of the Sun expands the sexual conflict, as it symbolises the ‘rape’ of one country by another.

It has already been said that, as in Jung’s work, traditional notions of religion do not fare well in Shaffer’s plays. The protagonist symbolizes what Shaffer believes in as man’s primordial need for worship. He looks for a purity of faith, which is not tainted like the faith of the Catholic Church priests, Ververde and De Nizza, in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. In his “God-Hunting”, Pizarro is drawn to more fundamental expressions of worship as demonstrated in Atahualpa. Shaffer captures the greatness of man’s spiritual awareness through the youthfulness of Atahualpa and through the ancient religious symbol of the sun. The predicament of the protagonist is that he is trapped between faith and reason. Shaffer’s insistence on the greatness of man’s spiritual awareness and his belief that a sense of the divine is essential is quite Jungian.

The Catholic Church is seen bestowing its blessings on the destruction of the Incas. This stark existence below is contrasted with the high above (god) in the form of Atahualpa who, in order to save one soul, readily sacrifices himself. The primitive proves to possess what it takes to be a god. His absolution goes beyond the borders of his primitive world when he sees a soul worth saving.

Finally, the room is filled with gold. The desire of the men to be sure of the rightful share of the gold seems to be turning into a revolt. Though De Soto is able to stop the revolt among the soldiers, he is not able to dissolve the tension among them. Though the soldiers can feel a certain change in Pizarro's behaviour, they still think Pizarro will kill Atahualpa even if the friendship makes it difficult for him to act on the obvious choice between his men and the Inca.

Shaffer's stance on the issue of ethics (and the question of being) is not normative. Unlike Socrates, Shaffer's sense of "good" and "right" demonstrates that human beings must suffer and do evil. The religion of the invaders promises them forgiveness of their sin within rigid orthodoxy. It also permits them to slaughter the pagan Incas in the name of their Christian King and Church. The Spaniards disagree and fight among themselves, but under strong leadership a small band of them destroys an entire civilization. Even the best of his characters end up harming others. As far as the integrity of words is concerned, Atahualpa, DeSoto, and

Martin are the only ones who speak for “trust”. Atahualpa trusts Pizarro to keep his end of the bargain. DeSoto insists

... I wish to God you'd never made this bargain ... Now you have no choice left (54).

And Pizarro's insolent pride rebukes,

In Peru I am absolute. I have choice always (54).

However, the truth remains, as Shaffer makes DeSoto his spokesperson here:

There's no choice where you don't stick by it. (54)

Young Martin speaks for the same ethical stance, yet Pizarro refuses to adhere to their “word-gods!” (49). This prevalence of lies and betrayal testifies to the importance Shaffer places on “honesty” (49) and “trust”(49). Therefore, Pizarro is left alone at the end of the play with tears running down his cheeks.

Young Martin's disillusionment with the romantic notions of chivalry and honour has started with the first encounter with the Inca, and is not complete. He confronts Pizarro to keep his word and urges him not to break the trust that Atahualpa has in him. As for Old Martin, his adventure started out with romantic idealism and ended in emptiness of despair and joylessness—a fate worse than death for him. The well intended beliefs lead him to the hell of a mere existence.

I went out into the night ... and dropped my first tears as a man. My first and last. That was my first and last worship, too. Devotion never came again.(49)

Shaffer's concept of worship also leads him to present Pizarro in a debate with Young Martin. We see him talking about the multiplicity of gods. Organised society, government, churches, all of these institutions restrict human behaviour. Shaffer detests the fact that in order to mark the intensity of our reaction to life, we need to "join a band" (1965b: 3).

Pizarro, from the outset of the play is seen lashing out at this fact. Referring to his army as "Pizarro's boys", he tries to reason with them. "The old band", as Pizarro calls them, are victims of "Gang-love", "Flag-love", "Carlos-the-Fifth-love", "Jesus-the-Christ-love" (56). He voices Shaffer's concern that "for a band, to give definition, [it] must find a rival or an enemy" (1965b: 3). Worship defined by a band, [as that is what Shaffer believes that institution has turned into] similarly limits the individual to certain norms outside which he cannot act. So why not individualize a worship and seek many gods. The same goes for identity. Consistent identity also lays the load of social expectations on the individual and compromises the individual's capacity as a person. Nevertheless, contradictions are a part of being human as well. That is why Shaffer seems to hold the view that there might be many gods and many selves and no band can embrace them all. That is why we find his characters unsatisfied by contemporary religions. Through them, Shaffer

shows how man's settling for an oracle, a voice, and a law puts "into the hands of other men the reins of repression and the whip of Sole Interpretation" (1965b: 3). History's "chivalric conquistador" (Dean 1978: 300) is Shaffer's "miserably terrestrial individual". Pizarro is the first protagonist revealing this naked shivering state of human beings under the institutional wrappings, bearing the pain and torment of a tortured soul. Yet, we should keep in mind that Shaffer is a believer in human dignity and we must not take his attempt at belief lightly. Pizarro's realisation of the atrocity of their conquest and his own mortality proves his great human dignity. Pizarro tells Atahualpa:

Trapped in this cage we cry out: 'There's a gaoler; there must be. At last, last, last, last of lasts he will let us out. He will! He will! ... But, oh, my boy, no one will come for all our crying. (50)

Even though Pizarro professes to be "absolute" in Peru, he is faced with a moral dilemma. He needs to make a choice between fulfilling his professional duty and killing Atahualpa or betraying the band and allowing the primitive his worship. Shaffer does not pretend that either of the worships is perfect. Atahualpa, in his worship, denies his people free will, yet the subjects still seem to find happiness in it. The "band" Pizarro belongs to professes to give free will, but also denies it if anything beyond the perimeters it allows for the members of the band. So all that is left there to show some difference between the two, is the intensity with which they are pursued. As an individual, Pizarro prefers the intensity of the sun-people, though it makes him debate the dilemma he is faced with:

If I go marketing gods, what do I buy? Christ [The God] of Europe with all its death and brooding or Atahualpa of Peru? His spirit keeps an Empire sweet and still as corn in the field (56).

The theme of the play is not just the ability to believe, but also a philosophical inquiry into this ability. Pizarro has no real faith in Christianity and finds it ironic and brutal that “To save my own soul I must kill another man!” (56). To do so, he will have to cause the destruction of the god of a new religion. Making his choice, he refuses to surrender his professional identity. Thus, he must destroy the captive. Estete and Ververde lend a hand in the decision this time. After collecting the “booty” for the Crown and Church, they do not have any use for Atahualpa. Valverde sanctimoniously advises him that “no promise to a pagan need bind a Christian” (55). Estete’s answer to Pizarro’s dilemma is “break your word just *because* you gave it”, as being “absolute King means to act out of personal will” (55). Pizarro lashes out at them, indicting both the institutions of the Church and the Government. Though he condemns and denounces all group loyalties, he still cannot go against his professional identity, as this is the only identity he has ever had.

Shaffer has raised the hopes of the audience in his portrayal of the relationship of the two men. The enlightenment the primitive brings into the life of Pizarro is intense and the audience believes that the protagonist cannot and will not succumb to the band. However, they are left in utter

shock when Shaffer denies them their hopes and in the process brings healing through the reality of killing. It is not a failure on part of the playwright to deny the precise moment of decision to the protagonist. It rather displays its humanity. After all, to fall is human and, no matter what, Shaffer's characters' sense of right and wrong makes them do evil. One can charge Shaffer with "faulty motivation" (Stacey 1991: 109), but the development of the action is convincing in the context of the play.

What happens next has nothing to do with the history of the actual event where Atahualpa was killed. Though one of the most distressing things to Shaffer in reading history is "the way man constantly trivializes the immensity of his experience" (Shaffer quoted in Jones 1987: 155), authenticating history is not his intent here. It has more to do with the desperate and confused character of the protagonist refusing to admit defeat. Being victims of their births and experiences, almost all of Shaffer's protagonists are robbed of their free will without knowing it. They are bound to their births. Pizarro, though, is described by Stacey as a "keeper" (1991: 102); he is unwilling or rather unable to sacrifice the lives of his one hundred and sixty-five men against one life, that of Atahualpa. This is a dangerous game of truth and dare, yet he has no choice but to be a pawn in the game. From the first Act, we come across Pizarro's vision of impending death, of the ravages of time and infirmities of old age. The reason for his ennui, as he tells Atahualpa, is his understanding of the disillusionment of all-killing time and certain death.

That prison the Priest calls Sin Original, I know as Time. ... The silence is waiting. Not one sound we make can lift it. The darkness, waiting. Not one deed of ours — mercy or anything, or grace can lift it up. ... Words kept, words broken, it all means nothing. Nothing... (49)

All he has is his professional identity. Time has robbed him of any romantic notions, so he cannot undertake the romantic quest he knows would end in failure or even death. All he can aspire to is a hope of a “may be”, when he is presented with a chance that could bring him spiritual fulfilment. Therefore, he makes a choice. Juxtaposed to Pizarro’s cynicism and existential pain is Atahualpa’s staunch faith in his creed and in his own divinity, which enables him to defy death:

Pizarro. You will die soon and you do not believe in your God. That is why you tremble and keep no word. Believe in me. I will give you a word and fill you with joy. For you I will do a great thing. I will swallow death and spit it out of me. (59)

Atahualpa kindles hope in Pizarro. His strength persuades Pizarro to give in to his comrades’ demand to break his word and execute him. He converts to Inca faith and Atahualpa even makes him confess and gives him absolution in the Inca way. Podol believes that Pizarro’s “conversion to faith stretches credibility and constitutes a definite flaw in the play” (Podol 1984: 122). The final scene begins, as Pizarro demands that Atahualpa may not be burned. The soldiers agree on hanging him provided he will repent and be baptized as a Christian. The baptism is accomplished

but Atahualpa invokes his father, the Sun, in his last moment of life. His body is laid at Pizarro's feet; the masked Inca followers perform chants of resurrection. The sun does arise and its rays do fall on the lifeless body, but they do not bring him back to life. The faith of Shaffer's creation, the gnarled, determined Spanish fighter, Pizarro, is dashed when Atahualpa's declared resurrection fails to take place. Pizarro is left wailing, "Cheat! You've cheated me!" (61), and this proves to be his last and greatest disillusionment. The horror of the story comes not from the death of the sun king but the endless disillusion of Pizarro, who is left only with gold he came for and not the renewed hope and vitality that he accidentally has discovered. The Sun does not come to save his son – instead he claims him. The non-believer is left with nothing. Nevertheless, the experience leaves him somehow enriched as he has at least glimpsed the shadow world of the soul for a moment. That is why in the end when Pizarro is left alone with Atahualpa's un-resurrected body under the sun, the light is seen shining on Pizarro's head– the new godhead.¹⁷ The ultimate dark jest of *Black Comedy* shows what God calls light is darkness to us. May be that is why Old Martin says Pizarro never got up after that. Here realization of the

17 It will be interesting to note the similarity with *Black Comedy*. Just as in *Black Comedy*, the torment of not knowing is brilliantly exercised through the mocking god figure of the electrician Schuppanzigh, who declares:

God said: "Let there be light!" and there was ... suddenly! — astoundingly!
Instantaneously! — Inconceivably — inexhaustibly—inextinguishably and
eternally— LIGHT! [SCHUPPANZIGH, with a great flourish, flicks the
light switch. Instant darkness] (1968b :106)

human predicament comes as a light to him that makes him realize that ultimately it does not matter whether Atahualpa is resurrected as he has promised or not. The darkness of death engulfing Atahualpa is the light of knowledge he has been seeking all his life.

In this attempt to answer the unknown, motifs of blindness and eyesight, light and dark occur. God's eyes are considered as capable of blinding and killing.

Before his meeting with Atahualpa, Pizarro has dreams of "a black king with glowing eyes" (25). It is again, in his final despair after Atahualpa's death that he says, "you have no eyes for me now, Atahualpa" (62). Atahualpa's dusty balls of amber eyes make him realize that "I [will] die between two darks: blind eyes and a blind sky" (62). The conqueror is left in the dark while the conquered basks in the light of his father, the Sun or, as Shaffer puts it in his introduction to *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, quoting Genet, "to see the soul of a man is to be blinded by the sun" (1965a: x).

Barbara Lounsberry, in her essay "The Cosmic Embrace" (1991: 81) calls the scene of Atahualpa's resurrection (or rather failed resurrection) "highly ambiguous". For her, the sun's rays not reviving the "son of the sun" could mean Shaffer's ultimate rejection of the sun as deity. Nevertheless, Pizarro's response to Atahualpa's failed resurrection is very moving and significant to the meaning of the work. One cannot but notice the miracle of sorts that occurs. Both these men have felt greater love for each other

than they have ever experienced before. Atahualpa, as a god, has had no prior opportunity to associate with equals. In his company Pizarro experiences laughter and a kind of joy, he has never experienced. However, their relationship is doomed from the beginning. Pizarro has to make a tragic choice: the destruction of his men and his mission, or the destruction of his “Son”.

The trinity of the Son (Atahualpa), the adopted Earthly Father (Pizarro), and the Heavenly Father (Sun) brings tears from Pizarro’s eyes. He is surprised at the tears on his cheeks. He has never cried before. Now his “frostbitten” soul has melted into feeling again. That is how, even in death, Atahualpa changes him deeply by giving him a glimpse of a greater reality. His final vision is peaceful:

... to live without hope of after, and make whatever God there is, oh, thats some immortal business surely. (62)

With this the light shines on his head, “the miraculous gift of the Creation! Light” (Shaffer 1968b: 106), giving meaning to life and God through the embrace of Death. Atahualpa’s sacrifice has saved one soul. The joy is momentary for Pizarro, as despair hits back soon afterwards. Nevertheless, that moment is a testament to the nobility of their togetherness. Earlier on in the play, De Nizza identifies Pizarro’s pain as the spark of divinity within that separates man from nature. Now, the only pain he is able to claim at the end of the play is this: “The sky knows no feelings, but we know them” (62). Confused and disillusioned, he relinquishes his religious quest. The pain of human incompleteness thus constitutes Shaffer’s most profound

and enduring theme. Between Atahualpa's two fathers, the one high above claims him, yet there seems to be a hope for the adopted earthly father along with a promise of togetherness in the next world. Pizarro's longing is answered. He has wanted to feel like a

country after rain, washed clear of all the badges and barriers, the pebbles men drop to tell them where they are (24).

He finds this track of being through the worship of a man-god and his losing him is the price of knowledge that he pays. As Shaffer affirms:

He celebrates in his stubbornness the wonder of life. He is left with no answers, ultimately with no existence. But in no paradoxical sense he recovers joy, by finding real grief. The frost melts. (1965a: *v*)

Through his sacrifice, Pizarro learns that there is no avoiding time. In the end, a Shakespearean kind of "readiness is all" is what counts. This surely is a proof that Shaffer does not intend to jest with the idea of God, but believes that only through the worship of unknowable gods can one find the answer to the enigmatic questions of life and existence.

The audience is left with doubts and goes home looking for new meaning in the predetermined, structured worships. That is how we see that the conventional religion's product is either the conventional believer (Ververde, De Nizza) with wrong answers, or the non-believer (Pizarro) with no answers at all. There are no right answers here. But when one comes across a new answer from a passionate, primitive worshipper like Atahualpa, both groups flare up — the first with spite as they feel threatened by the intense passion their own worship lacks, and the second with hope that they might find an answer to all their queries. But the band

of the representatives of the world is too much for them. It destroys the worshipper along with his hopes as he severs the ties with the band. That is what Pizarro's choice is — no choice at all — and that is what he does. He is left sitting alone watching the sun roam “uncaught” over the empty pastures. The band is satisfied and leaves him alone in his own despair as its task is done.

As for the earlier asked question as to whether it has been a conquest on part of Christianity or a defeat in everything it stands for, the answer seems to be simple. The fall of the Inca Empire also symbolises the Spaniards' own fall from grace. Shaffer's conclusion through Martin's words is proof enough for the audience and the reader:

So fell Peru. We gave her greed, hunger and the Cross: three gifts for the civilized life ... *So fell Spain*, gorged with gold; distended; now dying.[Emphasis in *italics* my own] (62)

This not only marks a total disenchantment on part of Old Martin, but it also marks the part played by the institutions of State and Church, and everything they have stood for. The gift of Christianity made “Peru ... a silent country, frozen in avarice”(62). Through Pizarro's argument, Shaffer effectively punctures the “Christianity for all' notion of the Spaniards. The hollowness and self-contradictory character of the Spanish priests is unmasked through the assessment of the more positive values of the Incan tradition (Westarp: 1984). Through this assessment, Shaffer intends to see who and what we are and what we have become.

The Royal Hunt of the Sun seemingly ends on a pessimistic note. Pizarro “sat down that morning and never really got up again” (62), Martin Ruiz too has changed by the end of the play. The inexperienced idealist had been warned by Pizarro

I am nothing you could ever want to be, or any man alive. (13)

The experience of war, which was the main socializing force in his boyhood days made him suffer. Words like “truth” and “hope” lost their meaning for him and he couldn’t clearly define what they stood for. As for his feelings,

there’s no joy in that. Or in anything now. But then there’s no joy in the world could match me for what I had when I first went ...across the water to find the gold country. And no pain like losing it. (62) His awareness of this transformation is uttered in his metaphoric lament,

After that I reckon the fruit always comes sour and doesn’t sweeten up much with age (62)

According to Bach, though Martin is trying to veil his insight in a philosophical sense, at the same time he is unable to understand that these experiences

...in all their bitterness could carry positive result, could make him aware of his freedom, could free him from idealizing and depending on other people (1991: 352-53).

This, according to her, is a structuring device on which Fromm elaborated in respect of the two *Oedipus* versions (352) and *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* is similar to *King Oedipus*.

Dean believes that

... Christianity's inadequacy to channel man's need for belief and worship drives characters to embrace some ritualistic and primitive, if not homemade, religious system¹⁸ (1978: 299).

This echoes Van Til's (1967: 3) conviction that

... If by means of his philosophy and natural theology the Roman Catholic apologist "proves" the existence of God, then he proves the existence of *a* god such as is "proved" by Aristotle, *a* god who, instead of giving meaning to the universe, is itself in need of the contingency of this universe as correlative to itself.

Correspondingly, Shaffer's view that "any form of organised religion is... totally ridiculous" (Shaffer *quoted* in Pree 1963: 64) must not be taken at its face value. Shaffer means that the traditional method of presenting God to men does compromise Him. Shaffer's intent is not to devalue religion or

18 However, it must be noted that Shaffer does not intend to point fingers at the Roman Church or Christianity in particular. His target is the basic structure of organised religion.

the institution of Catholic Church as an article of faith. His argument is against the way this institution is manipulated and made inaccessible to people. Shaffer is torn between the two kinds of good imposed as the double standards of society on the individual. Modern life and its diminished capacity to channel constructively man's spiritual impulses constitute the tragedy of the present times to him. Through Pizarro and Martin, Shaffer bares the torn state of modern man hanging between atheism and primitive worship. In his play these alternatives ultimately turn themselves into deep internal conflicts, thus creating a clash between the Old World and the New World: between the Christian and the pagan. The essential ruin is that of the larger than life figures: Francisco Pizarro, ruthless, cynical, illiterate but somehow greatly human; and the young god-king of the Incas, Atahualpa, "beautiful in body, magnanimous in spirit", but also ruthless and illiterate (Smith 1982: 456). This enactment of the downfall of these two great men gives the play the quality of an Aristotelian tragedy.

It was said earlier that the quest for wholeness is an inexhaustible theme and demands severe spiritual distress. Pizarro in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* is a rationalist who confronts someone who presents a fundamental challenge to reason. Pizarro's attraction towards Atahualpa is not because a pagan eschatology seems more reasonable to him than the Christian one; he is amazed at Atahualpa's completeness of character and inner unity:

It's the only way to give life meaning! To blast out, unshackle time and live forever, us in our own persons. This is the law, Martin; die in

despair or be a god yourself (58)

Thus, we find *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* actually is a rejection of the superficiality of the institutionalised version of faith and not anti-religious fervour on part of the playwright. Through an intensive search, Shaffer carries on with his quest for spiritual meaning. He realizes that there are no right answers there. However, as human beings, we need both to dominate and to be enslaved, so that man and the object of worship can be indivisible. “That is why it is called ‘The Royal *Hunt* of the Sun’ ”. (Shaffer 1964b: 22).

CHAPTER 3

SHRIVINGS

As a playwright, I am scared of the too well-defined identity — of being either publicly or (even worse) privately its prisoner. I rather believe my totem animal to be the chameleon. (Shaffer 1960: 20)

The Royal Hunt of the Sun had proved Shaffer's ability in the field of the epic theatre of the great proportion. He carried on "with deliberate stylistic experimentation" that, according to Taylor, makes "the creative originality of the artist evolve and make itself evident" (1974: 3). Thus in his next serious venture, ideology, and not God, became a tool to justify an ascendance to power.

This time he was haunted by the question of pre-conditioned human behaviour. The vital thought process behind the play was not directly the nature of God, but the nature of Man. With an array of ideas, he was going to lead the audience into having qualms concerning man's inhumanity to man. The quest was to try to see how far man would go to keep the faith. Is reason, he wanted to ask, the domain of man or the devil? He felt this was the best time to go for grand aspirations and orators. Once again, he was searching through the metaphysical questions of being, identity,

freedom of choice. The only difference was his presentation, which was less visual and more aural. He used this potential thought “to discuss on stage, with flourish and head-on explicitness, the idea of human improbability” (101).¹⁹ The play dealt with psychological motivations of his characters in a specific political background of the times of war and chaos. Developed through characters’ philosophical points of view, the conflict functioned as a dramatic foil, exploring the narrow gap between ideological truth and reality, and showing how one has eventually to accept reality as fact. It was an effort to probe the metaphysics of the human mind to find an answer to the philosophical puzzle: is human nature alterable or unalterable?

After the success of *Five Finger Exercise* (1958), many praised him for bringing theatre back to the realistic environment of the living room, but he warned them “I want to do different kinds of theatre” (quoted in Smith 1982: 452). True to his words, each play since *Five Finger Exercise* proved to be something of a stylistic compound of authority and wit. He had already found new grounds of total theatre in the form of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, which was to be his favourite dramaturgical area of interest in the years to

¹⁹ The page numbers in parenthesis after quotations from *Shrivings* (including ‘A Note on the Play, 1974’) in this chapter all refer to *Peter Shaffer: Three Plays* [Penguin Books 1976].

come; however, it did not deter Shaffer from experimenting with new theatrical genres. Shaffer believes predictability to be the end of creativity as far as a playwright is concerned. Corroborating that avowal in the new play *The Battle of Shrivings*, he once again changed his stylistic approach. The variety of patterns within the play was astonishing, displaying a special quality in Shaffer's drama, which was not apparent at first glance. Shaffer's fascination with the endless ambiguity of the human situation and the conflict between two different kinds of rights emerges more clearly in *Shrivings* than in any other play we will deal with in this thesis. That is why *The Battle of Shrivings* came as "something of a stylistic surprise" (Smith 1982: 452); it was certainly very different from what the theatre world expected of him after *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. The play proved to possess all the chameleonic traits he wished to acquire in his writings, but structurally *The Battle of Shrivings* (later printed as *Shrivings*), was more a textbook play than a stage play.

An eruption of global troubles made 1968 a turning point in history, politicising a new generation. In the General Introduction to *Plays of the Seventies*, the writer believes the radicalisation of students to be the most significant event for the theatre:

... by 1968, the war-baby generation was coming to political awareness 'of environmental plundering and pollution, cold-war imperialism, conspicuous consumption,' and the struggles of the third world. ... the response was 'disillusion, despair, pessimism – and anger'.... (Cornish & Ketels 1986a: i)

The peak of the Vietnam War protest, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy had tumultuous effect on the American consciousness. It turned into a movement of the political left, with Marx as “a symbol of the revolutionary transformation of society”(Cornish & Ketels 1986a: i). These disquieting events affected sensitive creative minds. Shaffer was no exception.

The psychological and social issues of the late sixties provided Shaffer with the perfect basis for a play. The question of pre-conditioned human behaviour could be resolved in this atmosphere of anger and retaliation. *The Battle of Shrivings* was triggered by the American trauma of Vietnam in the late sixties. Shaffer spent a lot of time in New York during that period. Though the play is set in England and not in the United States, it deals with rebellious youth, pacifism, and intensely touches a nerve in public soul-searching. The confusing feeling and the questions in his mind about finding the right answer (if there is any) made it a revealing and well-documented commentary in fact and fiction. As was said earlier on in the Introduction, in Mark and Gideon he had epitomized paradoxical ethnic and poignant social forces of the times that created them. For Shaffer, during those times, faith in human dignity and grace was in question. If that was lost, the foundations of our existence were to tumble down. Keeping hope and faith in such a time was proving almost impossible. The time, once again, asked for a brutal psychological evaluation of the human mind and intent. Deeply and emotionally invested in the political situation of the time, Shaffer admits to the contrary thoughts it brought to his mind:

The encounter between Mark and Gideon naturally sprang out of a division of feeling in myself, but it was charged with the violence of the angry city during its angriest times... (99)

The debate is held between two characters. Sir Gideon Petrie, a world-renowned pacifist philosopher, something of a secular saint, believes that by exercising self-control one can conquer violence and hatred. His expupil and now a bawdy bohemian, almost equally famous poet, Mark Askelon, believes that human beings can never change – they may shuffle the elements around and create the illusion of progress, but behind it, they remain unalterable.

Over and over I returned to that apparent truth that an absolute non-aggressive position seems unattainable by Man without tangible loss of warmth and cherishable humanity (99).

Thus, by setting the action of the play in his role player, Gideon's Cotswold house, Shrivings, Shaffer places three characters at the receiving end of the outcome of this battle of Shrivings – Gideon's American secretary Lois Neal, Mark's son David Askelon, and Gideon's unhappy wife, Enid Petrie. In the Middle Ages, Shrivings used to be a House of Retreat, moreover the name Shrivings suggests that it is a place of confession, penance, and absolution. Written in early 1969, *The Battle of Shrivings* premiered in London in early 1970. It was less theatrical than *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, but more argumentative. Produced by H.M. Tennent under Peter Halls's direction, *The Battle of Shrivings* did not attract favourable notices from the critics and the audiences, though the play was very special to Shaffer personally. It

proved to be Shaffer's first theatre failure. *The Sunday Times* found it "a copious flow of big words for small ideas" (Hobson quoted in Plunka 1988: 128); but the worst blow came from Benedict Nightingale, who deemed it "quite the worst play since *Tiny Alice*...solemn, affected, empty"(quoted in Plunka 1988: 128). It ran slightly less than two months and was never staged in New York.

Though shocked by his first major failure on stage, Shaffer admitted that the play took a bad fall "somewhere between domesticity and grandeur" (97). The "jubilant hostility" (97) it attracted from most critics deeply depressed him:

However, after the pain of dismissal finally abated, I came to acknowledge a certain justness in the verdict...It seemed to me, on reflection, that there was a danger in my work of theme dictating event, and that a strong impulse to compose rhetorical dialectic was beginning to freeze my characters into theoretical attitudes. (Preface 1982: xiv)

Shaffer, the compulsive revisionist that he is, took most of the criticism from the critics seriously and the following year he rewrote the whole play. To give the play "its quietus in [his] mind" (98), he altered the structure by eliminating the "domestic bickering" (98) by altogether removing the character of Enid Petrie, the pacifist's unhappy wife:

Thereby changing the quintet into a quartet. (98)

The pacifist became a divorcee. Shaffer did not provide the motives for his wife leaving him, which gave Mark one more subject to torment him. In

the absence of Enid Petrie, he focused Mark's attention on Lois Neal, Gideon's secretary and disciple. Thus, without altering the basic story, he enriched and sharpened the motivations of his characters. Shaffer admitted that the horror of the story had to be Gideon's lapse into violence:

An assault on a committed girl seemed to me in this situation even more appalling than one on an aggrieved wife. The fact that the girl was also an American clinched the matter for me. (99)

As for the extravagant rhetorical style, Shaffer did not intend to turn *The Battle of Shrivings* into Total Theatre like *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*:

...in this one I wanted the electricity to be sparked almost exclusively from the spoken words... my dissatisfaction with the piece, therefore, had nothing to do with rhetoric, which if anything I wanted to intensify; nor with its verbal duelling, which if anything I wanted to extend. (98)

Thus, he chose to key it up rather than play it down to make the play more purely *itself*. The rewritten version, *Shrivings*, published in 1974, definitely gave the play the subtlety Shaffer intended it to have. *Shrivings* presents stimulating ideas concerning the sociological and philosophical questions of human nature and identity in a society based on role-playing. Later Shaffer remarked that

I invested more sheer energy into this play than any other. It is really covered with the finger marks of struggle. (1982: xiii)

The dichotomy of victim-executioner, found so often in existential absurdist drama of the twentieth century (e.g. the plays of Sartre, Beckett,

Genet) forms the basis of the play. In Shaffer's plays, the protagonists and their alter egos tear at each other, hoping to find truth among a layer of lies; as the cross-examination continues, more of the pieces of the puzzle fit into place. Such battles of will always have varied ramifications. In the case of *Shrivings*, the outcome is humiliation on the part of Gideon and even Lois. As for Mark, he is a free spirited gambler with a loose sense of morality. Thus, once again we find a battle of wills between "a thorough-going atheist" and "a thorough-going rationalist" with the argument being about the improbability of human nature — whether it is possible to get the savage out of Man or not.

The focus remains on the way people (in this instance Lois and David) insist on conforming to established guidelines. The world of Shaffer's protagonist is filled with illusions, lies, and make belief. Sterility exists equally among the married and single adults. He depicts role players as lost souls, sexually sterile, and unable to develop contact or have meaningful relationships with others in any intimate way. They can only live in a secure world of roles, rules, and regulations. They cling to these artificialities for fear of losing everything. To achieve his goal, Shaffer creates a protagonist who is different from any other he has created before. Unlike Shaffer's other protagonists, who would like nothing better than to break out of their isolated shells, Gideon is trapped by years of role-playing, which have made it almost impossible for him to alter his staid existence. Gideon is happy in his role that he has created for himself. It actually helps him maintain his secure existence. He is an unconscious prisoner of his role, but consciously

he has never felt it cumbersome for his soul. Still he cannot adjust to change. Unlike Pizarro, Dysart, or Salieri, he does not feel the urge to free himself from dependence on what others think about him. His Alter Ego, Mark Askelon, has a sense of identity and freedom that Gideon does not possess but admires and unconsciously longs for. However, he would not give up his role for that either.

In *Shrivings*, Shaffer once again gives us as chilly and enigmatic a hero as he did in Pizarro in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. As a typical Shafferian primitive, Mark is a self-made man, true to his own instincts and intuitions, with a mind of his own. He is a sort of eccentric genius, who does not like to keep much contact with mediocrities. He lives alone as an eccentric social isolate in a world all his own. He overlooks the inhabitants from a height, yet does not feel compelled to interact with the mediocrities around him. Assuming a godlike role in *Shrivings*, Mark is all seeing, all knowing, omnipotent, and he wants to administer justice, no matter how cruel it is. He refuses to be judged by anyone but himself. He behaves as if he had come down from his lofty world to provide amnesty for the populace's shortcomings, as they are incapable of solving their problems and then retreat to his own world. But his world does not give him unfettered freedom. It is full of torture as well. While no one can excuse his amateur enlightenment, he himself cannot endure it as well. Unlike Pizarro who is aware of his shortcomings and is capable of transcending them with the proper assistance, Mark is unable to do so even when he is aware of his weaknesses.

The destruction of Pizarro and Atahualpa is tragic in the Aristotelian sense; *Shrivings* is different. The roles of both the protagonist and the alter ego are unlike any other we will discuss in this thesis. Between Mark and Gideon, it is difficult sometimes to assign the role of the protagonist, as none is corrupt enough. Yet, this provides us with the proof that Shaffer is interested in human psychology, which is another area of interest among twentieth century dramatists.

Another aspect that sets *Shrivings* apart from the rest of Shaffer's work is the characterisation of the protagonist and the alter ego. Though Gideon is the protagonist and Mark is the alter ego, Mark constantly assumes the role of the protagonist, especially when David is at the center of Gideon's attention. Though he answers to no one but himself, his own sense of guilt controls him. He is a prisoner of his own conscience. He has a strong sense of identity, but he is aware of the negative hold it has on him. The instances where Mark switches to the role of protagonist show David as the one who possesses what his father lacks. Unlike his son, Mark is more a destroyer than a creator. This vulnerability of his makes it difficult for the audience/reader to dislike him. Thus, by giving Mark this character trait, Shaffer saves him from the utter disapproval of the audience. David's gesture of forgiveness and absolution towards the end of the play highlights Mark's humanity. Even though Mark has spun an emotional web around all of them, his vulnerability gives him the grand stature of the primitive alter ego Shaffer intended him to assume, along with the cruel realist traits of his character. Shaffer personally believes in admitting to who one is. The

acceptance of one's shortcomings matters a lot to him. That is why, this time he has created an Alter Ego who is very much aware of his own weaknesses and in his prophetic role wants others to admit their faults too. Like Cristoforou in *The Public Eye*, Mark engages in psychological warfare with a threatening alter ego, as he is the eccentric who unmasks and humbles the protagonist.

In order to explore the depths of human nature's improvability, Shaffer has divided the play into three Acts. The division is done in a biblical way paralleling Christ's crucifixion on Friday and resurrection on Sunday. The action, which takes place over a weekend, is divided into three Acts: Act I covers Friday evening and night; Act II covers Saturday night and Sunday morning; Act III sums up the Sunday night.

The pattern of the play has uncanny similarities with the events of the crucifixion in the Bible. Mark strips Gideon of his role, and bows in front of Gideon on his throne of reason to "Hail the king of reason" as the mocking soldiers hailed Jesus "king of Jews". By belittling him, he figuratively spits on Gideon as Jesus was "spat on". As for Jesus' robe changing, here it will be his philosophy and role that will be stripped off him, leaving him ultimately crucified with words. While he is toasting the House of Shrivings with bad wine, Mark's remark to Gideon that "after you all is vinegar"(116) is yet another reference to the crucifixion. It has its origin in Christ's being given sour wine as a last drink. The audience is left

in utter shock, as here this self proclaimed Jesus, who has claimed to be able to save others including Mark, cannot save himself.²⁰

Gideon's soliloquies in Act III – the aftermath – are like the final cry of dereliction from Jesus, reflecting the burden of humanity's sin, complete identification with sinners, and real abandonment by his father; in this instance, Gideon's philosophy (i.e. his pacifist ideology) is his final cry of dereliction. Gideon, in his *human worth* (in the biblical sense) is incapable of saving himself. As the god of *Shrivings*, he has created Lois and David in his own image. His loss of self means they lose their souls too. Unlike *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Shrivings* is another kind of theatre experiment full of extended monologue. This is yet another example of the Brechtian style, where the audience is encouraged to think and make choices through a dialectic that presents two very distinct sides of the argument. Shaffer believes the goal of theatre is to incite the imagination and fuel our inner drives, instincts and archetypes, probing the inner recesses of the mind.²¹ To him what is inside a head is more important than external appearances. However, this time, unlike Brecht, he does not use a narrator to interpret the play or serve as a distancing device. While all the rest of the plays under discussion have a narrator to take us through the story, *Shrivings* involves

²⁰ The Bible references are taken from Matthew 27:46 describing the events of before and after the crucifixion.

²¹ Shaffer has maintained this more than once in different interviews. See Marriott (1958: 8) and Gelatt (1984: 52) for details.

the audience directly in the action. The audience are given free reign to weigh everything for themselves without any help from a narrator. To produce reaction in order to carry on with the debate, this time the audience have the reactions of Gideon's two followers, David and Lois. However, the balance of power over them is preserved through an unbiased admiration of Lois for Mark on one hand and David's sceptical apprehensive feelings towards his father's visit. Through this balance, Shaffer creates a sense of simultaneous rivalry and bonding between Mark and Gideon under the roof of Shrivings. In order to provide clarifying commentary on the plot and to take it further, instead of a narrator, Shaffer uses Mark's confessions in front of his shrine and Gideon's final soliloquies. This device not only controls the advent of events in plot and theme but also helps moving back and forth in action.

Unlike Artaud who would have gone for "total theatre" full of mime, mask, and ritual, Shaffer offers one thing that Artaud would not use – charm of language. Beauty is another notion Shaffer entertains that Artaud would never mention. Shaffer has always been criticised for an overpowering devotion to his own words. He reacts to those who accuse him of merely expressing beautiful language, and calls them "limited mind[s]":

Such a limited mind cannot receive visceral experience, is blind to gesture, is deeply irritated by the sight of an audience being moved by a dramatic experience... (Buckley 1975: 38)

Other than the pagan rites in the play that are essentially Artaudian, in *Shrivings*, through the character of Mark, Shaffer also added a few Artaudian elements pertaining to Theatre of Cruelty. For Artaud, cruelty signified “rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determination” (Plunka 1988: 43). He believed:

It is a mistake to give the word ‘cruelty’ a meaning of merciless bloodshed and disinterested, gratuitous pursuit of physical suffering... In the practice of cruelty there is a kind of higher determinism, to which the executioner-tormentor himself is subjected and which he must be *determined* to endure when the time comes. Cruelty is above all lucid, a kind of rigid control and submission to necessity. (Plunka 1988: 43)

This describes Shaffer’s portrayal of Mark’s character as well as the intentions with which he sets foot in *Shrivings*. Thus, though the play depends heavily on energy sparked by words, it still contains a few Artaudian ideas.

On an iconographic level, it is more a talk-and-think piece than a theatrical spectacle. The game of apples is the only thing that could be called theatrical in *Shrivings*.

Unlike *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, where Pizarro and Atahualpa’s relationship evolves on the basis of similarities in their lives, in *Shrivings* a relationship already exists between the protagonist and the alter ego, and

will be debased by Mark during the course of the play. As happens in the case of Atahualpa and Pizarro, Gideon from the beginning describes Mark as his equal if not superior. Here rests the plight of the human condition: the furious tension between *what might be* and *what really is*. Such characterization, and development of themes through it, makes *Shrivings* a monumental closet drama that is immensely clever in its subject matter and extremely well written. The only problem it provides is the lack of the theatrical content Shaffer's critics and audience had become used to in the past. The critics pounced on the play for its wordiness and claimed that it was yet another failed attempt of Shaffer's at creating literary content. Ronald Hayman, who had found *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* "seriously overrated", labelled *Shrivings* as "hardly less ambitious" despite it being naturalistic in content. He was of the view that in *The Battle of Shrivings* Shaffer once again "fail[ed] to fuse the action and debate, imposing a schematic development on both protagonists" (Hayman 1970: 62). For him if *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* was "tumbling into cliché", it was quite reckless on part of Shaffer "to commit himself to writing dialogue for two intellectuals of this calibre" (Hayman 1970: 62); the intellectuals representing the two Weltanschauungs in terms of conflict — a saint-like pacifist philosopher modelled on Bertrand Russell, and an anti-liberal, anti-traditional poet. Smith (1982: 461-62) found *The Battle of Shrivings* "...more a public soul-searching than a dramatized narrative" leaving the audience "merely disturbed, confused, and disheartened". *The Battle of Shrivings* left John Simon "hungry and disappointed" (1974: 118). John Spurling declared *The Battle of Shrivings* to be "an artistic disaster", which in its rewritten

version “can now perhaps be seen as Shaffer’s *adieu* to unmodified naturalism” (1976: 308).

However, the somewhat “unanimous scorn” (Dean 1978: 297) of the critics towards *Sbrivings* (then *The Battle of Sbrivings*) should not be taken as gratuitous sensationalism or as a sign of creative poverty. Shaffer has actually, made a good case for the violence in the play with the help of the accelerating violence existing in the society of the late sixties and the early seventies. The shock value is an essential stratagem to awaken an audience, getting increasingly hard to shock.

Shaffer’s strength as a dramatist begins, of course, with the unique articulacy of his central characters, their resort to insolence as part of their eloquence. Shaffer has always been keen to explore the desolation and defeats of such characters. It has already been mentioned that Shaffer’s work demonstrates that human beings must suffer and do evil, as the cosmos does not give them any choice. This is how nature (and creation itself) works. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* proved honour, trust and honesty to be just words. This time more issues are added to the list. “Administering to pain and seeking to lighten the inevitable destruction” (Lounsberry 1991: 85) gives a special inner sense of harmony to the characters.

Compared with the rest of the plays under discussion, this play is not usual as far as conflict is concerned. All the rest show conflict in the dialectic between sanctioned, normative behaviour and a sense of individual

consciousness as opposed to a formally channelled life style. In this case, pacifist ideology replaces normative behaviour. The conflict develops into a plea between logic and instinct for the individual to follow his own values, free from the advice and perceptions of others. Shaffer's intent is to present the "sickness" and frenzy of the period. It is not a desire to purge and heal, but to encourage facing this frenzy. The conflict, though it centers on the two men, is also a conflict between two ways of life and thought. The play is a dramatization of a profound human relationship. It is a dexterous unweaving of a web of hypocrisy. Rewriting the play Shaffer has reshaped the content into a clearer expression of his concept. Shaffer's long cherished motto "each man kills the thing he loves" is transformed into "the object of one's greatest affection can destroy the worshipper". Mark, whom Gideon worships like a god, destroys his worshipper. If *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* carried the theme of the ability to believe, *Shrivings* is an attempt to ponder the ability to challenge. The play deals with philosophical inquiry about basic human nature on one level and rebellion of children against their parents on the other. It is an attempt to prove that as human beings we are the Crown of Creation. Here scepticism is not the realm of the Devil but that of a Man, exalting his stature as the Crown of Creation, and differentiating him from animals. The lives of the characters are determined by the introduction of an intruder into their little world. This aspect of the play gives us a comparison with *Five Fingers Exercise*, where the Harringtons are forever changed after Walter settles in with them. The only difference is that Mark destroys everyone including the sanctuary they have built for themselves.

On the thematic level, Shaffer paints an alarming picture of a world in which the social order, in its political and economic realities, its establishment assumptions and mores, almost inevitably destroys what is alive and humane in people. People cannot find the strength or wisdom necessary to remake this order so that it might encourage what is best in human potential or even allow what is natural and healthy. Those within the system lose their souls and their goods, but so do the rebellious deviants. According to Shaffer, you cannot beat this life. Putting up a good fight is the closest human beings can come to being constructive. Fascinated with the impulse towards faith, for Shaffer,

... the adversary of the man of faith is not a cosmic void, or universal chaos; it is rationality. For Shaffer, it is the cold, clinical, empirical man without faith who has created an orderly, materialistic world that has robbed man of those irrational qualities that can make life an intense experience. Shaffer is not as concerned with the eternal design as he is with the individual who has become a diminished thing (Clum 1978: 427).

In *Shrivings*, Shaffer proves that logic, which originally seems to liberate an individual, ultimately enslaves. Administering the definitive defeat to reason, in *Shrivings* he unmasks rationalism. *Shrivings* was labelled the Cathedral of Humanism. Through a debate, Shaffer proves that any philosophy is mere words and thoughts until we put it to the test. In this instance, rational pacifism, when put to test, proves false. In order to understand the complexity of the situation, a deeper analysis of the play

might help one see Shaffer's perspective concerning the play. The basic conflict between the two Weltanschauungs works out in terms of a conflict between two men. The tension between the two holds until a Battle is declared. The prim, chaste, humanist philosophy of Sir Gideon is anathema to Mark. He declares war upon it over a weekend spent in Gideon's pacifist, vegetarian home. If Gideon can keep his composure during the weekend and consistently turn the other cheek, then Mark will convert to humanism. He is aware of the fact that pacifist principles prevent Gideon from violence of any kind, and he makes it clear to him that he will use it as ammunition to prove his point. However, the ending leaves us shocked as we see the philosopher losing his faith in the humanism while the poet, who comes out victorious on the outside, ends up as a guilty convert to the beliefs of his victim.

In *Five Finger Exercise*, Shaffer created the "theatrical crucible in which the nuclear British family ... is forced, in the manner of Henrik Ibsen, to face the truth about itself" (Smith 1982: 453). *Shrivings* proves to be another kind of quartet, where ideology and philosophy are supposed to provide the thumb-hold to keep it together. Mark's theatrical crucible forces the odd family to face the truth about itself. The harrowing ordeal pulverizes all pretensions to the devotion and closeness that have overwhelmed the inhabitants of the house before Mark's arrival. In both the cases of *Five Finger Exercise* and *Shrivings* the outsider, in an attempt to solve personal problems, creates instead a situation which is too difficult for the insiders to cope with. In the Middle Ages, *Shrivings* was a House of Retreat. Here,

in the play, Shrivings is the Cotswold house of Sir Gideon Petrie, a philosopher and President of the World League of Peace. Shaffer describes the atmosphere of Shrivings as full of “tranquility and dedication” (103). The missing subtext of bitterness and frustration enters *Shrivings* in the form and person of the most eagerly awaited guest, Mark Askelon. Nothing will ever be the same from then on. The world of Shrivings will have to reorient its line of force from the moment this fierce and fascinating person sets foot on the premises.

Shaffer makes sure that the reader realizes the significant role Shrivings, as a house, has to play to prove his point. The stress this House of Shrivings puts on the individuals is predictable. Mark is the first uninhibited individual who has entered Shrivings and refuses to go for predictability. He, from the very start, finds it amusingly shallow and trite. Though overpowered by destructive impulses and behaviour, he decides to break the controlled inhibitions of the inhabitants.²² Secretly he wants to be saved from his own demons. He desperately wants to have something to believe in and hold onto.

²² We must remember here, that Mark is not after the truth, but his interpretation of the truth. He wants them to face the realities of life as he sees them. In so doing, he is pleading for his own futile existence.

In the first scene of Act: I, Shaffer provides a strong basis for the action that is to come. The characters are spokesmen for their beliefs, but Mark is the only vital personality. Unlike him, Lois and Gideon live in a world full of lies and make-belief. David is the only who, on some level, chooses to be a part of the world of Shrivings. Another characteristic in the play is the character Shaffer gives to the House of Shrivings, which serves as a link to keep all these characters together. While the characters remain spokesmen of their beliefs (or lack of belief), Shrivings stands as a vital structure bearing the contrived sufferings of its inhabitants.

The commencement of the play introduces us to the remaining two characters of the quartet, Lois and David, two disciples of Sir Gideon. David Askelon, a nineteen year old youth and son of Mark Askelon, is a drop out from two schools and Cambridge University over the past five years; and Lois Neal, a twenty-five year old American is Gideon's secretary. The characterization here again differs from that of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. The character of Lois Neal is developed with qualities of being both *type* and *individual*. Her being American gives her character the individualistic traits. She is "tidy, efficient, and cheerful" (105). Given to the continuous use of clichés, she seems to the audience to be a believer, yearning to soak up anything to find a firm foothold. Lois, as a highly sophisticated and civilized individual, learns vital lessons in life's most liberated state through Mark's coarse and barbaric person.

In contrast to her character is David, who is more conscious than Lois is and challenges set behaviour with common sense. He has no sense of belonging. He is also an outcast, first by origin as a Jew (as Mark sees it), and then by the paternal exile imposed on him by his father since the age of thirteen. For David, Shrivings is the first place that has given him a sense of belonging. During his conversations with Gideon and Lois, one senses a mild hostility towards his father along with a desire to be accepted, appreciated, and admired by him. Here again, Shaffer has given us a portrait of a son and an absent father. David is apprehensive of the reasons why Mark is coming to Shrivings. He is the only one who feels the impending danger approaching the house and inhabitants of Shrivings. Mark, who has never accepted an award, must have an ulterior motive as far as he is concerned and David voices his doubts clearly when he says, "Why does he come now?" (110). It could not be "need", as he knows that Mark Askelon does not need anyone.²³ Though he is not very verbose, he senses doom. He understands and knows more than he lets on to others.

The news of the arrival of another derelict son, Mark Askelon to receive an award "to mark the appearance of his *Collected Poems...*" (106) along with

²³ Later on, in Act II, Mark corroborates David's observation that his father is selfish and self orientated, when he tells Gideon that "I do not require anything to live for!" (153); and on another occasion earlier on he snubs Lois by saying "...do you imagine I live my life to be approved by you" (149)

Gideon, leaves Lois ecstatic to be finally able to meet “The great Mark Askelon!” (106).

Described as “a gentle and noble” (107) man of over sixty, our role-player, Sir Gideon Petrie’s first impression shows clarity, courtesy, and a gaiety of spirit.

There is about him a sort of sparkling serenity: a delicate earnestness, through which one glimpses a deep and passionate involvement. (107)

From the moment he appears before us, we see him act with the extreme graciousness of a sovereign when he tells Lois that he would not deny anything to anybody on the day Mark Askelon first comes to Shrivings. The statement is ironic, as the house will refuse all guests over this particular weekend for the first time in its history. He has only the highest praise for Mark. For Gideon, he is “the Sage of Corfu, ... a Roman pugilist gone to seed”(108), which tells us that all is not right with him. His litany continues as he sings praises to Mark:

He was always a mountain! A sacred mountain, of course. Everybody came from miles to sit around the foot hills and listen! (108)

Gideon, as David so rightly puts it, is under Mark’s spell (108). Mark means the world to Gideon. That is why, when Gideon says, “he moves through the Mediterranean as if he owned it” (109), we are sure that Mark owns Gideon, if not the world. He has a hold on the Old Man, which is unbreakable. Mark, portrayed as a middle-aged man in a crisis of faith, is

going through profound dissatisfaction with his culture and his very existence. Contact with Corfu, a primitive and vital culture, exacerbates this crisis of faith and fuels his need for belief. Mark is torn between atheism and primitive worship, a clash of ideas, which has developed into a deep internal conflict. Whatever he is going through also has something to do with his wife, Giulia's death. Shaffer introduces him to us, first as a "*voice...calling wooingly*" and then as a man:

He is the relic of an enormous man. A mass of hair falls from his massive head; eyes stare from an eroded face. He wears a Greek shepherd's cloak with a hood. (111)

He possesses a voice that is "still powerful"(111). Later on, we will see David pressing the green apple in order to silence *the voice*. When asked about his identity, he answers Lois with a flourish

A shepherd, as my cloak proclaims. I suspect permanently without a flock. (111)

David is the only one who sees the wolf hiding inside the cloak. Shaffer, in *Shrivings*, has created a formidable combination in Mark: a blocked poet and a walking disaster on two legs, filled with the pollen of violence that was bred in those times. The body of the play is essentially a battle of wits between the Apollonian and Dionysian; the man of philosophy trying to use his philosophy to cure the uninhibited fury of youth. Yet, the Dionysian side of Mark makes it lacking in self-control. The House of Shrivings, here, stands for "order and restraint" (Apollonian) and Mark brings "violence of instinct" (Dionysian) into it. Shrivings asks for a specific behaviour equivalent to that of what society refers to as

“Approved”. It imposes that behaviour acquired through centuries of hiding from psychological self-realization. Encapsulating his goal is the direct communication between the primitive (Mark) and the role-player (Gideon). Once again, standard critical methods cannot be applied to *Shrivings*.

The theme of trust and betrayal that was presented in the relationship between Young Martin and Pizarro in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, works on a different level in *Shrivings* as well. Here, it is expanded, affecting all three inhabitants of the House of Peace along with the one who has betrayed them. Mark is a psychological misfit. Unlike Pizarro, who was aware of his shortcomings and was capable of transcending them with the proper assistance, Mark is unable to do so even when he is aware of his weaknesses.

Role-playing often leads to the control of others in order for the individual to maintain his secure existence. Therefore, in the case of Gideon, his role as the pacifist controls the lives of those around him. His followers are role players as well. Lois, in her role of supervisor, finds a family; and David in his role as a carpenter, in turn gets the sense of belonging in the House of Shrivings as well as a paternal figure in Gideon. His followers, in this case Lois and David, also see him a certain way, and assign it a role in their personal drama.

From the moment Mark sets foot on the threshold of Shrivings, Lois unwittingly starts giving him information about the place and its inhabitants. She has no idea of the state of mind Mark is in, and unknowingly provides him with enough ammunition to shoot a cannon. She is unaware of the fact that in the process, she is revealing the shallowness and hypocrisy of the ideology on which the House of Shrivings is standing. She is also unaware that, in her blind faith in Gideon and his philosophy, she is as much a part of the mirage as Gideon is. The information she provides is contradictory to the beliefs they profess to hold. A good example would be her information to Mark that “we have no maids at Shrivings” as Gideon disapproves of servants and believes in everyone doing their own work. However, she is unaware that, by doing the kitchen and household along with her secretary’s job, she is precisely doing what they (or rather Gideon) believe to be wrong. She readily offers to do Mark’s room for him during his stay at Shrivings, which he wittily calls a “Commune for Transients” (112). Though they try not to turn away anyone who genuinely needs a place to sleep, nobody will be entertained the whole weekend, while Mark is there. Though Mark mocks her job of “supervising” the house, his remark, “where did he (Gideon) find you?” (112), is more a statement of wonder than a question. To him, Lois Neal appears to be more a Lois “Kneel” at the house of Shrivings.

David rightly calls her a “Disciple” in the second Act. Here, when it comes to Gideon, she worships the ground Gideon walks upon. For her Gideon is a “saint”. Mark is extraordinarily perceptive and quick witted about her.

Mark immediately notices the apprehensiveness in Lois and is aware that she can only mimic Gideon's thoughts as she herself is without too many thoughts of her own. Therefore, he plays along and asks her to define sainthood.

Mark: What's a saint?

Lois: A man who doesn't know what it is to reject people.

Mark: And that's Gideon?

Lois: He has no hostility left in him for anyone in the world.

Mark: Do you really believe that?

Lois: Absolutely. He's proved it can be done (113)

And all Mark has to say in answer is

You have American eyes. (113)

This highly ironic remark says more about Lois than anything else in the play. He beautifully refers to the impressionable side of Lois, comparing it to her outward appearance.

The setting of the first face-to-face meeting between Gideon and Mark is highly symbolic. Gideon, standing down at the foot of stairs, calls Mark, while Mark

Looks down the stairs, and sees Gideon. *He descends.* [Emphasis my own] (114)

In a godlike manner, he comes down to meet the "sagging Jesus" (126) of Shrivings. He is the envy of the saint — in his godlike stature. They embrace warmly. There is a genuine tenderness between them as they greet each other. Soon, Mark's *other*, his dark self, possesses him.

Gideon introduces Lois as the “conscience” of Shrivings. Mark’s vehemently vulgar answer gives away his intentions towards Lois,

I sensed it right away. My moral hazel twig pointed straight at her!

(114)

The “House of Retreat” (115) Gideon so willingly wants to offer Mark “with all its tradition of Peace”(110), stands for “confession and penance” for Mark; as he wisely puts it: “Is that not what Shrivings mean?” (115). Mark is going to make sure that the house lives up to the idea it stands for. “A thorough-going rationalist” (Gideon) offers the “thorough-going atheist” (Mark) the house of Shrivings, hoping it will be appropriate for him (115). Mark accepts it with his remark that Gideon “has exorcised its spirit not a little” ((115). This direct remark is indirectly targeted at Mark himself. That is why he hints that it is unwise on the part of Gideon to expose Shrivings to his malign influence.

Mark Askelon, the “Sage of Corfu” (associated with a primitive culture like Pizarro) arrives at Shrivings bearing an emblematic gift, an ancient Greek libation cup from the sixth century. It originally was used “to toast the Gods”, but in this instance, “household gods cherish the ordinary” (115). At Shrivings, Gideon’s spirit is “the last of the wine. After you all is vinegar!”(115-116). Mark makes fun of Gideon’s austere life in an elaborate way from the moment he sets foot there. Gideon who is clueless about what has been said, as usual takes it as the litany of praises he is used to and says,

I can always rely on you to make a delicious ceremony out of everything! (116)

With Mark's toast, David enters and completes the toast for Gideon. This is something Mark has not expected. During the course of the whole play, this is actually the only time we see Mark truly taken aback and at a loss for words. The news of David quitting yet another school leaves him utterly speechless. David's remark that if he had not given Cambridge up "it would have given me up..." (117), is directed towards his father who has thrown him out of his life. Gideon informs him of his son's excellent carpentry skills and tells him that David has made all the furniture in that room. Impressed, though still in a state of shock, he manages to comment (117)

It's a noble profession, carpentry. *The only one with an indisputable saint!*
[Emphasis my own](117)

This remark, through its implied comparison of David to Jesus, also suggests the importance of David's character in the play. His next question whether David has brought something for him gives the reader a slight suspicion that Mark wants some recognition from his son. However, he is thoroughly disappointed to find that the object, a throne, is for Gideon. "A true Cathedral needs a *Cathedra!*" (118) follows with another bitter remark "the chair of Paternal Wisdom... Such objects have to be earned, eh, David?" (118) betrays the jealous side of Mark's personality. It also indicates the painful inability of father and son to reach each other despite their desperate need to do so. Mark hails Gideon on the throne as "First

Pope of Reason!", and when Lois praises Gideon on the throne, Mark's "exactly in place!" (119) becomes ironic mockery.

Mark's observation of the relationship between Gideon and David, their mutual laughter and a kind of joy along with a sense of being a father and son, infuriates him. From the moment he observes it, he wants to destroy the relationship. He makes no secret of his intentions for the House of Shrivings; he will destroy Gideon and what he stands for along with Lois. To achieve this goal, the destruction of his own son means little to him.

According to Shaffer, "*Shrivings* has always been an American play" (99). He has "most strongly associate[ed] it with sojourns in New York City in 1968 and 1969" (99). It was his obsession with morality framed in bleak metaphysical terms that turned into *The Battle of Shrivings*.

...When streets were choked with raging protesters against Vietnam War, newspapers were filled with the killings at Kent State University, and there drifted through our midst the fantastic army of Flower People...(99)

That time of tumultuous uprising raised questions in Shaffer's mind and he became obsessed with discerning mankind's true metaphysical status. He tried to probe their perspective on the universe for answers to philosophical puzzles concerning the two types of *right* and *wrong*.

Bearing in mind these ideas about two types of right, Shaffer broached the question of peaceful protest next. This lays the foundations of the play and helps the first scene achieve its purpose. Mark is not a believer in pacifism; as he tells Lois

Peaceful protest is absolutely Out,... Especially in your fair country.
(119)

Gideon answers for Lois that she left her country because of the violent stance of her country “until there’s another real peace movement, and not just Young Violence joining with old.” (119) The mention of Flower Children by Gideon is snubbed by Mark’s answer

If those daffodils could speak, ...They’d open their yellow mouths and yell ‘Violence! Violence! At the top of their stalks’ (120)

Mark’s idea of *violence* is *effort* for Lois. That is why, when Lois excitedly invites Mark to join them in their vigil to ban all weapons, Mark seriously enters the debate. He is of the view that one can use anything as a weapon, including penknives and even tongues:

Should we have them all cut out (120).

When a confused Lois blurts out that at Shrivings, they believe it to be wrong to fight in any circumstances. Mark’s example of Hitler leaves her without an answer. He has been looking for this loophole. He is of the view that “the evil you don’t fight, you enlarge”(121) while Gideon debates that “evil you do fight you enlarge” (121).

Mark uses the example of a ruffian with a pistol here to prove his point. He believes that violence is sometimes necessary to avoid violence. Gideon's refusal to answer violence with violence, even if a ruffian with a gun endangers the lives of his disciples, is not acceptable to Mark.

The extremity of pacifism in the face of violence is not normal, thus Gideon and his followers must lose their very meaningful, yet impractical sense of belief they follow so religiously, as far as Mark's point of view is concerned. *Shrivings* presents ideology vs. people, and shows how their belief or faith in it makes them act. Yet, when he gets the response of dying for ones ideals or letting someone kill the object of ones affection, all he can say is "Touching loyalty you have for each other at Shrivings!" (121). His response is harsh but it reminds us of Belinda's comment in *The Public Eye*:

You've got to be faithful to all sorts of people. You can't give everything to just one. Just one can't use everything. (1962b: 24)

Lois's "Shrivings is the loyalty!" (121) will soon be put to test. When Mark asks for David's response and he answers he would rather have Lois alive than a ruffian, Mark gets the information that his son has feelings for Lois. Again, his darker side is gathering all the information to bring Shrivings down. He intensely observes that Lois is not the least bit interested in David, yet she soaks up the compliments he gives her without a doubt. Mark mocks her ideals when he says that, though he would want to save her, he would rather let her die "out of deference to your principles" (122).

Mark, who appears to be a trickster and a master manipulator, suddenly shows his tormented side. For him, principles and ideals are nothing more than empty words when it comes to real experience. Only when one confronts an actual situation, does one face the reality of things. Mark sees bitter rectitude towards the poetic confusions of life as emotional indulgence. For him, being truly alive is synonymous with suffering an intensity of experience which frequently borders on the abnormal and which is repeatedly glamorised as “passion”.

For the first time, he openly confronts Gideon, asking him, “have you seen the Ruffian at work?”(122). He narrates the horrific outcome of a student protest on “a day in April” (123) in Wall Street, Manhattan, where the right-wing elders decided to respond to the youngsters.

Their protest: their statement of human dignity! (123)

Starting with beating up the children to a pulp, he then saw them scalp one, while policemen stood doing nothing. “He [the student] was moaning in unspeakable pain” (123) and yet dropping what blood he could into a drain. The cruellest month of April was pouring clouds of pollen, setting over his head “like dandruff”. The boy raised his head, looking at him standing in the window with a dry martini, and Mark “raised my glass” (123). When followers of pacifism are eager to know of his response, Mark asks them if they have any idea how much force one needs to accomplish the task of tearing a lump of hair out of a human scalp. He walks out with as if he

could still see it, and could not bear it. He did nothing for the boy, as “I wanted another drink” (124).

The end of the scene shows us Mark in front of an effigy of his dead wife in a black wooden box.

The whole shrine is coloured in the gay, crude manner of *peasant work* from Southern Italy. [Emphasis my own] (124-25)

Inside the door are “bright little gilded saints”. He kneels to it reverently and prays (to his dead wife) *Santa Giulia Paralytia!* (125)

By your murdered limbs, keep them all out of harm from me.” (124)

His actions below (downstairs) countervail his prayers in private to his dead wife above (upstairs in his room). His need of forgiveness as well as for belief is seen throughout the action of the play, in his confessional monologues to the effigy of his wife — his shrine. He always returns to his shrine, asking for forgiveness. According to Dean:

On the verge of total renunciation of Gideon’s faith in humanity and his own atheism, with a subsequent lapse ‘into the arms of Mother Church’, Mark has come to Shrivings specifically to be shriven. (Dean 1978: 301)

At one point, he even cries out to Gideon to save him. His compulsive alcoholic stance is to stimulate his confession.

Gideon cannot begin to guess the motive Mark has behind everything. Equally intrinsic to his personality is the role of father. The fierce battle

also starts for David's affection and approval, as Mark is jealous of the effect Gideon has on his unwanted son. David's affection for Gideon makes the savagery of Mark's attack on Gideon even more predictable and severe than it already is. He is driven to destroy Gideon and what the house of Shrivings stands for. Unlike Pizarro, Mark has a choice, but his dilemma is his inability to stop himself from harming the people he cares about. Thus, one man, reckless of life, destroys an entire philosophy. Mark, a ghost separated from the world around him, feels like a foreigner, an outsider with no place to call home

We are not Place People, David and I. My father...bequeathed me no home on earth: only envy of home in others.²⁴ (134)

Mark's analyses of his origin is more profoundly a study of homelessness — the homelessness of human beings in a world where society requires conformity to roles that often go against the grain of sensitive human creatures who are inadequately adaptive. From Clive “the spaniel Harrington” “slave Boy” (1976a: 38) to “Russo–Jewish–English–Neapolitan! Whelped in one island, weaned in another” “mongrel” (134) that David is, Shaffer presents children who are displaced and are victims from their birth. For Shaffer, to be fully human, one needs to suffer the pain of incompleteness with intensity. Mark, as the Alter Ego understands this. He has accepted his inherited pain as significant and has made peace

²⁴ Later on, he admits to Lois “I was never quite alive...I have never lived Now. And that ‘Never’ makes crueller murderers, even than Christ or Country”. (173)

with it. David on the other hand wants to escape and become invisible. David's desire of invisibility echoes Shaffer's own revealing statement in an interview where he said:

When I was younger, I often was invaded by the feeling of invisibility: of having no definite outline to myself and others. There seemed to be so many people inside me, all of them contradictory. I could not imagine the shape which could contain them all, and so assumed that there was none. (Buckley 1975: 38)

Understanding the demands of a modern and intelligent audience, Shaffer once again shows that belief in ideological truth might be a relative term instead of being absolute, as there are no absolutes in real life. We see Mark explain to Gideon:

Do you know how long it took me to fall finally from your faith? The time it takes my vomit to slide down a wall. (138)

Shaffer, in the person of Mark precisely labels Gideon's philosophy as nothing more than adolescent idealism of an adolescent idealist, who has never faced the realities of life. Mark's one experience of human brutality (on the outside) and his own inner brutality, in the end, taint the clean air of Shrivings. In the aftermath, the pollen of Mark's ideas floods Gideon. Gideon's gummy, unfocussed "prosaic eyes" open to harsh realities, making it impossible for Gideon to breathe, let alone think. The question that arises is not if Gideon's belief is an absolute truth. What matters is that

his faith and the faith of others in him have sustained him through his life and made reality bearable or even worth living.

Mark and David are both creators of the beautiful. Mark creates in words and David in wood. Their crafts are a part of their being. Mark's true worship is poetry, which even beats atheism "the moment [he] felt one poem as an act of worship". When it comes to the relationship between father and son, the battle of wills turns into a battle of art— blocked artist vs. the creative artist. His own son threatens to target his destruction as the supposed authentic artist. Here, Shaffer has expanded the theme from religion to modern society and art; he has sublimated his style to the level of serious philosophical debate.

Just like Pizarro's "frostbitten" soul for which "the savor of the salt has been lost" turning him into a man "without joy"; Mark is living the same existence. He is also aware that true worship demands a lot from a person. He says:

...when I realized how worship demands the present -- then hell began. I was no longer a Revolutionary Poet. I was a self-ordained priest without a faith. (173)

Mark's understanding of worship makes him see that without it, his life is nothing more than a hollow, abysmal existence. Gideon becomes an object of his envy because he has created an intensity and this self-created

intensity angers the joyless existence of Mark. We have already mentioned Shaffer's belief (Jones 1987: 152):

...I just feel in myself that there is a constant debate going on between the *violence of instinct* on the one hand and the desire in my mind for *order and restraint*. [emphasis my own]

Like Jungian individuals, Mark cannot compel himself to believe. Mark, the bitter, cynical, and envious god visiting Shrivings will not trivialize the immensity of his experience as a human being. Like Shaffer, he believes that doing that would be a betrayal of the Sole Interpretation of human existence and experience. The horrors of the world all around him make his point of view indispensable. For Shaffer also, most human activities do not seem to give a point to evolution.

As a part of his own joylessness, Mark expresses a revulsion towards the natural cycles of life and death in the form of pollen.

...dead spring – round, dead, unalterable spring, with its meaningless glints of hope!(136)

Here, the cloud of pollen, separating Mark from the boy, whose hair has been ripped out of his skull in a protest march, symbolises the fecundity of nature's cycle. Mark describes the effect of that vision of disgust at the renewal of life:

He sat there... looking up at me, through that curtain of pollen. We lasted forever. I mean, five minutes. Five centuries in another sense,

until I saw him transformed to an earlier time, five hundred years at least, when Wall Street was just granite ledge padded by Redskin feet, and he another human sack, holding its scalped head... Five hundred years and no change. Five thousand years and still the identical horror. The tearers and the torn. The orderers. The penalisers. The Joyless, returning and returning like the spring -- Unalterable... (136)

Mark's belief in the Unalterable is coupled with loss of faith in the goodness of man. Mark not only sees the student, but he also perceives the eternal spiral of human brutality, aggression, and violence in that moment. This sense of the Unalterable has led Mark to experience the joylessness of life so intensely that he "[has] to make others know" (138); he feels obliged to spread the word.

His claim that in just one weekend, he can upset the peace of the House of Peace so completely that Gideon will ask him to leave, is supposed to constitute a victory of *hate* over *love*, violence over peace. Gideon will have to acknowledge

That the Gospel According to Saint Gideon is a lie. That we, as men cannot alter for the better in any particular that matters. That we are totally and forever unimprovable. (138)

In his war of wills with Gideon, he freely and easily becomes the "Ruffian with the pistol". Mark, "the most marvellous pupil" and "the most marvellous friend" of Gideon, turns into the betrayer and the seducer (137).

Thus, Mark has declared “The Battle of Shrivings” on both personal and philosophical levels. By putting David and Lois in the middle, he wants to purge them of “their delusion” (139) about Gideon and his philosophy. Lois, the typical American of the seventies, is more a victim who is brutally exorcised of her belief, and her faith in Gideon’s philosophy. We may call Shrivings a duologue, exploring two sides of the argument. On the philosophical level it is an argument to prove that human beings are Unalterable. Mark, the godless cynic, believes that violence is an unalterable facet of human nature and human beings are unimprovable. Gideon, the peace advocate, preaches the doctrine of Improvability. However, on both levels, it is a war of wills and the outcome will be humiliation.

The tormenting unconscious emotions ingrained in Mark’s mind seem to be unleashed in search of a purgation, yet it is the archetypal destructive nature that needs to purge the latent drives and instincts from his psyche. The catharsis works by subjecting the inhabitants of Shrivings to the Dionysian side of the unconscious state and then releasing the tension through a dissipation of these destructive and often frustrating inner drives. Mark is aware of the fact that, if he undergoes this process the outcome will be serious. No one will come out of it unscathed. He knows that in the process, he will dissect everyone, even torment them before healing, including him. At the very heart of the matter, life and reality, there is a ceremonial quality in a sense that expatiates in Mark’s mind all the ideas of pretence creating a confessional where his aim is not to seek the spiritual state, but only a desire to be exorcised of the demons within.

As in Shaffer's other mature plays, the primitive alter ego seeks freedom from roles and social mores. He worships according to his own needs, depending on no one for the source of his inspiration. Though Mark as the primitive alter ego exists according to a code of behaviour that he has created for himself, not for other individuals, he still wants to shatter the existence of everyone else around him. Mark aims to develop antagonism leading to the clash between two alter egos to such an extent that physical violence breaks out. *Shrivings* also creates a platform for a disquisition on larger philosophical issues. Violence vs. repression gives violence as the outcome because to break repression, one needs to retaliate. Repression as acceptance means bowing to aggression on one level. Thus, Mark, the devil's advocate or nature's prophet (whatever we might call him), proves that violence is essential for creation.

Though the method is destructive, Mark's need is to force Gideon into accepting the idea that he is more than an ideology or a role player. He is a human being who is affected by the external forces to act unpredictably as well. Predictable does not exist.

In order to expose their self-deceit, Mark's strategy is to play on everyone's insecurities under the roof of the House of Retreat. The mind games he plays are the vicious work of an astute mind that finds them gratifying. Primitive Alter Ego here is guilty of assault, but his intent is to produce a justifiable, albeit violent, reaction to prove his point.

The first attack is in the form of a well thought-out and well-executed Apple Game. To prove his point, everyone has to get involved. In order for the disciples to be able to see things for what they are, he will have to remove the veil from their eyes by creating doubt in their minds.

The game is based on a real life experiment where the subjects were instructed to administer electric shocks to innocent victims. In Mark's version of the game, he lines up apples, identifying them with mild shock to The Death Apple. Thus, tied to a chair, he asks for the right of free speech — to be able to say anything, fair or foul, truth or a lie. He challenges them that he can make them press The Death Apple. Starting as a harmless game, where Gideon is just indulging his guest, it veers off to dangerous grounds, ultimately turning into a dangerously explosive ordeal. No one will be unaffected, including the instigator. Mark believes that Gideon's somewhat fanatic belief can break only through a war of exceptional intensity. As the Voice of Reason clashes with the voice of extreme passion and joylessness, the dichotomy smashes idealism in favour of physical reality.

In order to win, he makes every effort to distress the players. No one is safe. He relentlessly attacks Gideon and Lois' sexuality, Gideon's divorce, and his wife's contempt for his hypocrisy. He even updates Lois that Gideon is homosexual. His great renunciation of sex is a lie and nothing more than the decision of a self-accusing pederast, pretending to be Gandhi. A distressed David, who is very close to Gideon, in his outrage

picks The Death Apple and smashes it to pieces. By the rules of the game, Mark wins. Along with his victory, he has set in motion the forces of doubt in the minds of the followers. As an additional benefit, Gideon's refusal to honour Lois' wish to throw Mark out of Shrivings creates a wedge between the two.

Typically Shaffer's sterile protagonists lie in order to maintain the status quo. Both Gideon and Mark can be put into this category as far as lying is concerned. Being the alter ego, Mark is supposed to be the conscience, yet the only time we are sure about his telling the truth is when he is alone in his bedroom in front of his temple. As for Gideon, the hypocritical humanist philosopher is nothing but the role he has been playing almost all his life. He lacks a strong sense of identity. Maintaining a fake reality for himself and for those around him through his philosophy, he used to be well hidden. Until now, he has let others keep this imaginary picture of him in their minds and has never reacted sufficiently or stepped out of the role he has created for himself. His renunciation of sex has been another attempt to cover for his literal sterility. He could not meet set sexual standards; sex consequently lost any stimulating value it once had for him. This makes him "literally sterile". Gideon's speech is a desperate last attempt to win Lois back, but she does not believe him.

When I was young, I had, as they say, sex on the brain...Sex was everywhere. A girl's hair bobbing...sudden fur of a boy's neck. The twitching lope of a red setter dog. In flowers, even – the smell of cow

parsley in a field would almost make me faint. To say I was bi-sexual would have been a ludicrous understatement. I was tri-sexual. Quadri. Quinti. Sexi-sexual, you might say! (165-66)

In the final Act, Lois confronts Gideon and calls him a “phoney” (192-93). She has lost faith in Gideon, as did Belinda in *The Public Eye*. Lois, whom Gideon has created in his own image, abandons him but, unlike Belinda, she is left with no identity at all. She insists that “its easy to be chaste when you’ve got no cock” and “its easy to give up bloodshed, when you’ve got no blood to shed”(193).

In a short space of time, Mark has made David eat meat; tied to the “throne of reason”(157), he has made the disciples of non-violence first torture and then destroy him. Now he successfully launches a plan to seduce Lois. Mark’s ability to conquer Lois’ mind with the subtle ease and the social efficiency of the troubled mind is remarkable. Lois has already revealed herself to him just because he over-reacts to spoil the imaginary pictures of him she has been building in her mind. Gideon’s rational humanism, to which Lois, figuratively, “kneels” in worship, is also unmasked and brought painfully to adult understanding. In his discussion with Lois, about Gideon’s principled pacifism, Mark tells her the truth when he says:

It’s a lovely vision, Miss Neal. Many of us dreamed it once. And then woke. (150)

With her seduction, Mark provides Lois with the impetus she needs to revolt against the circumstances he calls stifling. Lois is attracted to Mark because of the feeling she receives from him as well. She may see in Mark a man who gets pleasure out of just being in her company as a woman. The anti-Catholic in Lois' reminiscence of her childhood is dominated by

A beautiful plastic Jesus... It had great ruby tears on its face and I'd have to pray to it before turning out the light: 'Dear Lord, make me a Good Catholic and a Good American. Amen!' (109)

She has been in love with Mark because "he wrote about Catholicism like it was a disease" (107). When Mark accuses her of being a simple minded American who believes in people, she gives him a piece of her mind. She is aware of the fact that society endorses labels like nationality or "Serf. Heretic. Catholic. Communist. Middle class" (149) on people in the name of system. It keeps the organized set up in place. She also knows that these lies are there to destroy the originality in an individual, turning them into typical band members. Gideon obviously provides Lois with thoughts that reflect the resentment of good citizenship which she has implied:

Country can be a mental prison, and patriotism an ape's adrenaline.
(120)

Lois has chosen England to be her new home in an attempt to seek salvation in a world of turmoil and conflict. She has abandoned her country, her family, and her religion, finding a new home in Shrivings. The mysteries buried in the deep recesses of a genius mind's creative process clash with an over-civilized and sophisticated but somewhat suppressed

Lois. Her sense of insecurity makes her believe that one of the neurotic symptoms of our times is “an inability to live in the real world”, but she is unaware that she falls into the same category. Like Young Martin the “grovellor”(1964a: 13), she is a “kneeler”, who does not have a strong sense of identity. Behind the façade of high ideals, she is searching for some kind of stability.

From Mark Askelon, who is experiencing profound dissatisfaction with his culture and his very existence, Lois receives this advice:

Then listen, Miss America. Go home. Forget Europe. She's old, wicked and useless – like me. Purge her. Get her out of you, if you want to live. Believe me, everything bad started here. The pox. The subjugation of woolly heads. The social layer cakes which God's hand alone is allowed to crumble. Above all, the Police State. That's our main gift to the world. (175)

Though he has carefully planned her seduction, he is giving her honest advice. Between sexual restraint and the free flow of self-expression through sex, complex emotions flow as the play progresses.

However, all these attacks are mere escapes from his guilt. Mark's loose sense of morality makes it easy for him to parade his own depravity as he openly admits that he is a creature without joy. He confesses that he could not accept his wife's love and devotion. His wife's worship of him led him to force her into subjugation. The failed marriage of Mark and Giulia and

the breakdown in their relationship was due to his stubborn refusal to conform to the mediocre, or Giulia's incapability to rise above it. In losing an appreciation for his wife's joy in life, Mark in his sadistic wayward method, first took away her son. Then he precipitated her paralysis and death by forcing her to watch while he made love to another woman. This subsequently resulted in his losing faith in himself. He has not only murdered Giulia, and plans to destroy Gideon, and his son, but also has relinquished his own value as a human being. However, the horror of all horrors remains his confession of being joyless:

Inside me, from my first day on earth, was a cancer. An incapacity for immediate Life. (173)

The jealousy of those who are joyless in itself is a consuming passion. Thus, Mark's problem is not just the hypocrisy at the center of *Shrivings*. Gideon is passionate about his role as a Pacifist. Mark hates this passion in him. He cannot bear the contentment of the inhabitants in this house. Gideon exercises a hold over his son and Lois; Mark's envy of this commitment makes it unacceptable to him. According to Klein:

If there is one lesson — one message — that dominates above all others in Shaffer's work, it is that of the importance of passion in ones life, the lack of which renders life empty and meaningless. (1983b: 36)

He is emotionally sterile and has lived his life hating those who could feel the immediacy of life. Gideon's passionate dedication to social causes is contrasted with the emotional sterility of the poet Mark Askelon, who,

even as a youth envied one and all who could feel excitement. Thus, the battle of Shrivings is fought on both personal and metaphysical levels — between reason and restraint, Apollonian and Dionysian, and the two sides of the right and the wrong. This theme of passion and the lack thereof, dominates the action in *Shrivings* and Shaffer will continue with it later in *Equus* and *Amadeus*.

Mark's final and most ruthless attempt is the destruction of his own son. He, first accuses David and his generation of being unable to “get it up to save [their] stoned lives” (181) and later alleges that he is “unmale” (182). However, the lowest blow comes when he challenges David's paternity, casting doubt on whether he is in fact David's true father. David, who for a short period has belonged, once again is turned into a lost soul. David also turns on Gideon, his former idol and mentor, proclaiming him to be nothing more than a man of “theories and hopes and vigils and fasts! *And nothing! Lovely nothing!* ... FUCK OFF!”(185). Thus the battle which started with Mark's Apple Game, proves to be vicious, leaving psychological and spiritual scars on the residents of the House of Peace, Commune and Love. At the end of the play we realize that the place is never going to be the same again. Gideon, betrayed by his “first flier” (137), will never be able to trust himself again.

In the final Act, Gideon himself raises his hand in violence when he slaps Lois, and thus destroys himself and all he stands for. That is how Mark forces the master and disciples to acknowledge that violence is an essential

facet of human nature, indeed of *nature* itself. Recognition of violence inherent in “God’s hand” (196) is Mark’s proof of this reality, which ultimately makes Gideon bow his head to a murderer’s hand.

The ultimate destruction of the house of Shrivings leaves us with a slight hope that a new and more honest relationship will arise out of tragedy, even though the chances do not seem good. Mark has challenged the entire system of their beliefs in the times they live in. As a part of the social fabric that they belong to, they are driven by the strength of their beliefs, actions and their behaviours. Shaffer has broached the subject of the unrest in the late sixties and early seventies through this series of confrontations. This helps him form a commentary on the society and times these characters belonged to.

The whole battle is placed within a wider human context. In the end, Mark seeks understanding first from his son, and then from Gideon. Mark admits that David saw the killer in him; he refers to him as “My Son—Confessor” (188). Mark ceases to be the alter ego and bows to David as a superior. His confession leads to the possibility of love and reconciliation. David’s reaching out for his father is “a richer moment of cosmic embrace” (Lounsberry 1991: 90) as he controls his urge to violence. David urges him to reach out to Gideon. Mark tries to give himself to the faith of Gideon, but conviction comes late as he already has set in motion the forces of destruction. The Gideon who dwelled in Shrivings before Mark arrived is dead: though his demise is on the figurative philosophical level, he does not

exist any more. But this destruction is not just that of a person. It is the destruction of his followers as well, whose hopes and beliefs have been pinned on the philosophy. Thus, the need of a fifty year old poet for belief proves that it is an essential human necessity and a condition that needs to be satisfied.

In *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, we see Pizarro who hoped to gain worship, ultimately loving Atahualpa as a son. Here, Gideon, who has felt as close to Mark as a proud father could, sees himself destroyed by the son. Twisting the truth to his wishes, Mark Askelon has finally destroyed Gideon's followers along with the philosopher himself. While Atahualpa's belief provided Pizarro with momentary affirmation of his life, Mark takes away everything the old man has held dear in his life. While Pizarro felt genuine grief and heartache for a fellow mortal even after his disappointment in Atahualpa's alleged immortality, Mark's ultimate and passionate submission to Gideon will never give Gideon, or his follower, that same stronghold of faith to sustain him or them through life.

As Shaffer is a playwright of ideas, this eloquent exposition intelligently explores man's struggle for meaning in a world where from the moment of birth, one is supposed to die, as it will not give one a home forever. Thus, we see passion, violence, creativity, pessimism, optimism collide with scepticism in an attempt to find some kind of cosmic balance. In *Sbrivings*, Shaffer's effort is not to sentimentalise the issue but look through the psychological tumult and the swirl lying beneath the surface of these

conventional sets of liberal notions. The whole brutal struggle degenerates into personal accusation in order for Mark to achieve his goal. It probes man's continuing passionate fascination with violent forms of belief. Gideon's assumption that he can tame an uncivilized, primitive force (presented in the person of Mark Askelon) by reason is impossible in reality. As a result, Mark reacts to Gideon's assumption with extreme violence so as to shatter the misconceptions under which Gideon and the inhabitants of Shrivings have lived. The revelation breaks the gentle pacifist mould of Gideon's person along with the philosophy he has stood for.

As has been said earlier in the first chapter, rational inquiry was born midst the darkness of two world wars.²⁵ The goal was to find some kind of enlightenment that would give answers to the questions about faith and being. In *Shrivings*, Shaffer has once again provided his characters with a forum to address this serious question — more directly and openly than ever before.

Man squeezed like a nut between an ideal choice and a practical one,
and cracked in bits by either. (100)

This might be the best way to describe *Shrivings*. The philosophic source always treats religion within the limits of reason alone. Mark's actions here are more an appeal to the inhabitants of Shrivings; his urgency, even desperation, is to provide them with an experience of violence. Mark

²⁵ For more detail see Introduction from Pp.17-19.

knows that the human soul is forced to live under merciless conditions. Mark directly criticizes the way the system works, and forces us to act accordingly:

Isn't it amusing how the fashion in inquisition stays the same! They all have one thing in common. The passion for invisible God. First we have the vengeful Daddy, wrapped in clouds. Then Mobile Mary, whizzing up in Heaven. Now it's Self-Raising Man, jumping himself out of Nature: what an astonishing sight! (152)

Control of mind leads to control of soul, which ultimately instrumentalises it. Mark proves Shaffer's conviction that there definitely are limits to what can be rationalized. In order to exist, one needs to surrender control. Gideon's Pacifism is thus an effort to instrumentalise the kernel of one's existence in the name of all-embracing control of mind. But Mark makes him realize that it does not free a person. It rather enslaves one and ultimately one's identity is lost. When Mark wages a war on Shrivings, he is doing it to save his soul first and then that of others, as soul is the core forerunner of all faiths and belief.

In *Encyclopaedia of Religion, Vol.4*, it is stated that "the absence of doubt is the height of irreligion" (MacGregor 1987: 429)²⁶ which means that the will to doubt is not necessarily an act of nihilism, but can also be seen as an

²⁶ For more detail see "Doubt and Belief" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol.4*, Mircea Eliade: Editor in Chief, Macmillan Publisher Company, New York. Collier Macmillan Publishers London: 424-430.

active ingredient in pursuit of lively faith. Shaffer's intent here seems to be the same. If one goes through his work from the earliest stages, one can easily find the foundation of his ideas and his approaches to this ultimate theme he creates through his characters. *Faith* is "the assurance of things hoped for, conviction of things not seen" (Pelikan 1987: 250)²⁷, but it is a lot more than that as well. It is an entire set of concepts used to describe the human mind and its attitude towards life and creation and a lot more. *Faith* is also believing in something whole-heartedly, as it is the heart that makes or breaks a god or an idol. This makes *faith* an abstract term describing the attitude of the human mind and spirit. Shaffer has used faith to unfold mysteries of the heart and soul and the effects it brings on the life of people at large. We have just a worked-out way of seeing things in the world and have got so used to it that even a little tremor of curious questioning feels like an earthquake that will destroy the foundation of all our existence and whatever have we have ever made ourselves believe in.

Demonstrating his versatility once again, Shaffer explores humanity's moral dilemma while through his characters examining the psychological motivations behind it. Failure of modern society to provide a constructive vehicle for human impulses is still one of the root causes of lost identity and faith. Civilization still is unable to fulfill the void of spiritual needs. Shaffer's scorn of institutionalisation in all its forms, is also echoed through characters in the play. Gideon accuses us of regarding the "act of killing" as amusing and "the act of creating" as obscene.

²⁷ For more detail see "Faith" in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* (vol. 5): 250-255.

You can go to church, and respect the stopped mind. You can go to war memorials, and respect the stopped body. (129-130)

Lois, who believes in people, is of the opinion that “people”,

...don't want war. Or politics. Or organized religion. They have been taught to want these things...we've all been made to work every day, printing up labels: Serf. Heretic. Catholic. Communist. Middle class. And when we're through, we're made to paste them over each other till the original person disappears, and nobody knows who the hell he is anymore! (148-49)

This is how Shaffer sees the human condition — destruction occurring in both earthly and spiritual realms.

To help portray institutions in their bare form, we see the characters stripped naked to show both levels of being. Lois and David, naked under towels, show their psychological state; and the covers and wrappings, once removed, reveal the true vulnerable and natural state of their being. These techniques, simply and truthfully, help occupy the intuitive ethical positions these characters stand for. Though things are supposed to happen a certain way (Gideon), usually reality (Mark) is a far cry from our expectations. The facts, ideas, and reasons Gideon has fed them are not enough anymore.

The play is an existential search for identity in a society based on role-playing, and the dialectic struggle between the Apollonian and Dionysian

forces of one's psyche. Yet, the protagonist cannot be confused with the existential hero, who might rebel or revolt to initiate change. Though in the aftermath of the battle, Gideon gains a new sense of understanding from Mark, he will never act on the newly acquired knowledge.

The play enlarges reality and enlightens the reader without masking the dangers and uncertainties of the real world. Mark's speeches about pollen beautifully echo and articulate these uncertainties of the real world and sum up the play as far as human nature is concerned. The originality of the observation, all the more potent for being disguised beneath an apparently conventional surface, is paralleled by the veiled originality of the form of expression used. Gideon, in the aftermath, bows his head to acceptance of the truth about human nature. Thus, Shaffer's basic or underlying intention of performing an exorcism is achieved, though it leaves the protagonist and the antagonist both with broken souls.

Some places are built by their own needs. And then there are others that are made by the need to impress. With Mark's arrival, chaos enters the house of Shrivings. Before Mark's arrival, Shrivings has been an unreal place, providing Gideon with a stronghold for his belief. The integrity of the House of Shrivings is restored, as now it follows its own truth, its one single theme, and to serve its own single purpose. It has imposed penance upon the people inhabiting it. However, the absolution offered is partial, as a complete victory will be an illusion. In breaking the mould of Pacifism, Mark has released the disciples of their disillusion. The lack of complete

absolution works as a form of ironic commentary on the action of the play. The objective achieved can be summed in one of Shaffer's later plays, *Lettice and Lovage*:

Enlargement for ... shrunken souls; Enlivenment for ... dying spirits;
Enlightenment for ... dim prosaic eyes. (1988: 95)

CHAPTER 4

EQUUS

I was born Jewish — though how a child can be born into any religion I don't see. You can only be born the child of your parents — not a Jew or a Christian. That's imposed upon you. It's a strange and sad thing that you have to spend so much time unlearning the damaging things you were taught— in all good faith on the part of your parents — as a child. (Shaffer quoted in Gelb 1965: 4)

Shaffer's next attempt *Equus*, more than ever, raised the question of humanity's true metaphysical status, concerning the theological puzzle of the knowledge of God directly. If *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* was a quest to find God incarnate, *Equus* was a lot more ambitious than that. Here, Shaffer's intention was to try to fathom how far man would go to assume godly powers and become god. To divine the mystery of faith, Shaffer presented the relationship of a mortal with an immortal deity. The very nature of the play, once again, is the loss of faith in conventional religion and the resultant scars it leaves on the human soul. As in the rest of his "exuberantly and unashamedly theatrical" work, in *Equus* Shaffer used the theatre medium "for all one is worth" (Colvin 1986: 12).

Shaffer's fascination with the ambiguous human situation created by two kinds of right produced this play about a conflict of mythological

proportions. By presenting the sort of conflict which generates modern day myths in a world of ritual with primitivism at the core, a search for worship through religious passion began with a difference.

It dawned on me that people talked about the 'air of mystery' in the mask scenes of *Royal Hunt of the Sun*, for them it was all taking place in some remote past... Very often, I realized, audiences relate to a historical play at a specific level, as though it had nothing to do with them today, as though it were some sort of an outing. (Shaffer quoted from Buckley 1975: 20)

Keeping that in mind, Shaffer decided to present "the numinous...the thing that throws shadows longer than themselves" (Buckley 1975: 20) with a difference this time. The setting he used to evoke the dark forces in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* belonged to the past, but here he portrayed the emptiness of conventional society and religion in a contemporary setting. This was an effort to prove that spiritual concerns/needs of human beings go as deep today as they did in the past. Nevertheless, the fact remained that conventional religion's failure to provide spiritual fulfilment resulted in the distortion of the spirit of the primitives as well.

From past to present, reality to dream, narration to dialogue to choric frenzy, the play's impact proved a lot greater than that of any other play he had written. Yet starting from historical myths, as in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Shaffer achieved his real area of interest: a modern use of myth, which I will discuss a little later in the chapter in detail.

The play stemmed from a chance account by a friend at the BBC, about the crime of a highly disturbed stable boy in rural England. All he was told was that the son of strictly religious parents blinded twenty-six horses in the North of England after seducing a girl on the floor of a stable under the horse's eyes. In his disturbed mind, he who blinded twenty-six horses with an iron spike feared that they would reveal his secret to the parents.²⁸ Haunted by the story, Shaffer did not pursue it to find out the actual details after his friend's death.²⁹

I knew very strongly that I wanted to interpret it in some entirely personal way. I had to create a mental world in which the deed could be made comprehensible. (1976c: 201)

Believing that "I'm not a journalist or a photographer" (Shaffer quoted in Schickel 1974: 117) he did not delve into the details:

Today people have a tendency to know almost too much. That can be inhibiting to playwrights. An exact record of fact doesn't always help the imagination. (Shaffer quoted in *Vogue* by Emelson 1975: 192)

Shaffer says that the friend's "complete mention of it could barely have lasted a minute..." (201). However, the compulsive urge to write about the incident started him on an elaborated version of his deceased friend's

²⁸ This detailed account of the actual event is narrated in Smith (1982).

²⁹ All subsequent citations of the play (including 'A Note on the Play') are taken from *Equus* in *Peter Shaffer: Three Plays*, (Penguin Plays) 1976.

anecdote as the basis for the play. The play grew from my own preoccupation with myth, with my own mental life. (Shaffer quoted in *Vogue* by Emelson 1975: 136) From that sketchy account came *Equus* — a theatre experience that took the theatre world by storm. "...The author had the skeletal plot for what has become a modern classic" (Gianakaris 1992: 232).

In order to find an answer to the gruesome synopsis, he delved into the history of horses as sexual and religious symbols, and did quite extensive research in animal psychology, working out the boy's motivations to his satisfaction. Shaffer lowered the number of the horses to six and improvised complex reasoning behind the boy's actions.

The play explores the spiritually based motivations of a seventeen year old boy, Alan Strang, who embraces the pagan belief that horses are gods and is institutionalised after brutally blinding several of his charges at a stable. The plot revolves around Martin Dysart, a psychiatrist, trying to find an answer to the problems of this teenage boy, Alan, the son of an aggressive, down-to-earth, atheist printer and his pious wife. It seems that Alan's early religious passion, encouraged by his mother, has been supplanted by a crazy fixation on horses. These twin deities — the Christian and the Centaurs — he has joined into a private god he calls *Equus*. He worships it in a secret ritual in his room first and later in ecstatic midnight communion with the real horses in a stable, where he works part-time. The terrifying

equine presence in the shadows of his mind brings the tragedy upon him. Shaffer has further explained it as

Equus [the Latin word for horse] is surely, among other things, the name one individual [Alan Strang] gives to his impulse for worship. I think that is the telegraphic statement about *Equus*. And like all gods of that kind, like almost all gods I've ever heard of, it is an ambiguous presence — both conquering and submissive, both judging and accusing on the one hand and accepting and gentle on the other. (Shaffer quoted in *Vogue* by Emelson 1975: 137)

Shaffer devised the dramatic action of the play after conferring with an eminent psychiatrist on the psychological implications of the horrifying event. It took him more than two years to write the play.

Leaving the theatre failure of *Shrivings* behind him, Shaffer made sure that this next play would be successful. He worked very closely with John Dexter during the rehearsals as well:

The power of the play seemed to be constantly inside me, telling me where to go with it. (Shaffer 1982: xv).

Equus has been described as the greatest critical and box-office success of the seventies. The impact lies in its interlocking themes, which are both imaginative, and highly controversial; the craftsmanship of the playwright and audience appeal on intellectual, emotional, and visual levels.

A horrifying crime, brutality, sexuality, religion, agony of mind and spirit, conflict, compassion and humour are the themes of *Equus*. (Blumenthal 1985: 28)

Shaffer pinpoints and explores some area of each individual's distress in attempting to curb passion in order to function acceptably within the norms of society. Between Dysart and Alan, once again, the play explores man's struggle for meaning in a world in which death dominates and religion holds no salvation. Shaffer plays faithfulness against faithlessness, passion and violence against impotence.

Equus premiered in London's Old Vic Theatre on 26th July 1973. He knew the English public would make fuss over the boy's attack on horses. Panter-Downes is right when he said,

[*Equus*] deals with a horrific theme that the English public, often accused by European neighbors of being so sentimental over animals that they would react more furiously to an ill treated puppy than to a battered baby, might be supposed to shun with repugnance. (1973: 183)

The nude love scene before Alan's attack on the horses, he used as a visual symbol of Alan's naked psyche. This helped Shaffer to put the focus on modern man's struggle to live with ambiguities. By forming different kinds of conflicts, he showed that, though the cure offered an exorcism of Alan's demons and a promise of normality and adjustment, it could also take away passion from his life. Thus creating a lot of controversy over the nudity, its depiction of the horses, and its belittlement of the psychiatric profession,

the play took the theatre world by storm. About *Equus*, Shaffer said in the preface to *The Collected Plays*

When the English were outraged by [*Equus*]...it was because it showed cruelty to horses; when Americans were outraged, it was because it showed cruelty to psychiatrists. (Shaffer 1982: xvi)

From there, it went to New York in 1974 and lasted for more than a thousand performances at the Plymouth Theatre.

For the only time in my life I was accorded a standing ovation — on the first night at the Plymouth Theatre — an event no playwright is likely to forget. Approval of this kind, poured from an American bottle down a European throat, is an elixir of youth. I experienced the undeniable euphoria of feeling physically younger at the age of fifty than I had at thirty. (Shaffer 1982: xvi)

Though the play received varied critical responses, almost all the critics acknowledged the play as powerfully moving. The critics perceived variance between the excellence of the writing and the power of presentation. The theme of the play was more under scrutiny than the characterization this time. Christopher Ford of *The Manchester Guardian*, fascinated with the imagery of the horse, wrote:

Equus has such lithe magnificence at once so warm and alive, so naked and virile. (1973: 8)

Walter Kerr declared that *Equus* was

The closest I have seen a contemporary play come —comes powerfully close—to reanimating the spirit of mystery that makes the stage a place of breathless discovery. (1984: 121)

Barnes of the *New York Times* admired the play's "refreshing and mind-opening intellectualism" (1974: 26) *Variety* found the play philosophical, though inconclusive per force, "always challenging the audience to think again about conventional wisdom"(Pit 1973: 44). However, the best way to sum up all the positive remarks on the play would be to quote John Barber (1973: 13), who referred to the play as a landmark of the modern theatre:

But this remarkable play, with its talk of the dark gods and its plea for an instinctual truth the modern world has lost, must count as one of the National Theatre's bravest and most uncommon achievements.

As for the negative comments, Ian Christie of the *Daily Express* found it nothing more than "a lot of fearful philosophic claptrap" (Quoted in Plunka 1988: 148). Nevertheless, the best summing up of the initial response, negative or positive, is supplied by Wilson:

Mr. Shaffer's play is about many things — the Nietzschean conflict between the Dionysian and Apollonian impulses, the problems of normalcy and the attributes of insanity, the need we have to worship a god — and these ideas will be analysed and criticised for some time to come (1974: 203)

Equus, turning out to be a vast playground for the imagination, from the very beginning made it clear that it would move unavoidably to the abreaction of Alan's extreme act. Instead of providing a simple explanation, Shaffer provided vast grounds for inquiry. Understanding the complexities of the mind, Shaffer was aware of the fact that the motivation behind complex individual acts cannot be empirically delineated. That is why

Shaffer drew specific parameters within which Alan acted instead of providing the sharp lines of simplistic casual relationships. In order to make the deed comprehensible, Shaffer returned to the primitive world. Shaffer moulded *Equus* into a play about the creation of a Dionysian religion in a highly rational world, a passionate worship that also reflected the Christian world's inability to integrate sexuality and religion. According to Lambert, the Apollonian (rational) and Dionysian (instinctive) theme in *Equus* has been "constant throughout human history, never resolved, always relevant and very much in the air today" (Lambert 1973: 14). Shaffer skilfully takes us through the bickering from which the reason for his appalling act might emerge. The characters of Alan and Dysart have been moulded by a search for experience, self-fulfilment, and meaning in their lives, the pressures of sexual performance and its attendant anxieties, the conflicts of religion, and strivings for a greater purpose.

The gradual opening up into the boy's background exposes a rational working-class atheist father, and a conventionally Christian mother. The pressure this puts on him has made him create his own world. His first impressions of a horse have been of the power of the animal and the authority of the horseman. He idolizes their sheer brute beauty and sensual drive and in its ultimate transference, this adoration takes the form of a passionate religious myth. In a primitive, natural fashion, Alan has fused the two chief forces in his life — worship and sex — into a single figure: the god *Equus*. The instinct of union is the greatest fact in human experience. To Alan's mind, sex is the source of life and of nearly all its deepest

pleasures as well as grief. In ritualising his adoration of the horse-god, he experiences what Gianakaris calls “a form of auto-eroticism” (Gianakaris 1992: 232). However, the act of gouging out the horses’ eyes seems irrational. On the other hand is the psychiatrist who is the boy’s hope of stabilising. The only problem is that this man has been suffering from “middle-aged malaise” (Lambert 1973: 14). In order to feed his own irrational impulses, he is used to taking annual holidays in Greece. Unfortunately, his dim provincial world has turned these holidays into nothing more than nightmares in which he slices up his child patients. He believes his situation to be worse than the boy’s. Dysart’s dream symbolises his growing professional scepticism and an increasing sense of guilt at performing what he fears may be a form of spiritual murder. Deciding the boy’s fate, Dysart is aware that the process will cost the destruction of the vital spark in Alan.

Shaffer's solution to finding the reason for this specific violent act through the psychiatric search was once again based on Artaudian “total Theatre” and the Theatre of Cruelty along with Brechtian techniques.

...what is ultimately applauded in *Equus* is not its message but its packaging [in the modes of Brecht and Artaud]. (Witham 1979: 65)

Equus demonstrated that it is not extinct myths but living ones — like psychoanalysis — that can convene as a collective and allow ritual participation. Artaud believed in a kind of theatre that explored rites, rituals and rhythmic patterns:

The theatre will never find itself again — i.e., constitute a means of true illusion — except by furnishing the spectator with truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsession, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit or illusory, but interior. (Artaud quoted in Plunka 1988: 42-3)

Alan's relationship with *Equus* and his subsequent blinding of horses is Artaudian as it presents violence, sexuality, and evil on stage.

For Shaffer, drama is an ornate rite, which produces catharsis for the audience. It is not just that Shaffer uses sex in the play as a passion with which he can make his audience identify, thereby leading them to an even more intense and meaningful passion in religion. Instead, by inextricably linking religious experience with sex, Shaffer once again looks into the theme of human incompleteness, which remains inexhaustible. Here, the audience identify themselves with the role-player, middle-aged protagonist, and feel purged of their sins and “confess” their evils along with the protagonists. Thus, the play is a process of discovery, a journey into the unconscious. Like Brechtian spectators, the audience become observer, critic, thinker, judge, and Artaud's ritual participant.

Plots and characters work only as a means to an end — that of providing a thought-provoking theme. If Pizarro's struggle was for worship and immortality, Dysart craves for worship and passion. If *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* talked about the ability to believe, *Equus* speaks of the ability to experience passion — intense passion. However, loss of faith in

conventional religion and its consequences stays as the central theme of both these plays. Once again, we see Shaffer establish that life might be possible without an institutionalised form of religion, but it is not possible without belief in some kind of superior power that can control the emotional and rational impulses of people.

Society demands everything to be done in a certain way. It determines every thing by the generic value term *Normal*. This is what gives a person his identity in the eyes of society. Whatever is against this value is rejected, dismissed, and discouraged as *abnormal*. *Normal* represents the usual or average pattern of behaviour typical of particular groups; it also refers to subjective issues such as mental or physical health. Dysart is aware of the fact that limiting oneself to a single, consistent identity that we associate with *normal*, is nothing more than a category of social expectations. In Alan, Dysart comes across a youth whose religious conflict and personal strife against the conventional society has created a big psychological void in his life which has ultimately destroyed him. The moral dilemma he will be confronted with is if it will be right to cure Alan and make him fit the Normal profile of society. Thus, through these characters, the play forces us to be our own psychiatrist, exploring the real motives behind our normal lives.

The iconography to help support the play is influenced by Brechtian style, which is set within an experience much closer to the kind envisioned by Artaud. Once again, through a systematic narrative framework, Shaffer introduces a narrator as the mediator. Dysart addresses the audience from

his post, first as an outside observer, and later merging into the inner plot as an active participant in the play. Like Old Martin, he instantly engages our attention while enjoying a unique perspective of his own. Thus arousing interest and curiosity on part of the reader and the audience, he draws them into the action of the play. Once the general subject of the play has been introduced, Dysart assumes his active role, yet at regular intervals he returns to comment, thereby providing an explanatory commentary on the plot and its proceedings. The highly articulate speech of the narrator, along with the visual scene of necking animal and boy, thus sets the scene for the audience. The audience's fascination with him is partly because he carries within him that which must be accommodated to the Normal. We know that Dysart is a complex and problematic character, but this may only serve to add further weight to the satisfaction that we feel as an audience. What we sense as inevitable is brought to pass by Dysart himself, in defiance of his own ambivalence and despair.

To enhance the dramatic and theatrical effect, Shaffer has members of the audience and the cast sit together around "a square of wood set on a circle of wood" in stage directions.

They are witnesses, assistants – and especially a Chorus. (1976: 204)

Seeing our fellow members of the audience as a part of that community makes us feel included in the process. This unusual setting of the audience and cast sitting around the square (which resembles a boxing ring) and

watching both Alan and Dysart as they interact also strengthens the impression of their being scrutinized and judged by a conventional community of whose standards they are attempting to break free. This stage setting creates an ecstatic and alarming but beautiful experience depicting the human and Godly realms. Thus by setting the stage “for a plot that entails savage battle between the powers of orderly society and the chaotic impulse of instinctual religious worship” (Gianakaris 1991: 13), Shaffer stunned the theatre world, once again, with *Equus*.

The iconography, he had worked on so meticulously with the stage setting, became even more specific with regard to the depiction of the horses on stage. For Shaffer, the whole theatrical approach depended on the abstract portrayal of the animals. The actors were not allowed even the slightest element of realism

Any literalism which could suggest the cosy familiarity of a domestic animal — or worse, a pantomime horse— should be avoided ... Animal effect must be created entirely mimetically... so that the masking has an exact and ceremonial effect. (206)

John Simon has vehemently criticised the fact that all six horses were portrayed by “lithe young men” as male horses, and not a single mare was there. John Simon quoted Brustein in his *Hippodrama at the Psychodrome*:

I never thought I'd see an audience stand up and cheer on behalf of sodomy, but I guess you can't ever underestimate the idiocy of Broadway. (Simon 1975: 103)

Finding the accusation quite unbelievable, Shaffer answered sharply that

I have no idea what it means. That there are men on stage wearing masks of horses? What would they want me to have — women? If you're going to create an image of animal power, you have to use men. Quite realistically, you've got to have at least one — the actor who plays Nugget — who is strong enough to lift the boy gracefully to his shoulders and carry him." (quoted in Buckley 1975: 30)

Shaffer's fascination with mask drama started with *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, where people saw the masks change their expressions. Here, once again, audiences have claimed to see the horses' eyes roll. Shaffer has again proved himself the master who can doctor the imagination of his audience. Alan's reverence is largely conveyed through the striking image of the horses themselves. The horsemen are to remain silent apart from occasionally making "Equus Noise" which Shaffer describes in the script as "a Choric effect...composed of humming, thumping, and stamping — though never of neighing or whinnying". The noise symbolises and illustrates "the presence of Equus the God". For Alan, their ceaseless presence determines his every action.

As is typical with Shaffer's stories, the plot requires at least two protagonists. Here we have three: Alan, Dysart, and from the play's first lines the third figure is the mysterious horse-deity. It is not only Alan, but also Dysart who identifies with the horse. He experiences it as a relentless, irreducible question within the self. According to Jung, many horses are clairvoyant. Alan's god is all-seeing.

Without uttering a single line of dialogue, *Equus* determines the fates of all the play's central characters, thereby demanding scrutiny by audience and critics alike. (Gianakaris quoted in Chaudhuri 1984: 292)

Shaffer's characterisation is superb. The dispirited, passionate, adolescent boy, his conventionally religious ex-school teacher mother, his unimaginative, almost Victorian, atheist father who secretly visits the local sex-film cinema, are the nucleus family whose interrelationships are examined.

[*Equus*] is firmly rooted to specific personalities and their histories: the boy's genteel, lower-middle class mother with her tired religion and his literal minded old style Socialist father with his life-hating rationality... This noble savage is one who rejects and is rejected by his society and therefore, like the horses, must be tamed, even blinded. (Greig 1975)

As compared to the very rounded characters of *Dysart*, Alan and even *Equus*, Frank and Dora are most of the time *flat* characters, who show a few individual character traits at times. Then there is Hesther Solomon, the conscientious magistrate, whose character is a mixture of both *type* and *individual*. *Dysart*, childless, locked into a loveless marriage, and suffering from professional menopause, reacts empathically to Alan's passion, suffering, and need. In his god hunting, *Dysart* is drawn into more fundamental expressions of worship, as was demonstrated earlier in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* in the persona of Atahualpa. The ancient religious symbol of the horse has taken the place of the sun this time.

The horses provide colour, grace and beauty of movement, which work as the foil for the dark passions, torment, and anguish, dominating the dramatic action of the play and its challenging intellectual content. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Classical Mythology*, monsters and fabulous beasts symbolize the dark and unresolved forces in life and in human nature. Centaurs “part human and part animal, represent man’s unruly instinctive nature. Although less awesome than demons, they still harassed and haunted humans” (2000: 58). The image of the horse since ancient Greece has been closely linked with man’s idealized image of himself. Sigmund Freud used it to describe the link between id and ego. Another concept introduced here is the concept of God as slave through the image of horses. The slave/master paradox, according to Stacy, become psychological and religious references when weighed against the Freudian comparison of the *ego* (the Apollonian Dysart) and the *id* (the Dionysian Alan) to a rider and a horse:

The horse provides the locomotive energy and the rider has the prerogative of determining the goal and of guiding the movements of his powerful mount towards it. But all too often in the relationship between the ego and the id we find a picture of the less ideal situation in which the rider is obliged to guide his horse in the direction in which it itself wants to go. (Stacy 1991: 106) [as quoted in the souvenir program for the British National Theatre’s production of *Equus* in 1974.]

In *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, we have seen God come to earth; here in *Equus* the Sun God is replaced by the Greek image of the horse as God. The difference is that Equus lives in all horses now.

Shaffer admires the non-believers who refuse the institutionalised set up in favour of primitive worship. Alan Strang epitomizes the Dionysian — that which is creative, intuitive, and inspirational. Dysart is the Apollonian — ordered, premeditated, and systematic. In the middle of sterile, efficient contemporary society (of which Dysart is a representative), Alan has created a sentient, primal, and passionate religion complete with ceremonies, sacrifices, and total ecstasy. The tortured evolution of Alan's religious observances when set against Dysart's disconsolate personal life causes Dysart to embark on a search for meaning in life. However, reviewers often find it difficult to empathise with Dysart's concern for destroying emotion, and disagree with Shaffer's presumed tendency to equate brutality with a lust for life.

For Shaffer organized forms of society and religion, government, churches restrict individuals, turning them into a "band". Man's limiting himself to a worship defined by a band kills passion in life, turning people into just a statistic. For Shaffer contradictions and varying images provide a truthful reflection of self. Limiting oneself to a single, consistent identity associated with *normal* is nothing more than a social expectation. Once the truth about oneself is embraced, the individual is freed of the hold the Band has over him. Dysart comes to realise the truth in the end. Whether we call it

animism or a transcendental belief in God in all things (Lounsberry 1991: 82) the truth remains,

Without worship you shrink, its as brutal as that. (274)

His fascination with ancient Greece dramatizes a romantic longing for purified existence. All he has ever longed for is to live up to his ideal:

Look! Life is only comprehensible through a thousand local Gods. And not just the old dead ones with names like Zeus — no, but living Geniuses of Place and Person! And not just Greece but modern England! Spirits of certain trees, certain curves of brick wall, certain chip shops, if you like, and state roofs — just as of certain frowns in people and slouches... Worship as many as you can see — and more will appear! (254)

Between the two characters of Dysart and Alan, Shaffer, providing his audience with yet another provocative theme, perfected the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Thus, the central point of Shaffer's exploration, once again, is the need of worship in human beings.

Artaud believed that,

The true purpose of theatre is to create Myths, to express life in its immense universal aspect and from that life to extract images in which we find pleasure in discovering ourselves. (Artaud quoted in Plunka 1988: 44).

Alan's worship of his god with "chinkle-chankle" and his ritualistic self beating, and most perfectly of all, his communion with the horse — god and lover — in the Field of Ha Ha, set against Dysart's Hellenic high-priest

sacrifices of a herd of children, has made the play a modern day myth, full of ritual, religion and ceremony.

In his earlier *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Mr. Shaffer sought after the images and ritual to capture the essence of religious conflict, internal strife, and self-crucifixion. In *Equus* he has brilliantly found them, uniting subject and style... (Vandenbroucke 1975: 132)

The word "Equus", according to Gill (1974: 123), stands for more than a single horse, as the word "man" stands for more than a single man. Symbolically the horse is a classical symbol of power, potency, and freedom. It is also frequently used as a symbol of the animal component in man. The masks of the horses' heads here mirror the mask of conformity; the bit in Nugget's mouth suggests the attempt to curb freedom and induce enslavement.

The horse is an animal of darkness here, representing unbridled instinct and terror. In Psychology it symbolises the unconscious world: imagination, impetuosity, desire, creature power, youth, energy, and sensuality. A white horse denotes majesty, as when Christ is mounted on one (Rev. 19:11) This Christian version of the archetype appears in *Equus*, through Dora.

The half-horse half-man figure implies fusion, which ultimately leads to the thought developed later in the play: that man and the object of worship are indivisible, and that man has the need both to dominate and to be enslaved. The symbolism continues in the conflict between religion and sexuality and is subtly emphasised. The horse as a symbol also suggests *energy*. Jung writes

“since the horse is man’s steed, and works for him and energy is even measured in terms of horse-power, the horse signifies a quantum of energy that stands at man’s disposal. It therefore represents libido...” (quoted in Chaudhuri 1984: 292). That worship of Equus is also an exalted celebration of libido is clear to Dysart. This association is also apparent in the mythic centaur. Creating myths is hard, as we are used to thinking in the now, used to explaining before we really see, according to Kerr:

Mr. Shaffer ...may have been trying for just such ...a portrait of the drives that lead men to crucify themselves...Here, I think, he has found one. (Kerr 1973: 121)

Though the play is built on the story of Alan Strang, it presents the middle class audience with a hero of its own proportion with which it can identify — and Dysart is exactly that. It is in the character of his protagonist, Dysart, that Shaffer makes us see that without worship, one diminishes into nothingness. Like Pizarro, Martin Ruiz, and Mark Askelon, Dysart is aware of the joylessness and meaninglessness of his life. The contact with an intense religious experience makes him aware of an emptiness within him, and a void where exists the latent need for worship and belief. He has never ridden a horse. His vicarious experience of passion has been his travels to primitive climes with his suitcase stuffed with Kao-Pectate. Alan’s gaze feels accusatory to him because he is acutely conscious of his normality.

His marriage has become a matter of habit. His alienation from his wife represents a congenital revolt against domesticity and the money does not satisfy the need he feels.

Going through male menopause, he has been re-evaluating his passionless life: his non-sexual marriage, his literal sterility, his reluctant fascination with the primitive Greek legends, with their centaurs and Dionysiac revels, all add to his confused state of mind. His work is not enough any more to provide him with any satisfaction. His therapeutic efforts have taken the identities of young people until now, but this time his work will take away a passion so intense it has made even him envious of the boy. He is afraid of turning Alan into a drab, uncultured adult, whose only contact with the equine God will be a bet from time to time.

Alan, on the other hand, has experienced passion in its extremity – a reality that Dysart both lacks and envies. He has created a unique pain of his own that is a unique proof of his being alive. The pain that defines Alan is contrasted with the *commonplace* and *normal* experiences of everyday life.

Thus, through these two characters, the conflicts between the ordinary events of our existence and the erratic or eccentric are exposed. The tormented Alan's horrible deed is not in question. It is the intensity of his self-created pain and passion that Dysart marvels at and covets. Shaffer, a great admirer of Jung, has said,

Jung, when talking about neurosis said 'Neurosis is an escape from legitimate pain'. Until I read that, I hadn't quite been aware that there *was* a thing as legitimate pain. (Shaffer quoted in *Vogue* by Emelson 1975: 136)

Dysart's reluctance to remove the pain has to do with the passionate life the youth has led and the source of his extremity of passion. However, he finally accepts his part as a healer as Shaffer's intention has never been to equate barbarism with an enviable passion for life.

Martin Dysart is the conqueror of the new religion of psychiatry, conquering minds in the name of *normality* and *social efficiency*. His nemesis is not the son of the Sun, but a teenage boy who has created in his mind his own kingdom of god. As the play's protagonist inflicted with apparent outer conflicts and a far deeper personal one, we see him struggle with an internal emptiness that fully manifests itself during the process of treating Alan Strang for his crime of passion against horses.

...The craftsmanship ...is as ingenious as it is legitimate. The author is confronted with a technical need: if the stable boy has a secret he is fiercely unwilling to confide to his doctor, the doctor has a secret of his own, one just as crippling ...so that the battle will be eventually joined, wound for wound...(Kerr 1974)

First, he must force Alan to cooperate so that he may find out the details that have led up to his crime. Secondly, he must convince *himself* that he is doing Alan a service rather than a disservice by proceeding with the

treatment, which will turn him into another “normal” member of society. It is not easy for Dysart to convince himself, since he envies Alan's ability to worship, even if the objects of his worship are horses, and his ability to feel passion, even if that passion has ended in criminally psychotic behaviour.

Dysart lacks the sense of transcendence that can form real worship. He feels the need of something intangible which must be regained if he is to live meaningfully:

I need — more desperately than my children need me — a way of seeing in the dark. What way is this? ... *What dark is this...* I can't get that far. I will however pay it so much homage... (301)

On the other hand Alan's Dionysian passions, capacity for ecstasy and worship, striving for freedom and need for enslavement have created his conflict causing him to lose control. The conflicts are unravelled during therapy. Alan's myth is passionate:

...if [Alan's] myth is an abomination, at least it is an active abomination rather than a passive one. At least it is a myth that says yes to the present rather than placing its hope in a time to come, as the mother's Christianity and the father's socialism trust. (Walls 1984: 316)

Like Pizarro, Dysart is for Shaffer's yet another frost bitten soul, whose basic life force, referred to as “horse power”, is too little. He is going through a professional menopause. Suffering from a severe identity crisis, he is questioning his profession. The professional menopause makes him

lament that his job is “unworthy to fill me” (217) and makes him see the hypocrisy of the “antiseptic proficiency” of his married life. He is also torn between two other principles: on the one hand, there are the claims of society, his responsibilities as a child psychiatrist; and on the other hand, his understanding and even envy of Alan’s worship of Equus. Although he remains well adjusted by either intellectualising or repressing his envy, his treatment of Alan thoroughly humanises the need for worship and belief. While facing the full extent of his own irreconcilable conflicts and professional doubts, Dysart is expected to exorcise Alan's demons, stripping him of his passion and reducing him to a normality which will rob Alan of his ecstasy.

Dysart is also a rationalist who has come across someone (Alan) and something (Equus), who present the fundamental challenge to reason. In this sense, Shaffer certainly has not abandoned the quest for spiritual meaning. Though, from the beginning, Dysart understands that Alan has committed an atrocity, he also realizes that the boy’s frantic sexual energy, damned by guilt, is really a source of misery to him. As a psychiatrist of skill and conscience, Dysart must do something about it.

He’s not pretending that you must allow people to continue in distress...to do their own thing... There is a higher and more important priority sometimes at work than the individual’s doing his own thing. However, that said, he cannot *but* be aware that in removing the source of the boy’s distress and nightmares, and dealing with violent emotion that has resulted in this disgusting crime, he is also, very likely, removing the main source of boy’s ecstasy, individual

passion, and his own glory in being himself. (Shaffer quoted in *Vogue* by Emelton 1975: 137)

Dysart is not a shadowy manipulator of the boy. He is a seeker of self-knowledge, even as he strives to understand Alan. He must confront himself as he confronts Alan, cure his own ills and unhappiness with those of Alan:

The thing is, I'm desperate. You see, I'm wearing that horse's head myself. That's the feeling. All reined up in old language and old assumptions, straining to jump clean-hoofed on to a whole new track of being I only suspect is there. I can't jump because the bit forbids it, and my own basic force – my horse power if you like – is too little.
(210)

He realises that the boy's guilt is a source of misery for him. At the same time, Dysart marvels at the potency of his patient's private struggle against a mechanistic world where conventional attitudes and beliefs form the background against which he rebels. However, we must not take this as Dysart's wish to support abnormality. In his mind, there is no doubt that the boy has committed a criminal act and that something must be done about it. There is no doubt in his mind that the boy is in absolute pain. As Shaffer himself has so rightly put it:

If you're Jack the Ripper, or a mass murderer, you must be stopped from doing your own thing. (Shaffer quoted in *Vogue* by Emelton 1975: 137)

Alan is neither a mass murderer, nor a serial killer. Dysart's dilemma stems from the fact that in removing the distress and pain from the boy (which is essential), he will have to take away the source of his ecstasy, his individual ferocious passion. Dysart is against taking away the source of his ecstasy in favour of the paraphernalia of modern life. Though critics have said that for such an imaginative boy, it would not be impossible to replace it, Shaffer seems to be working along the lines that if the source or the muse is taken away, creativity will have to leave along with originality. Thus, despite his reservations, Dysart *will* affect a cure. The question he is faced with is which is preferable—the desire or the achievement:

My achievement, however, is more likely to make a ghost!...Passion, you see, can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created.

Hesther Soloman is the last character in Shaffer's plays that has admirable ethical authority.³⁰ As with young Martin and DeSoto, "trust" and "honesty" are not mere words for her. The foundation on which these words rest consists of sympathy and compassion. Hesther Solomon draws our attention to the need to have human sympathy for Alan. She is aware of the fact that the boy is not an aggressive, dangerous madman. Hesther is "the ethical spur" (Lounsberry 1991:84) that holds Dysart to maintain his priorities like "children before grown ups". For her all that matters is the

³⁰ Lounsberry places Atahualpa, De Soto, and Young Martin in the same category, calling the rest of the characters moral hypocrites or searchers.

fact that “the boy is in pain, Martin. That’s all I see”, and she insists that worship is not destructive. She provides an insight into the beneficial aspect of Normal. Her awareness of these facts and her effort to lighten the inevitable destruction leave us with hope for a better civilization and humanity.³¹

Frank Strang, Alan’s father, is the embodiment of the authoritative, repressive but well-intentioned father, and is opposed by his wife. Alan’s mother is protective, indulgent, and consuming. Dora Strang, though, represents the religious conventionalist. Shaffer does not seem to judge her or even try to distort her into a hypocritical enthusiast. She is portrayed as a loving, well-intentioned, but misguided person, who appears to be more of a victim than an aggressor. We are convinced that it is partly her influence on the boy that has set him on the course resulting in his peculiar obsession.

With all this array of characters and themes *Equus* remains among the best known and one of the most critically acclaimed of Shaffer's works to date. The critical response over the years has been tremendous. For critics it was hard to deny the potential of the play. As Smith so rightly puts it:

31 John Simon does not agree with Lounsberry and in his *Hippodrama at the Psychodrome* describes her character as “...Hesther Solomon who brings the youth to Dysart. Her name tells us that she is Jewish, which presumably, sets her above typical Britisher and makes her more psychiatrically oriented.” (1975: 99)

Perhaps it is one of the attributes of a truly exceptional work that the critics will not know what to make of it. (1982: 465)

Plunka rightly deems *Equus* to be “one of the most controversial plays of the twentieth century” (1988: 147), as quite a few critics viewed it as a defence of insanity (Plunka 1988:96); it also upset the psychiatric community as they took it as defamation of their profession. Whether they call it “an overblown closet homosexual drama” (Buckley 1975: 28), or a “disguised manifestation of twinship” (Buckley 1975: 32), Shaffer’s main intent of exploring the Divine cannot be obscured by such criticism. The human need for a definition of the idea of God along with a need for worship, is more clear here than anywhere else in Shaffer’s plays.

Despite her finding the play philosophically shallow and the writing a trifle pat, Hughes concluded “Shaffer is that rarest of playwrights today: one who has something to say, one who can keep the audience continually absorbed and challenged while he is saying it”. (1973: 444) According to Witham

[*Equus*] leaves many viewers uneasy because they are uncertain what they are so enthusiastically applauding. (1976: 61)

Presenting his views of the psychoanalytic world, Oscar Grusky in *Psychology Today* asserted that therapy is frequently a mundane and bureaucratic encounter, almost devoid of high drama, as it does not include high drama, especially in institutionalised settings. He noted that the play “illustrates a tendency in the popular arts to idealize the mentally ill” (Grusky 1977: 21).

Most important, to picture therapy as posing a serious choice between creativity and conformity is to over-simplify and over dramatize.

(Grusky 1977: 21)

For him, *Equus* is not dogmatic enough in its psychiatric explanation. It is a mere attempt to see Alan's illness against a broader canvas of family, religion, social class, law, and problems of social control. The psychological world's concern, according to Grusky, is that the public gets the impression that the play's assumptions about psychiatry are universally accepted facts, when they are in fact far removed from reality and in essence far from proved. Bizarre behaviour does not necessarily derive from sexual repression, according to him. Shaffer has maintained that the audience's reaction to *Equus* is partly because "they collectively dislike their analysts immensely" (Shaffer quoted in *Vogue* by Emelson 1975: 192). The play provides them some way of showing this in public. Besides, there is also an enormous area behind it, which cannot be put precisely into words — the area of experience, which is a continuous source of distress.

Sanford Gifford (1974) has also criticised *Equus* for its faulty psychology and misguided views of the patient-psychiatrist relationship. He accused Shaffer of using a serious matter for theatrical devices. Shaffer's response to him was as strong:

I must say I lost my temper with the fellow over his assumption that I really know better, that I was doing this play, on which I spent two years, to pander to the audience. You've got to be pretty defensive about your profession, it seems to me, to make an allegation like that. I

want to assure him that playwrights are at least as serious about their work as he is about his. (Shaffer quoted in Buckley 1975: 30)

The psychiatric world tends to forget here that the purpose of theatre is not to present and prove the science of psychiatry, but to produce and create exciting fresh views of human relationships. Shaffer is generally critical of psychiatry. He regards it as a substitute religion (mostly American), and too often a convenient excuse for not being responsible for one's own life. However, he has said in a note on the play,

I have also come to perceive that psychiatrists are a varied breed, professing immensely varied methods and techniques. Martin Dysart is simply one doctor in one hospital. I must take responsibility for him, as I do for his patient. (201)

Among literary critics, Gill deems the play to be Shaffer's "big, bowwow speculations about nature of contemporary life in the midst of a melodrama continually thrilling on its own terms" (Gill 1974: 123). He continues:

Mr. Shaffer convinces us that there is a pagan "horseness" separate from the life and death of individual horses and well worth our reverence; we violate it at our peril, as we violate our humanity at our peril. (Gill 1974:123)

For Schickel it is "the dazzling psychological thriller" (1974:117). Clurman (1974: 388) found the play's philosophy "bogus", promoting the idea that the schizophrenic is closer to the truth of life than common people are. He found "Dysart himself needs to be cured of his faulty reasoning". For him,

one need not be crazy to live untrammelled by conventional proscriptions. For Richardson the play “is all contrivance, all middle class whines and whimpers...”(Jack Richardson 1975: 78). Witham noted that *Equus* was infused with the same philosophical outlook which was so popular and controversial in 1956:

...Being truly alive is [still] synonymous with suffering an intensity of experience which frequently borders on the abnormal and which is repeatedly glamorised as “passion”...ultimately *Equus* is a schizophrenic play, because its theatrical fireworks cannot mask its muddled logic and tired philosophy. (Witham 1979: 62, 65-66)

Discussing the Apollonian and Dionysian struggle Jere Real concluded that “*Equus*...surgically probes man’s continuing fascination with violent forms of belief, those passionately fanatical, sometimes sacrificial manifestations of religious ecstasy... in extremely devout belief.... in the drama and literature of our Freudian-shaped century”(1975: 114). Kenneth Hurren (1974) found the play beautifully organised and arrestingly written, even though he could not completely accept the case history invented by Shaffer.

However, no one comes close to the extreme criticism of John Simon. He has accused it of being a plea for a homosexual life style. Simon, in two different articles has shown his extreme resentment of Shaffer's work. Shaffer’s subject, he sees as nothing more than “worn-out, whimsy...insanity” (Simon 1974: 118). For him in *Equus* Shaffer is trying to make the boy’s aberrancy look as glorious and seductive as possible, as

opposed to the “straight” society in the greyest possible light. As for the psychiatrist’s dilemma, Simon believes

...What has this common stable had to lose if, instead of naked nocturnal horseback-riding, and whipping himself figuratively and literally, into a frenzy before a nice girl, becomes a solid citizen, and occasionally wins or drops a few shillings at the races? (1974: 118)

The whole play “with the far-fetchedness of this whole notion of hippophilia, makes me agree with [the] view that what is really meant here is pederasty” (Simon 1974: 118). If that was not enough, in another article, he pronounced that “*Equus* is pretentious, which the public falls for...and other good or bad devices to *épater les bourgeois*” (Simon 1975: 97-8). The ending was equally trashed:

...as if psycho therapy were such simple matter: a little hypnosis here, a bit of abreaction there, and our hideously disturbed protagonist’s mind is safely on the way to total discovery. (Simon 1974: 118)

In his ultimate analysis, the play propagates dishonesty. He feels that by making the dreadfulness seem fascinating, Shaffer has tried to “smuggle subliminal but virulent homosexual propaganda” (Simon 1975: 106). Shaffer’s depiction of Psychiatry “as a castrator of bodies and soul” (Simon 1975: 106) is deceitful. And last but not the least, “dishonesty towards normality (whatever that is), by making its representatives and defenders...pathetic and unappetizing” (Simon 1975: 106).

To understand Shaffer’s intent in the light of all the varied criticism above, one must make a detailed and deeper critical analysis of the play.

Structurally, the play is divided into two acts and thirty-five scenes indicating changes of time, location, or mood. Most of the twenty-one scenes comprising Act I are given over to Dysart's step-by-step investigation into the conflicts leading to the incident. Through hypnosis, abreaction, and alleged "truth drugs", Dysart ultimately isolates the psychic sources for Alan's aberrant behaviour, a form of psychosexual dysfunction.

Repeated shifts of time are utilized: from present to past, to further in the past, back to the present and so forth. In *Equus*, Shaffer has once again, experimented with the Brechtian-style narrative — providing a *raisonneur* in the plot who steps outside the enacted story to comment directly on the proceedings for the audience. Dysart acts as a narrator, at times explaining himself and the treatment of Alan to Hesther, who has seen that Alan is admitted to the hospital rather than being imprisoned. At other times, whether he is explaining his plight or the development and unravelling of Alan's case, Dysart addresses the audience directly. His own inner turmoil, verbalised in his direct address to the audience, makes him, as much as Alan Strang, an object of inquiry.

The play is set at Rokeby Psychiatric Hospital in Southern England. Alan's act of blinding six horses has outraged the community, but Dysart is persuaded to seek its causes to return the boy to "normal". The outraged community wants him imprisoned for life, but the magistrate recognises that the boy is deranged, and believes that Dysart can help him. Hesther Solomon, in fact, considers Dysart to be the boy's only hope. Dysart is

reluctant to take the case, but, the gratuitous, unfathomable horror of the act leads the doctor to accept the charge. Alan's progression to "normalcy" takes an unusual turn when it affects not only the boy, but also enlightens the dark caverns of Dysart's psyche through his experience.

In his first meeting with Dysart, the teenage persona produces an astonishing variety of emotional responses, based on pure instinct. From the television jingle mumblings that mark his first utterances to the doctor, to the far more dangerous spoken clues, he slowly unveils his psyche. Until now Dysart is used to the "usual unusual". Dysart is taken by surprise when a tormented Alan Strang reveals a mental adroitness he has never come across. Dysart sees that Alan wants his help, but he does not want the analysis to be painful. Alan urges that they each answer questions in turn. The reason behind it is that it not only makes it easier for him, but also lets him know Dysart the man before he puts his trust in his hands.

Hesther Solomon has already warned Dysart about the "startling"(212) vibrations the boy gives, but he soon has to agree that Alan "has the strangest stare I ever met" (218), and "treating him is going to be unsettling". Once again, a dream is recounted.³² The night after his first meeting with the boy, he dreams of butchering five hundred children, with Alan's face on "every victim across the stone" (218). Dysart's dream is shocking. Armed with a scalpel as a Hellenic priest,

32 Dreams recur in Shaffer's plays from *Pizarro* to *Amadeus* to *Yonadab*.

I part the flaps, sever the inner tubes, yank them out, and throw them hot and steaming on to the floor.

In his dream, Dysart feels distinctly nauseous. He feels that his mask is slipping off his face. It seems that his nausea and the slipping mask at the sacrifice of the children will reveal doubts to his fellow priests and mark him for destruction. He has previously expressed “doubts” about himself as a psychotherapist. Psychotherapy involves certain metaphoric disembowelment, and the sacrifice of Alan’s passion and his odd form of worship for the sake of integration is worth puzzling over. Dysart sees the practice of psychiatry as “all reined up in ...old assumptions” and therefore it becomes a discipline that is incapable of understanding people. Slicing up children, he believes he is acting as an instrument of social control for the industrialised and institutionalised society:

[By returning Alan] into the Normal world where animals are treated *properly*: made extinct, or put in servitude, or tethered all their lives in dim light, just to feed it! I’ll give him the good Normal world where we’re tethered beside them – blinking our nights away in a non-stop drench of cathode-ray over our shrivelling heads! (300)

Like Hamlet, he has looked truly into the essence of things, he has gained knowledge, and his nausea inhibits action. He knows that his action cannot change anything in the eternal scheme of things. He feels that it is ridiculous to be asked to set right a world that is out of joint. Knowledge is the destroyer of action, as action requires the veils of illusion, while true

knowledge outweighs any motive for action. In addition, Dysart has insight into the horrible truth.

Dysart, disillusioned with modern civilization, and uncomfortable with his role in it, perceives himself as a servile priest of the Normal, turning unique individuals into uniform, standardised parts of the social machine. He sees that the emotional price we pay for civilisation is a lot more than we bargain for. However, the fact remains that Alan and Dysart are trapped in roles ascribed to them by society. They represent the opposing currents of instinctive and rational thought that Shaffer calls the Dionysian and Apollonian sides. However, one of the most important things about *Equus* is that we never are in actual dread that Dysart will refuse to treat the boy. Dysart's character has also been interpreted as an attack on the psychiatric profession. Though he is sceptical about his profession, psychiatry has served him until now as a source of a feeling of omnipotence. It has helped him conceal his own myriad problems until Alan's volatile sense of free will forces him to confront his sterile existence, which lacks a definable identity. Though he envies Alan's passion and worship, it remains difficult for him to leave the security of his *ennui*, at the end of the play. Dysart is attracted to this vital quality of spirit in Alan. The audience know that Alan is a tortured soul who is unbalanced and dangerous; consequently, we, along with Hester Solomon, hope that Dysart will be able to end his suffering. A response of repulsion and fear does not do justice to the depth of Shaffer's play, as Walls so rightly puts it:

The spectator in *Equus* must accept the paradox that a repulsive, horrific crime committed against innocent horses ignites a positive, poetic, spiritual fire within the deadened, timid soul of Dysart. (Walls 317-18)

His fascination with his captive continues to grow as time passes.

Dysart knows that he is a deeply hollow man confronted by someone who presents the idea of extreme passion, so he is trapped in a predicament of to cure or not to cure Alan. He admits that his fondness for browsing through art books on mythical Greece is a poor substitute for real worship. The twentieth century modern citizens of the technological age have lost touch with primitive emotional nature; scientific inquiry has removed almost all possibility of worship, which for Shaffer is one of the greatest tragedies of our times.

Dysart conducts his sessions with Alan methodically — urging, bribing, or tricking the boy as necessary. At the beginning the bits and pieces of information obtained are important, but the way they fit into the puzzle that Alan is, is unclear. To understand him, Dysart will have to unscramble the clues.

As the drama progresses, Alan's past is slowly unveiled through therapy. After a series of abortive attempts Alan's story emerges. "The dreary paraphernalia of modern life" (Shaffer quoted in *Vogue* by Emelson 1975:

137) has provided Alan with nothing to look forward to, but an electrical and kitchenware shop. In order to unscramble the rest of the clues, he decides to visit the Strang household, where he comes across interesting information. Growing up in a home with his mother's conventional religiosity, matched and subverted by his father's atheism, Alan has tried to create his own world. Dysart learns critical information about Alan through his parents; Dora Strang, a conventional picture of a mother who is supposed to be inordinately attached to her son, has constantly forced her beliefs on her son, which in turn have made him inherit his mother's religious temperament in an acute form.

Frank Strang is against his wife's religious fervour. He thinks of himself as an upholder of artisan rectitude, and has no patience with the poetic confusion of life. He refuses to allow a television in the home: "it's a dangerous drug...Absolutely fatal mentally" (219). Books, learning, industry, self-improvement are Frank Strang's values and he is deeply disappointed in his son's lethargy: "It's a disgrace when you come to think of it. You the son of a printer, and never opening a book!" (219) He is vaguely Marxist and an atheist. His wife's religiosity and its influence on Alan deeply upset him.

Alan's first horse ride, offered by a stranger, at the age of six, was gratefully accepted but soon interrupted by the frantic shrieks and protestations of over protective parents, especially his father who spoiled the experience for Alan. He felt an exuberance and power in the animal

matched by the control and authority exercised by the horseman. Thinking back on it, Alan describes his sexual excitement during the ride and anger at his father for pulling him off the horse. After that, Alan refused to ride a horse. Alan's claim to have ridden only on that one occasion in his life is supported by his parents. This is baffling, as the boy who loves, and even adores horses should like nothing better than to ride them.

Walls has questioned Frank's motive for pulling Alan off the horse. Is it because it represents the sensuality and a desire of passion or is his action that of an overprotective parent? However, one has the sneaking doubt that he might have snatched his son from the horse because of the class-consciousness of his upper middle class wife, which is a source of an inferiority complex in him. The socio-economic hierarchy that reveals the exploitative aspects of capitalism thus works as one of the catalysts to Alan's case in the form of a Marxist father. The conflation of class and sexuality is also one of the many reasons that alienates Alan from his father and mother. Thus, the class disparity existent between the parents widens the gap of communication. Alan is sacrificed as the child produced by a socio-economic misalliance.³³

33 The end of Chekov's *The Sea Gull*, with Treplev's suicide and the drowning of Grisha in *The Cherry Orchard* are other examples of the same thing.

As for Alan's stance on sex, his family has warped him in that respect too. Dora is puritanical about sex. For Frank, religion equals "bad sex". While Frank represses his sexuality, Dora dispenses religious dogma. As he has grown up in such an environment of contradiction and suppression, Alan's religious beliefs have merged with his sexuality. Alan's dementia stems, in part, from his parents, who have pulled him in opposite directions since birth and insist that he follow their chosen paths. Their psychological ethics and repressed ideologies have scarred Alan. His father has influenced his unconscious, as a result of which he shares elements of speech and gesture with his father. His religious fervour, though, alienates him from his father. The overt energy that drives the plot lies in the transgressive nature of Alan's sexual attraction to horses as a child, which as a catalyst brings the essential conflicts to the surface.

When Alan was a child, his mother used to read to him — history, the New Testament, stories of horses in which horses spoke and felt. From her narrative about the Christian cavalry, Alan learned that "pagans" regarded horse and rider as one entity like a god. From here Alan derived the idea of "two shall be one". Another story was about God's speech to Job — the story of "Ha, ha" beginning with "Hath thou given the horse strength?" What started out, as an amusing activity between mother and son thus has become a potent force in Alan's worship.

Under Dora's tutelage, the boy became religious enough to hang a lithograph of the suffering Jesus, feet chained, back under the lash, to his

wall. Dora remembers that he fell in love with the picture and “insisted on buying it with his pocket money” (236). A young boy’s insisting on spending his own money suggests that he felt strongly about it. His father objects to the picture, which he sees as a form of emotional indulgence, like television. Even Dora’s response to it is far from approving:

I must admit it was a little extreme...*It certainly would not have been my choice...* [Emphasis my own] (237)

Dysart eventually learns that five years ago Frank took this lurid picture of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ off the wall, which deeply upset Alan. However, he stopped crying when Frank put up a replacement — the photograph of a horse looking outward with Christ-like eyes. Describing the picture, Dora tells Dysart about the unusualness of the photo, as it is “absolutely head on. It comes out all eyes” (237).

Discovering much that is related to Alan’s bizarre equestrian myth, Dysart sees that the first notable link in the chain of obsession is Alan’s equation of Christ and the horse. The traumatic pre-pubertal incidents where he rides a horse, and his fascination with the scourging of Christ establish a link between his nascent sexuality, his religious feeling and horses. When a photograph of a horse replaces the lithograph of a suffering Christ in chains, his religious need accidentally leads him to discover something divine about the picture. The staring eyes of the horse and Christ become an obsession. He creates a new religion for himself — Jesus-Equus in chains with a horse bit — “for the sins of the world”. Alan’s mistaken belief that the union of horse and human represents godhead, along with

the bizarre photograph of the horse with which Frank has replaced his son's graphic portrait of the crucifixion helps to fuse religion and sexuality in Alan's mind. In this complete transference, Alan not only loves horses; he idolizes them. His adoration ultimately becomes not only his myth, but also a source of sexual excitation.

Next, Dysart learns from Frank about Alan's flagellomaniac ritual in front of the picture of a horse. His father once saw him in front of the picture with a piece of string fashioned as a bridle in his mouth and a coat hanger with which he was beating himself. This chastisement of flesh through pain is directly associated with religious behaviour. Thus, the psychiatrist comes to know that Alan has created a religion of his own along with a ritual with a horse-god at the centre of it. The Christian motif used here has its roots in Alan's childhood. All the while Alan was chanting a litany of equine genealogy he has created for *Equus*.

...Prance begat Prankus! Prankus begat Flankus! Flankus begat Spankus! And Spankus begat Spunkus the Great, who lived three score years! And Legwus begat Neckwus. And Nekwus begat Flekwus, the King of Spit. And Flekwus spoke out of his chinkle-chankle!...And he said 'Behold – I give you Equus, my only begotten son!' (242-43)

His ritualistic recitations culminate in the familiar words of one of the god's predecessors, "Behold I give you, my only begotten son!" (243) His father blames the boy's problems on his wife's reading him "kinky" Bible stories about an innocent man whipped and made to drag a cross up a mountain.

Frank openly admits to it with Dysart, "If you want my opinion, it's the Bible that's responsible for all this" (226). Though it is a reactionary, offhand, simple remark, it sticks in our mind uneasily.

Once again family, that is a vital element in Shaffer's plays, has failed to function as a unit because of narrow-minded individual views. Without the security of the family, Alan's psychological need to establish his own identity free from familial restraint, has led him to create a new creed for himself. Shaffer has said

The trouble is if you don't spend your life yourself, other people spend it for you. [quoted in Plunka 1991: 58]

Alan is true to his values. His family can define him, as he is a product of his family environment. Frank's fatherly advice has discouraged him from being true to his own values and instincts, so he is trying to find himself in an environment in which an authoritarian father and a doting mother impinge upon his emotional and mental growth. All this also depicts the disastrous consequences that occur when one person's strict adherence to codified behaviour completely subsumes and destroys the freedom of an individual with unconventional attitudes. Alan has inherited the problems of Belinda, Clive, and Bob. Alan lives one hour every three weeks, and he must defend his right to be a unique individual. Shaffer, in his portrayal of Alan, echoes Clive's words

A child is private and important and *itself*, not an extension of you, any more than I am. (1976a: 52)

According to Nietzsche, it was out of “a most profound need” that the Greeks had to create gods. Alan moves instinctively to create his own myth surrounding a horse in order to save himself from his father’s atheism and his mother’s wishes for him to succumb to the strictly traditional Christianity that negates the will to power. In Christianity, Nietzsche sees hatred of “the world”, condemnation of the passions, at the bottom a craving for the nothing, for the end.

Alan’s leap into the world of unknown Equus is a desperate attempt to find his own identity. Alan Strang’s familial confusion over religion not only drives him into an unconventional worship; the guilt prompted by this worship also drives him ultimately to destroy his God — something he could not do to his parents or their beliefs. The usual outcome is that Alan’s father shifts the blame on to his wife, while she blames it on the devil. No one wants to accept the responsibility for Alan’s destruction. Dora describes her torment as a mother who tries to mould her child, but must recognise that the essence of Alan’s personality is beyond her control. Dora insists that Alan alone, and not his past, is responsible for what has happened. Clive’s “I am myself. Myself. Myself” (52), is once again echoed in Dora’s

Whatever’s happened has happened *because of Alan*. Alan is himself. Every soul is itself. If you added up everything we ever did to him, from his first day on earth to this, you wouldn’t find why he did this

terrible thing – because that's *him*; not just all our things added up.

(270)

Her position, even if it is motivated by a desire to exonerate herself, is remarkable. It becomes the mark of a rival paradigm of madness, madness as the unknown, although Dora Strang is correct when she informs Dysart that Alan is much more than merely a product of his parents. Against the Freudian paradigm of madness, Dora sets up the Demonic paradigm, oversimplifying it by pouring religion into it.

...the Devil isn't made by what mummy says and daddy says. The Devil's *there*... I only know he was my little Alan, and then the Devil came. (270)

More information comes from the stable owner, Mr. Dalton, in whose stables he worked. Dysart learns about a girl, Jill, in Alan's life, who got him the job at the stables. Try as he might, Dysart cannot make Alan talk about the girl. This leads to the final question and answer round. Though he gets very little information about Jill, Alan still is not ready to open up to him. Instead, he chooses to strike at Dysart's "area of maximum vulnerability" — the subject of his marriage and his wife. He tells Dysart expressly that he has a sexless marriage. Dysart admits that the boy has assessed the situation accurately. He knows that the boy is getting more out of him than he is getting from the boy.

From there, Dysart moves to hypnosis under the pretence of making the boy feel better. That is when he gets a clearer picture of the mental state of the boy. Alan shows how strong a Jesus identification he has built in his

mind for his horse god. He also tells him about secret midnight rides, which have begun as religious rites but ultimately taken the shape of sexual ecstasy.

The emotional highpoint of *Equus*, according to many critics, is the re-enactment of his ride in the last scene of Act I, which depicts intense psychological passion.

By now, Alan has become obsessed with horses in general and attributes to them the ambiguity of Christ. They are godlike in their strength, but they allow themselves to be chained and scourged by men; inside all horses' eyes is the same equine Godhead. Alan also admits to the psychiatrist that he took the job at the stables to be around horses, helping him elaborate and complete the ritual of his worship. Persistent questioning, concerning his horse riding, makes Alan reveal how his peculiar rite at home changed into a ritual of secret pilgrimages to the stable-temple under cover of darkness. His father destroyed his first experience with a horse. He would not let that happen again. Alan's self-created God is a slave, that he wants to enslave. A view which is primarily expressed in his view of the harnessed Equus: "Equus, my Godslave!" (265) only Alan can ride. They have a slave/master role which is revealed by Dysart:

He lives *one hour* every three weeks — howling in a mist. And after the service kneels to a slave who stands over him obviously and unthrowably his master. With my body I thee worship. (273)

Secretly, every three weeks he takes a horse out in the middle of the night. He first puts sandals on the horse's feet/hooves, and then fixes the "chinkle-chankle" of bridle and bit. The horse gets a lump of sugar, "His Last Supper", before Alan leads him into the field of "Ha Ha". Stripping himself of all his clothes, Alan becomes horseman (centaur): "His neck comes out of my body"(265). Starting slowly, Alan gradually gains speed and he and Equus race through the night faster and faster in a "Hampshire field" until he achieves the most complete physical, emotional, and sexual union, Weightman calls "*ejaculatio Sacra*" (1975: 45) or ecstatic communion. Alan shrieks "Equus, I love you! Now! Bear me away". The ride over, sexual and spiritual communion achieved, Alan kisses the horse whispering "Amen!" No matter how strange the ritual, the boy has found his own sense of ecstasy against a colourless provincial life. The first act ends with this re-enactment, which is "one of the most brilliant and arresting visual images ever staged" (Vandenbroucke 1975: 131).

Alan associates the concept of man's union with God with the sexual nature of man and woman becoming one. His ritualistic climactic ride, where he screams "I'm stiff! Stiff in the wind!... I'm raw! *Raw!* Feel me on you!... I want to be *in* you! I want to BE you forever and ever! — *Equus I love you!*... Make us One Person! *One Person!* (266), certainly makes it and the relationship sexual in nature outwardly. However, looking beyond the physical aspect of sex, one sees the religious sexual functions and feelings of primitive man. For Alan, love and worship equate personal growth, existence, and identity too. In his union with his god Equus (Nugget),

whom he embraces and kisses, he achieves acceptance. He undresses before the animal completely, he shows himself fully to his God, bowing his head to him. “The horse in turn nuzzles his neck” (209).

During all this time, while he is busy with case study, we see Dysart giving information about his personal life through monologues and conversations with Hesther. The key details of his life disclosed are a passionless marriage, his sterility, and his hypocritical existence. The “pallid and provincial” trips to Greece are not a surrender to the primitive, but a farce. His wife’s not being able to share his love for Greek culture makes him accuse her of being “utterly worshipless” (254) while the truth of the matter is that he himself is devoid of any real worship. As he so rightly puts it:

Without worship you shrink, it’s as brutal as that... I shrank my *own* life. (274)

He admits an envy of Alan who lives his passions and fascinations rather than merely reading about them in books as he does. He confesses to Hesther that Alan also has special meaning for him:

That boy has known a passion more ferocious than I have felt in any second of my life...I envy it. (274)

When Dysart tells Hesther that he is jealous of Alan; he is jealous of Alan’s passion and of a spiritual and artistic creativity, which Alan has illustrated. Nothing in his life compares with Alan’s intense mystical midnight rides.

For Alan, the coupling of man and animal could prove a type of grandeur, an intensification of religious experience. Alan has been attracted to more "normal" religious images during his childhood, but his father's objection to religion has caused the boy to change his worship to more Dionysian forms, thereby creating the Apollonian and Dionysian struggle between human desire for order, rationality, and restraint on one hand, and passion, power and violence on the other. However, Dysart is aware of the fact that his human hand of love will become the hand of destruction, adding one more Normal dead staring adult to society. When Dysart speaks of Alan's knowing a passion, this reminds us of Clive's wish to fall in love with only one person as he tells Walter:

I want...to know what it is to bless and be blessed. And to serve a great cause with devotion. (1976a: 86)

Alan's stare seems to him to be challenging Dysart:

At least I galloped: When did you? (274)

For Dysart, Alan's sexual ride with the horse is more a religious rite than an attempt to reach sexual satisfaction. Their union communicates the idea of passion and links it to worship. Alan represents much more than a young man whose sexual inclinations lean towards bestiality, "the usual unusual". When Hesther mentions his pain, Dysart responds "his pain...He has made it". Without such creativity, he lacks the "horse power" which would enable him to jump clean-hoofed on to a completely new track of being. Thus Dysart is incapacitated in spiritual and artistic terms. He has great difficulty in justifying himself. Society and religion are the creators and the

destroyers of individuality and emotion, and they are using him to fulfil their needs and requirements. He is a product of his society and, though society may consider him an outstanding product (in a sense that he is a professional man), he is a spiritual cripple, only half a man.

All the while, the questioning process has turned up something else: the hopelessly chained soul of the doctor himself. He married an antiseptic Scotch lady dentist and they “Doctor and Doctor Mac Brisk... were brisk in [their] wooing, brisk in [their] wedding, were brisk in their disappointment”, and ultimately “turned from each other briskly to [their] respective surgeries” (253). However, it is his own surgery — his genuine capacity for returning young minds to accept norms — that frightens him. His dream tells him that he is sacrificing children, waiting to have imagination, passion, and individuality. He is jealous of the boy he means to cure. Between the two of them they have “locked horns, both right, no escape” (Kerr 1984: 125). The play is perfectly proportioned in its mutual pain.

The play deals not only with Alan Strang’s madness, but also with Dysart’s deep dissatisfaction with his profession. His longing to escape from the ‘normal’ to experience the kind of transcendence that Alan has known allows Dysart to realize by comparison his own, unsatisfied desires and to articulate his own unhappiness. Dysart’s crisis of conscience grows out of disillusionment with himself, his profession, and contemporary society.

For Dysart, institutionalised forms of family, and church are false idols. They ultimately corrupt and destroy the purer forms of being, knowledge, and worship. He knows that the family has warped Alan, just as the Catholic Church bestowed its blessings on the destruction of the Incas in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. Christian fundamentalism, according to Lounsberry, has blood on its hand in *Equus* (1991: 79). We see these institutional wrappings physically and psychologically stripped bare during the action of the play revealing the characters in their natural state, in complete nakedness, all shivering and vulnerable. There we see the pain and torment these characters call their existence. Dysart's "I need...a way of seeing in the dark. What way is this?... *What dark is this?*" (301) is a plea concerning this faulty knowledge of humanity that in its reaffirmation brings love for both sides.

A child is born into a world of phenomena all equal in their power to enslave... Suddenly one strikes. Why? ... *And nor does anyone else..* (268)

It is the torment of not knowing, that reveals them as human beings. His probing into Alan's psyche only solidifies the way he thinks. However, many critics, ignoring the religious context of the play, take Dysart's allusions at face value.

Dysart's relationship with the religious primitive Alan forms the central theme of probing spiritual life apart from the band. Alan lacks a role model, a father figure, and Dysart is seen as a potential father figure.

Dysart sees a potential saviour in Alan and vice versa. Dysart has a fantasy of returning to a place by the seas — where gods *used to* live, before they died. Alan believes that “Gods don’t die” whereas for Dysart, they *have* died; life itself and meaning have died. He feels as if he has been robbed of the centre of his life. He, the giver of meaning, and answerer of questions is lost — searching ardently but without direction for order and intelligibility. Through him, Shaffer is trying to explain modern man’s dilemma, that without his gods, his heroes, his pat answers, modern man desperately searches for meaning for understanding of the world. He longs to be assured of some basic congruence between his aspirations for intelligibility and the essential constitution of reality.

Intrigued by Alan’s primitive passion, the psychiatrist Dysart faces a personal crisis when he becomes reluctant to strip the boy of his rare emotion and thus relegate him to the normal yet mundane life he leads himself. Following the revelations, Dysart determines that he must return the youth to normalcy. The conventional side of Dysart’s personality along with his profession’s ignorance, pressurizes him to destroy Alan’s passion, which he is loath to destroy as this is what makes Alan unique.

Stemming from childhood experiences of deep frustration, Alan’s passion for horses has developed into a form of equine worship with sexual overtones. It puts the psychiatrist into the dilemma that, to cure Alan, he will have to excise the “ferocious” passion from his soul. Shaffer's fascination with the endless ambiguity of the human situation, of the

conflict between two kinds of right, can be noted in *Equus*, particularly in Dysart's reflections on the "Normal" with a capital N as witnessed in his own problem with the boy. The boy's criminal act is not in question here. The job of the psychiatrist is to restore a clinically abnormal Alan. But Dysart is not sure what normal means:

The Normal is a good smile in a child's eyes — all right. It is also the dead stare in a million adults. It both sustains and kills — like a God. It is the ordinary made beautiful: it is also Average made lethal. (257)

The exorcism necessary to make Alan normal is the destruction of the religion which is the core of his life. Dysart knows that, although he is able to cure him, the cure will entail the sacrifice of the boy's ability for ecstasy, making him suffer the pains of a bland, pallid, and arid existence, as Dysart himself does.

I'll take away his Field of Ha Ha, and give him Normal places for his ecstasy — multilane highways driven through the guts of cities, extinguishing Place altogether, *even the idea of place!* He'll trot on his metal pony lamely through the concrete evening — and one thing I promise you: he will never touch hide again! (300)

In curing Alan, Dysart feels that he will only create a form of desecration. He also knows that he will not accomplish what he wants to do with Alan: to make "an ardent husband — a caring citizen — a worshipper of abstract and unifying God". The world of Normal will offer him its material gains, "smirky sex" and an acceptable, passionless religion and God, which, as an

alternative to his worship will not be satisfying. All he can do is replace the ecstasy with “Normal”, or in other words, Alan will be confined still, but in a limited sphere of solvable problems.

The second act starts with Dysart’s monologue, and we see him imagine the horse mocking him and asking “*Why?...Why Me?... Totally, infallibly, inevitably account for Me?... ‘Account for me’, says staring Equus. ‘First account for Me!’*” (267-68)

In direct contrast to this is Alan’s worship. The object of his worship has long histories in mythology and ancient religions, thus the object of worship assumes reverberating metaphysical meaning. The spiritual essence of the horse in *Equus* is directly comparable to the concept of humanity. Brendon Gill calls it “horseness” and elaborates on the idea,

[It] is separate from the life and death of individual horses and well worth our reverence; we violate it at our peril, as we violate our humanity at our peril. (Gill 1974: 123)

According to Shaffer, he used the horse to transport the audience back “to a time when there wasn’t much distinction between the human and the animal” (Buckley 1975: 25). Fascinated by the concept, Dysart wonders

is it possible, at certain moments a horse can add its sufferings together— and turn them into grief? (209)

However, even with all the yearning in him, he cannot believe in it. The separate reality of horseness is impossible for him to believe in.

The ultimate gesture of seeking help comes from Alan when he talks about the truth drug. He is ready to face his demons and unburdens himself. Dysart tells Alan that the placebo will make it easier for him to talk “like you have to speak the truth at all costs. And all of it”. Alan tells about Jill, how she arranged the job for him, ultimately asking him on a date to a skin flick. There, Alan, sees a naked woman for the first time in his life. Alan’s father had disrupted and destroyed the experience of his first horse ride. His first date is no exception as they run into his father while watching the pornographic movie. His father’s feeble excuses make Alan furious at his father’s hypocrisy, and at the forced recognition of his parent’s loveless marriage. He becomes agitated; first loathing the older man for his hypocrisy, for “all those airs he put on”, and then sympathizing with Frank as he sees him as “just a poor old sod on his own” (288), someone who “does his own secret thing which no one’ll know about, just like me!” (289) Alan learns everyone has secrets. His father, with all his apothegms is nothing more than a man with needs. Frank, who then lacks the guts to confess, pretends that he is seeing the theatre manager about printing some posters for him. To exacerbate his hypocrisy, Frank declares that he will do no further business with the man now that he knows what kind of film is shown there. Frank tries to compel Alan into leaving with him right away. In his father’s presence Alan has always felt challenged and snubbed. However, this time Alan asserts himself by refusing. He notices that his father looks scared, which merely arouses hatred for the older man. Alan repeatedly calls him “Bugger! Old Bugger! ... Filthy Old Bugger!” (287)

Ignoring the inner conflict that Alan feels about his father, Dysart prompts the agitated youth to admit that the insight he derived into his father's nature somehow liberated him. This should enable him to feel sexual desire for Jill without guilt. Eyes have a profound significance for Alan. They are the bulging eyes of the horse in his favourite picture, the horse that he has apotheosised. Alan's childhood with his mother has provided him with the religious foundations. She told him " "God sees you, Alan. God's got eyes everywhere". He talks about Jill's amazing eyes and Dysart prompts Alan to say that Jill's eyes lead to thoughts of her breasts. At Jill's suggestion they stole away to the stables for a tryst. Both got undressed, but the noise of *Equus* made him uncomfortable. The stables are for Alan a sacred place, the Temple of *Equus*, the god's "Holy of Holies" so he could no more feel sexuality in the stables than he could if he were in a church. He tries to lie to Dysart that he had a successful experience with Jill:

I put it in her ... All the way. I shoved it. I put it in her all the way.
(294)

However, he cannot fool Dysart. Dysart ultimately gets him to admit the truth as Alan re-enacts the episode. The critics have lauded the re-enactment of the crime as one of the contemporary theatre's most dramatic spectacles. Barry B. Witham observed:

[*Equus*] is an exhilarating play: a remarkable blend of delayed exposition and theatrical effects of melodrama and circus... In addition, it is that increasingly rare serious drama which capitalizes on lurid events while maintaining a devotion to idea. (1979: 61)

Trying to perform sexually, Alan does not see her eyes but those of Equus “rolling” in rage and disappointment. Excited by the movie, and excited by the girl’s seductive charm, he tries to make love except that he is unable to do so: “When I touched her I felt him”. The sacrilegious need to transfer the ejaculation from the divine to human, under the accusing gaze of all-seeing Equus makes him panic. Although he tries to “violate” this holy place, Alan soon realises that this god is not the forgiving deity, but more like the moral, forbidding God of the Old Testament. The god Equus Alan confronts in the stables is neither the Christ-like victim he once venerated, nor is he a Dionysus he kneeled before, naked, and rode until he achieved *ejaculatio sacra*.

The events precipitating Alan’s fall both concern sexuality and change his relationship with his god. Ultimately Equus takes over, showing himself to be the self-determining master, with the result that Alan is unable to function sexually with Jill.

When I touched her...I couldn’t feel her flesh at all! I wanted the foam off his neck. His sweaty hide. Not flesh. Hide! Horse Hide... Then I couldn’t even kiss her. (294-95)

Mortified by his failure, humiliated, frightened, he sends Jill away, but Equus remains:

He’d seen everything — he was laughing...mocking. (296)

Left alone and naked, he tries to ask Equus forgiveness first:

Equus...Noble Equus...Faithful and
True...Godslave...Thou—God—Seest—NOTHING! (297)

However, the truth, as Dysart describes it, is that “Lord thy god is a jealous god. He sees you forever and ever, Alan. He sees you” (297). This leaves him with no choice but to blind his jealous, all-seeing God. Reaching out for a metal spike, he blinds the horses to absolve himself from the accusing glare of Equus’s all-seeing eyes. Like Pizarro, in blinding horses, he has destroyed a part of himself — the epicentre of his life, his god, and his lover. Torn between his desire to live and the Nietzschean life-denying force of morality, Alan strikes out blinding the horses so that the eyes that have tormented him for so long can no longer see. According to Mustazza, Equus is God of the Old Testament:

Ha, ha, the God of Job has come to torment him, the God who forces Job to admit finally, “I know thee only by report but now I see with my own eyes. / Therefore I melt away. I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6) (Mustazza 1992: 183)

Alan wants to be found and punished once his ordeal is over. The image of eyes is important in *Equus*. The all powerful eyes of Equus have “watched” Alan and cursed him, so in his re-enactment of the crime, his final gesture is

... *he collapses on the ground — stabbing at his own eyes with the invisible pick.*
Alan: Find me! ... Find me! ... Find me! (298)

If Equus, even after blinding him can be seeing him, he would rather blind himself, not to be able to see him at all on a symbolic level. The psychological wound has been found, however; Dysart can cure his obsession with horses and return him to the normal world. The price Alan has to pay is

Hopefully he'll feel nothing at his fork but Approved Flesh. *I doubt, however, with much passion!* Passion, you see can be destroyed by a doctor.

It cannot be created. (300)

All this is revealed by a dried up intellectual and humanist on whom passion is lost, but who in a way cannot but admire the boy whose perverse acts are indicative of a sublime gift, a capacity to comprehend and surrender to a fulfilling idea and life force.

Now, he is confronted with the same moral dilemma that Pizarro faced: would it be right to cure Alan and make him fit the Normal profile of society? What should Dysart do? Should he betray the profession, shirk his responsibility and let the boy be; or should he take away the boy's worship that is his sole existence? Through Dysart's problem, Shaffer's intention is not to present either form of worship or religion as perfect. The institutionalised form of worship and its clash with atheistic ideas have driven Alan to create his own worship, which has been perfect for him for a while. Then his worship is marred by its bestiality on a literal level, which offends societal mores. As his struggle for religious instincts and societal instincts clash, they create a conflict which drives him to violence. The dilemma is once again that of Pizarro's "if I go marketing for Gods, what

do I buy?" (II x), or which one do I let exist? Dysart's dilemma is not that the boy should be allowed to do his own thing; his dilemma is whether in curing him he will be able to find anything to put in its place or not. Civilization cannot tolerate unbridled violence. Dysart has no choice but to do what he does.

That is a truly tragic situation. Because it's not, again, a conflict between easy courses; although rather arduous, its not a conflict between leaving a boy as he is. It's a conflict in having not to leave him as he is and, at the same time, possibly eviscerate him. And this appears to be tragic. (Shaffer quoted in *Vogue* by Emelson 1975: 136)

Alan has nothing else but Equus, who is the core of his life and his very existence. "He is a modern citizen, for whom society doesn't exist" (273). Hesther desires to make him normal because "the boy is in pain". But Dysart believes that

The Normal is the indispensable, murderous God of Health... (257)

As for the boy's pain, it is "his pain, he made it, it is unique to him". However, even after he has realised all this, the reality prompts him to make a choice on behalf of Alan. Dysart feels worse because the boy has laid his trust in his hands, but, like Pizarro, he will have to make the choice on his behalf, breaking the trust of the boy. In order to keep his professional identity (which happens to be the core of his existence), he must destroy what has enlightened him with the cruel reality of curing. Dysart lacks the belief the boy has. As he did in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Shaffer has raised the hopes of the audience; they believe that that the protagonist cannot and will not succumb to the band. The audience is

waiting for Dysart to find some kind of middle ground, but their hopes are denied once again.

The nude scene is a visual symbol of Alan's naked psyche, which has been systematically stripped by Dysart. In the end, he wraps Alan in a blanket to cover his nakedness, but himself stands in front of the audience, in spiritual nakedness. He accepts his mediocrity as the basic weakness of men is exposed when confronted with decisions concerning the system. He cannot escape his "eternal timidity" (274). Although he questions the consequence, he goes through with the cure because he cannot give up the certainty of routine of a painless existence. All he has is his professional identity. If that is lost, he is not sure if he would be able to have enough intensity of passion to create a new spiritual life for himself. In one of Shaffer's later comedies *Lettice and Lovage*, Lotte tells Lettice the same thing

Ghosts! They're the worst! That's what we must never become
ourselves—you and I. (1988: 47)

This echoes Alan's fate. Alan is turned into a ghost like millions of others before him. Alan's being a ghost is the worst fate he could have. "Equus gallops off with Alan's intestines in his teeth" (Stacy 1991: 110). Dysart confesses that he is the destroyer of Alan's personal passion and pain:

You won't gallop anymore, Alan. Horses will be quite safe... You
will, however, be without pain. More or less completely without pain.
(300)

What happens to Dysart is not too different from what happens to Pizarro in his confrontation with the god-King, and to Gideon with the dissipated poet. The primitive mythical forces are assumed to be tamed by reason and conformity to acceptable behaviour by society. When met with the genuinely primitive, the protagonists generate a violence that can shatter our conceptualisation of ourselves as civilised beings. Such revelations have already destroyed Pizarro and Gideon; now it's Dysart's turn to suffer the outcome. Like Pizarro, who is left with the dead body of Atahualpa, Dysart is left hovering over the naked body of the worshipper he has revered and reluctantly destroyed. As in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Dysart binds himself to Alan, but the captor finds that he has become a prisoner of his own needs. We are left in the room filled with echoes of Equus' lament over the "irreversible, terminal" things done there. Dysart admits that

There is now in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out.
(301)

Bach, compares *Equus* to *Oedipus of Colonus* as it ends on a conciliatory note. However, Dysart neither dies, nor do friends and children in the end surround him. Unlike Pizarro, he clearly understands the situation. Like Oedipus, he is blinded and needs a way of seeing in the dark. After having been able to express criticism of and doubt about his profession, he now is at the onset of a new way, which will not lead into death but into life. Bach believes that

After having read the play, the reader knows that Dysart can see in the dark, only the psychiatrist does not know it yet. (Bach 1995: 353)

Once again, the audience go home with questions and doubts in their minds, but looking for new meanings. Conventional religion and the institutional set up give men nothing but structured worship and a life without the reality of self. As a product of the modern institutionalised church, the conventional believer (like Dora Strang) with wrong answers, or the non-believer (like Dysart) with no answers, has become the reality of our society. When new answers arise from passionate, primitive worshippers with the hope that they might find as an answer, a god, a worship, all hell breaks loose. The worshippers are destroyed, leaving people like Dysart with the sharp pain of confinement to convention.

Despite the claims of critics like Simon and Brustein, the play's content is definitely based on religion — specifically Christianity. Between his parents, whether one call religion “just bad sex”(Frank) or “sex makes for bad religion” (Dora), Alan never abandons Christian for the pagan principles. Christian elements, instead, provide a basis for the pagan. Equus starts out as a Christ figure. Ultimately, Equus turns himself to the “jealous God” of the Old Testament, who watches and judges the actions of his people. The main portions of Alan's belief in his god's suffering and triumph are definitely biblical, specifically Christian. Like Christ, Equus was born in a stable, and there are comparisons between Jesus' genealogy and Equus' genealogy. Prior to his secret night rides, Alan offers a lump of sugar,

which he calls “His Last Supper” and which contains his sins – that is how “into [Alan’s] hands he commends himself”. His secret ritual, following the subsequent self-flagellation, echoes the words of God at Christ’s baptism: “Behold, I give you my only begotten Son”. As for the concept of “becoming one” with *Equus*, his mother has told him:

When Christian cavalry first appeared in the New World, the pagans thought horse and rider was one person. (I vii)

Stacy points out here that a child’s imaginative mind might confuse *cavalry* with *Calvary*.

This ultimately turns the tension between Christian and Dionysian into Nietzschean frenzy. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche described Christianity as the “embodiment of disgust and antipathy for life” which offers “better life” (2000: 8). For Shaffer, we are used to “the second-rate formula of a Church — any church”. We settle for the institution whether it is in the form of a church, a shrine, or a synagogue. The human need for worship makes us demand a voice, a law, an oracle, which ultimately puts our whole existence in the hands of repressive men (Shaffer 1965b: 3). His resentment towards the system is apparent in *Equus* as well. Jung believes

Society expects...every individual to play the part assigned to him as perfectly as possible, so that a man who is a parson...must at all times...play the role of a parson, in a flawless manner. (Jung quoted in Van Niekerk 1996: 86)

Society expects Dysart to play the role of the psychiatrist and bring the boy back to its standards of *normalcy*. His band, his profession, is too much with him. Alan's deity, Equus, strikes a reverberation in Dysart's own inner life; however, he is not ready to sacrifice his identity. Like Pizarro, he chooses to oblige the band. Though Dysart does not admit defeat to the band before the act of destruction, he admits to it afterwards. The suffering this whole process causes them is what makes them real. He tells Alan his future, but he will rather settle for his romantic quest of searching for centaurs on the plains of Argos, as there are no centaurs in the real world. He is freed to suffer existence. Perhaps he will achieve a sense of spiritual fulfilment in the end. Conventional life has not provided him with answers. He can only make men unable to "jump clean-hoofed on to a whole new track of being" which even he is not sure is there. He himself is in the dark, but is supposed to give others light. The choice ends the worship. Thus, Shaffer's *Equus* forces us to be our own psychiatrist, exploring the real motives behind our "normal" lives.

In a patriarchal society, the importance of the individual is lost. The answer to the most difficult question confronted, according to Shaffer, should be man himself, not the rules and roles improvised by the band he belongs to. Thus, once again, the long cherished motto "each man kills the thing he loves" works. As it did for Pizarro and Mark, contact with a primitive and vital culture once again exacerbates the crisis of faith and fuels his need for belief. Dysart finds the case interesting because, like Pizarro, he has been tormented in his own life by religious and sexual failure. We know that for

Dysart it has never been a matter of choice. He has known all along that the boy is in pain and he must treat him. The extremity of Alan's case or the "Dionysian excess" (Walls 1984: 318), which has started Dysart's struggle, takes him to the ultimate conclusion. The doctor's dilemma stems from his concern that, if the source of Alan's passion and ecstasy is taken away from him, he will lose his individuality. If he replaces Alan's ecstasy with "Normal", Alan will still be confined, but in a limited sphere of solvable problems. He must convince himself that he is doing Alan a service rather than a disservice by proceeding with the treatment, which will turn him into another "normal" member of society. Nevertheless, he decides to nip the Dionysian wisdom that is trying to come out of him and help Alan, even if it makes Alan carry on as a half man. It is important to note that in the end Dysart takes upon himself neither the boy's passion nor his belief, but only his unenviable pain, which stays in his mouth like a "sharp chain".

Much of the meaning we draw from the play depends on the symbols and the way we react to them as audience. This is one of the keys to its complexity. There is no single valid meaning as different responses to the and associations with these symbols lead to our drawing different conclusions. The ending of the play puts the burden of the outcome of Dysart's decision and its consequences on the audience. Whether they find the experience and the outcome a positive experience for Dysart or they think that he is left with Alan's pain, as Bach has already pointed out, the truth of the matter is that Shaffer has successfully provoked on the part of

the audience to respond differently to Dysart and so to interpret his eventful fate differently as well.

Many critics thought *Shrivings* to be Shaffer's adieu to the theatre world. Shaffer, however, not only stunned the theatre world with *Equus*, using the same theme of the exploration into the nature of god, but he also proved that he is a master of his trade. Spurling is right about him when he says

Equus teaches us to call no playwright predictable until he is dead.
(Spurling 1975: 65)

CHAPTER 5

AMADEUS

My own apprehension of the divine is very largely esthetic [*sic*]. I am aware that this is by no means a general condition. It is for this reason, and despite the popular attention given to my play, I find it hard to confess openly that the existence of Mozart (as of Shakespeare) is central to my belief in the sovereign value of mankind, when all around the horrors of the world conspire to convince one of its complete dispensability. Not to be vague, the creation of the 'C Minor Mass' or the final act of 'Anthony and Cleopatra' seem to give a point to evolution: Most human activities do not. (Shaffer 1984a: 22)

Shaffer already had established and distinguished himself as one of the premier playwrights of our day. *Equus* had him a standing ovation for the only time in his life:

Strangely, this optimism has persisted with me for years. It sustained me all through the long period of time I spent working on *Amadeus* and it buoys me up now as I write the Preface. (Shaffer 1982: xvi)

John Russell Taylor, while commenting on Shaffer's works from *Five Finger Exercise* to *Equus* ended his essay with the words,

After *Equus* there is just no guessing what he [Shaffer] may do next, but it seems inevitable that it will be grand and glorious. (1974: 32) And precisely right Taylor

was in his observation, as a “grand” and “glorious” *Amadeus* was the outcome of Shaffer’s next attempt at drama. Shaffer had all along been warning his critics “I want to do many different types of theatre” (Smith 1982: 452); true to his words, *Amadeus* took his career from epic to operatic proportions of theatre. In the previous plays Shaffer had explored the inexhaustible theme of the quest for wholeness through dimensions of religion (*The Royal Hunt of the Sun*), religion and sexuality (*Equus*), and politics and ideology (*Shrivings*). *Amadeus* brought together religion, sexuality, politics, and professional fulfilment. The philosophical debate reached the sublime level where the “other” for whom the rivals contended was no longer man but God. Being a firm believer in man’s primordial need for worship, he had used the ancient religious symbols of the Sun (as in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*), the Horse (as in *Equus*), and its modern counterpart ideology (as in *Shrivings*). This time Shaffer found in Mozart’s music “an evocative and aural symbol of divinity equivalent to the sun and horse images of earlier play” (Lounsberry 1984:21). Illuminating the spiritual issues, *Amadeus* was a battle concerning the granting of godly gifts, causing a loss of faith in conventional religion and the destruction of the gods of the new religion. This continued insistence on the causes of loss faith in conventional religion and spiritual awareness through themes and symbols related to us as human beings formed part of his continued quest to understand the nature of God.

Since 1963, Shaffer had wanted to do a play on the Faust theme.³⁴ The legend of Faust, he thinks, is most alive even today. Shaffer's dream of staging a version of the Faust legend, was realized in 1979 — five plays and numerous revisions later — with the premiere of *Amadeus* in London (Plunka 1988; 172). Shaffer had heard that Salieri was suspected of causing Mozart's death by poison. "He (Salieri) is said to have disliked Mozart, who had become to some degree a rival of his in Vienna" (Scholes quoted in Scott 1980: 40). *Amadeus* retold the story of this supposed rivalry between the obsessed, jealous court composer Salieri, and the egocentric, impudent genius Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. P. H. Lang in his book *Music in Western Civilization* describes the Salieri Shaffer has based his character on;

An intriguer... there can be no question of Salieri's malevolent interference with the success of his Austrian colleagues. His fine musicianship told him to concentrate his malice on Mozart, whose lamentable fate was due in no small degree to the Italian's machinations. (Quoted in Scott 1980: 40)

Shaffer worked out a fable that was fascinating and ingenious; as Gianakaris puts it:

Shaffer seized on this alleged misdeed to fashion an arresting drama concerning not only Mozart's life and times but the nature of genius, stifled in a humanly flawed world. (Gianakaris 1991d: 127)

34 For details, see Plunka's *Peter Shaffer: Roles, Rites, and Rituals in the Theatre*. He refers to Shaffer's interviews in *The New York* (1963) and *Times Evening Standard* (1970), *After Dark* (1971), *The Manchester Guardian* (1973) where Shaffer showed deep interest in the topic.

Initially, conflicting stories about Mozart's death and his funeral had aroused Shaffer's interest on the subject. In an interview with Chambers, Shaffer stated how he started writing *Amadeus*:

[*Amadeus* began] idly when I was reading an account of a storm at the burial of Mozart which drove the mourners away but which is not mentioned in the Vienna meteorological records. (Shaffer quoted in Chambers 1980: 13)

These discrepancies surrounding the death of Mozart in 1791 resulted in the play:

I thought I detected the kernel of a drama here, and I made a few notes. (Shaffer quoted in Gelatt 1980: 13)

Shaffer has admitted that the play was difficult to write. It presented the greatest challenge in theatre for him. According to Londré:

When Peter Shaffer chose to make Antonio Salieri the protagonist of *Amadeus*, he set himself a task as formidable as that of Shakespeare in arousing sympathy for Macbeth or Richard III. (1991: 115)

In order to transform the kernel into a public event without betraying it, he did extensive research for three years on Mozart "the perfectly finished channel of inspiration who could just write down notes without pausing" (Shaffer quoted in Chambers 1980: 13) before he achieved his goal. It took him another two years to complete his work on *Amadeus*. The technical

brilliance and thematic complexity appeared to arise out of deeply felt experience. The task Shaffer undertook was tremendous. Shaffer admits:

[I] spent virtually a year attempting a different opening scene every week. It was an exceedingly hard task to find the centre of the work to reduce a mass of historical material to anything remotely coherent and yet dramatic (Shaffer 1982: xvi).

However, it soon evolved into a larger form, turning definitely into a play about divinity:

I had a bigger and grander story...It was the enormous theme of envy of genius by mediocrity. It is also about the relevance of human goodness in art...(Shaffer quoted in Townsend 1986: 218)

Amadeus, like *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, is a visual and aural spectacle. It also explores the metaphysical “first questions” (Lounsberry 1991: 76) of being, identity. However, this time the emphasis is even more than ever on a sense of the divine — the nature of God and the human relationship to it. The questions of being and existence of God lie beyond rational knowledge. According to Lounsberry

Given only the certainty of uncertainty about the existence of God and the meaning of life, ethics in Shaffer’s plays are necessarily spare and tentative. (1991: 83)

Shaffer’s intent to find out what can re-ignite man’s spiritual nature and turn religion into passion is dealt with in a different way this time. *Amadeus* also bears great resemblance to *Equus*. Sobriety versus passion, mediocrity versus genius, already talked about in *Equus* and even in *Shrivings* in the

characters of Gideon Petrie and Mark Askelon, are at the centre of play. Enhancing the conflict between faith and art, Shaffer expressed God's grace in artistic inspiration through Mozart's music.

According to Shaffer, we do not and cannot know with certainty the meaning of life or whether God exists. Despite this reality, we seek meaning and worship. Life without a sense of the divine, according to Shaffer, seems meaningless. His exploration of this poignant paradox is apparent here too. The questioning about the nature of divinity is at its strongest in *Amadeus*. He has used Mozart as a conduit of God until "God blew too hard on the flute and it burst".

In Salieri's absurd pact with God in *Amadeus*, Shaffer has not been trying to attack organised religion, nor is he accusing business industry or government. The focus, once again, is on how certain individuals insist on conforming to established guidelines. Even more than that, Shaffer seems to be bringing a certain assumed fact to our attention. The human assumption, he believes, that God automatically rewards virtue needs to be re-worked. There are occasional reminders that this is untrue. One cannot bargain with God as Salieri has tried to do — chastity for artistic talent. More than that, as Lounsberry noted, "in *Amadeus* Shaffer introduces two new ideas regarding the divine: divine need and divine use" (1991: 87). Thus, the play becomes an exploration of a different kind: Man created God because he needed Him; in order to let Himself be known, God would need Man. "God needed Mozart to let himself into the world",

Salieri tells us. Through these words of Salieri's, Shaffer has made his first suggestion of God's having needs, just as human beings do. However, it is more complicated than that. In *Salieri*, Shaffer has tried to maintain that, while God can fulfil human needs, His needs remain unfulfilled.

His earlier plays have introduced us to the protagonists who are indecisive adults living in a world filled with lies, illusions, and make-belief. However, they feel secure in this world, clinging to artificialities for fear of losing everything. This time, he has created a protagonist with a difference. Salieri, not only revolts against God; he fearlessly breaks loose from the staid existence that he has been used to. He adjusts himself to the change. Nevertheless, he learns from his Alter Ego in the process. Though he revolts and retaliates, he still longs to become one with his rival, or in this case be him.

Through his unique incorporation of history along with Artaudian Theatre of Cruelty, and Brechtian epic theatre, Shaffer gave the theatre world another rare spectacle. *Amadeus* premiered in Great Britain at National Theatre's largest stage, the Olivier Theatre on 2nd November 1979, and "quickly became the most successful play in that theatre's history" (Jones 1987: 145). Creating theatre history has not been new to Shaffer and *Amadeus* did it once again for him. The play was about "the extinction of divinity" (Shaffer quoted in Scott 1980: 40) as were *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Equus*. After an extensive run of eighteen months there, it transferred

to the West End's Her Majesty's Theatre. In his Preface to the play, an elated Shaffer wrote:

The Sunday Times of London reports that audiences began lining up at six o'clock in the morning to buy the few tickets which are sold on the day of performance. This is hardly a usual practice with the Great British Public. (Shaffer 1981a: ix)

As is his wont, Shaffer moved the play from there to America. Shaffer, a confessed compulsive-revisionist, revised the play in order to achieve greater clarity, and to link Salieri more directly with Mozart's ruin. In November, 1980, when the play opened in Washington, D. C., he had changed quite a bit of the play in order "to make it more and more itself". Without altering the basic story, he sharpened and enriched the motivations of his protagonist:

One of the faults which I believe existed in the London version was simply that Salieri had too little to do with Mozart's ruin... Now, in this version, he [Salieri] seems to me to stand where he properly belongs — at the wicked centre of the action. (Shaffer quoted in Gianakaris 1991d: 128)

The play received an enthusiastic reception in Washington D. C. A month later, it moved to New York's Broadhurst Theatre and the public flocked to see it. The result was success once again; *Amadeus* proved to be as successful in New York, as it had been in London.

Amadeus received mixed reviews from critics after its first run in London and America. However, the general reception of the play was more favourable in America than it had been in London. Most of the criticism was directed towards Shaffer's characterization of Mozart and his unhistorical representation of the facts. He was also accused of reducing a large-scale possibility into gimmicks.³⁵ Michael Billington of *The Guardian*, in his "Divining for a Theme" (5th Nov. 1979) had reservations concerning the impact of the second act where Salieri and Mozart were reduced to god-destroyer and god:

The presentation, in short, is immaculate. But having wisely decided that Salieri was a spiritual, rather than a literal prisoner, I just wished Shaffer had not tried to elevate the play into a majestic homily on the death of a god. (quoted in Plunka 1988: 173)

James Fenton's derisive indictment of the play deemed it a "perfectly nauseating load of ...shit" due to its offensive nature concerning the characterization of Mozart:

There is all the difference in the world between a depiction of boring character and a boring depiction of a character. The same goes for offensiveness (quoted in Watson 1987: 160)

Esslin's analysis of the play was:

Thematically Peter Shaffer's new play [*Amadeus*]...deals with the mysteries of genius and of the creative process (as did *Equus*) and with

35 For detailed criticism on the first run of the play in London and America, see Watson's *The Ritual Plays of Peter Shaffer* (1987), Plunka's *Peter Shaffer: Roles, Rites, and Rituals in the Theatre* (1988).

the contrast between the overcivilized and the natural man (as did *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*), between sexual restraint and the free flow of self-expression through sex (as did *The Battle of Shrivings*). (Esslin 1979: 20)

However, he also thought that Shaffer made a huge mistake by making his Mozart use scatological language in polite society, which resulted in his being “a figure of grotesque inappropriateness, a veritable monstrosity...” rather than the “individual of earthy sexuality and scatological expressiveness” that Mozart was historically (Esslin 1979: 20):

What a paradox; the most sublime spirituality issuing forth from a man who is capable of making endless jokes about shit and piss! (Esslin 1979: 20)

He believed that Shaffer failed to manifest the sublimity of the subject matter, which demanded lines of convincing impact. The flatness of language with which Shaffer wrote even the part of Salieri, a representative of the “‘mediocrity’ writ large”, prevents his character from reaching any real heights (Esslin 1979: 20).

One of the best compliments came from Clive Barnes of the *New York Post*, who admired the play for its excellence:

This is a play of the most infinite diversions, a play to savour, enjoy, laugh at and yet one that leaves most agreeable aftertaste of thought to it. The memories of its vignettes, and passionate ideas, will last years after the journey home. And that is what theatre is all about. (1980: 65)

Over the years, Shaffer has been disillusioned by the medium of film. *The Five Finger Exercise* (movie, 1962), *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (movie, 1968),

The Private Ear and *The Public Eye* (movies, 1972), had fallen short of the excellence of the original pieces because of the writing style of the screenwriters. He adapted *Equus* (movie, 1977) for the screenplay himself to avoid vagueness. Despite his promise, the director, Sidney Lumet insisted on presenting the blinding of the horses in “ultrarealistic” fashion (Gianakaris 1985: 87). In an interview with Gianakaris in 1980 (which the interviewer refers to as Tapes) Shaffer said that “he could not bear to watch the blinding scene when it was shot, nor can he look at it even now on the screen — so painful was its crude literalism” (Gianakaris 1985: 97). Since then Shaffer has almost sworn himself off movies. But Milos Forman “persisted for two years” despite Shaffer’s hesitance till he agreed to discuss the project with him:

When I asked him what he would do with my piece, he told me what he would *not* do: turn it into a stagey hybrid, neither play nor picture.
(Shaffer 1984b: 56)

Shaffer did the screenplay once again and he worked tirelessly with the director. This, he has assured us, is the first and the last of the metamorphoses of the play:

...no matter how fortunate our effort may prove in its reception, it will spawn no sequels. There will be no television series of half-hour dramas in which Salieri plots a different method of murdering Mozart each week, only to be frustrated by the wily little genius in the twenty-ninth minute. (Shaffer 1984b: 57)

Though critics like Kessler (1984) and Simon (1984) claimed it to be as bad as the play, offering nothing but “worn-out truism” (Kessler 1984), critics like Gianakaris and Blake (1984) praised the brilliance with which Shaffer

fused the psychological intent of the play with philosophical and theological questions. The film was a great box office success:

Amadeus, the film, marks the next step in an extraordinary artistic odyssey: it represents an innovative attempt to employ film in conveying abstract values through a fusion of the visual and the musical. (Gianakaris 1985: 89)

Shaffer calls the movie “a parallel work” to the original play, refusing to call it just an adaptation.

Film is a director’s medium; the author is a second class citizen. I’d much rather be writing for the theatre, because my job is working with words not with images. (Shaffer quoted in Armitstead 1987: 8)

After the first three plays we have discussed, *Amadeus* repeats Shaffer’s concern about divinity but it has become broader with a treatment that is far deeper than before. As in the previous plays, the prevailing values are represented by one of the protagonists — “the mediocre Salieri, servant of God but shunned by him” (Chambers 1985: 13). His opposite is blessed with the transcendental quality. The difference this time is that Mozart lives his life as an expression of Divinity, but he is not fully aware of it. One thing is for certain — his life as an expression of divinity is not reducible to any time, place or to any religious system or morality. Shaffer wants us to try, experience, and comprehend the mystery of Mozart and his genius. He holds Mozart in great reverence and, commenting on the paradox that Mozart was as a person and artist, Shaffer has said:

I myself have this mystery in Mozart to hold intact for almost 40 years, ever since, sitting on the grass of a hot summer garden in England, I

first heard his Piano Concerto in A Major (K.488) on a wind-up portable phonograph. Hearing it now, I still become amazed all over again by its *certainty*. The best of Mozart's works — say, the last dozen of these piano concerti — demonstrate the thrilling paradox at the heart of created things... (Shaffer 1984a: 23).

Amadeus is Shaffer's own reflection on the nature of genius and the value of artistic success, just as *Equus* is a symbol of his anger at the times he lives in. Shaffer believes the radiance and splendour Mozart's music exudes, to be the divine principle reflected in the world. For him art embodies beauty and beauty is a sign of divinity. This is what brings passion into the creation of Absolute Beauty.

Skilfully exploring the very depths of the "condition humaine" (Anonymous 1981: 33), Shaffer has once again created characters of startling credibility. The relationship between two or more characters has always been a salient feature of his plays, and *Amadeus* is no exception to that generalization either. Shaffer directs the crux of the psychological interest of the play not onto the genius Mozart, but onto his jealous competitor, Salieri, who is now nearly forgotten:

The action of the play is narrated and interpreted through the lens of Salieri's consciousness — a daring approach in view of Mozart's universal appreciation today and Salieri's almost total anonymity.
(Gianakaris quoted in Bidney 1986: 183)

The implication hovering over the play has been that Salieri ultimately poisoned Mozart to be rid of the great musician, which turns it into a

controversial play. Salieri and Mozart are personifications of two opposing concepts of the artist: the craftsmanlike composer who is a master in his own right, but never goes beyond the limit of accepted tastes, and the divinely inspired genius, the original and therefore more successful innovator of the art.

Sharing the common theme of the death of a god, *Amadeus* presents the vision of Mozart, the god of music. Amadeus was Mozart's second Christian name. However, the play is not about Mozart; it is about Salieri and his love of and faith in God.

Amadeus revolves around Salieri, is acted out mainly by Salieri, is set largely in Salieri's mind, and is about Salieri — his characterisation being complex and one of Shaffer's finest achievements to date.
(Scott 1980: 40)

Salieri is as riveting or arresting a protagonist as any other in the previous plays. He immediately captures the audience's attention as he offers a self-conscious examination of the play's narration without diminishing the naked theatricality of the play.

Salieri bargained with God in his youth, undertaking to live a life of virtue, honouring Him through music, in exchange for fame as a composer. The audience is forced to experience the drama through Salieri's eyes; Shaffer's Salieri is intelligent, poised, and aristocratic in manners and possesses

appreciation for beauty. Salieri's purpose is to win posterity's understanding of his efforts to suppress the voice of God thirty-two years later.

Once again *Amadeus* links to other works of Shaffer's dramatic oeuvre where the life of the protagonist is determined or changed by the introduction of an intruder into the little listless and lustreless world of the protagonist. Just as Shrivings was destroyed by Mark's arrival, Salieri has a foreboding that Mozart's arrival on the musical scene of Vienna will forever upset his life:

I confess I was alarmed by his coming... So to the Baroness Waldstätten's I went. That night changed my life.³⁶ (239-40)

The character of the genius, Mozart, presents various ambiguities as well. Instead of being presented as a god, Mozart is portrayed as an overgrown prodigy, who combines the genius of a truly great composer with the scatological humour of an "obscene child". Salieri's first encounter with Mozart's music immensely shocks him. He recognises God's love (*Amadeus*) pouring through Mozart's music, while his own music has never even tasted an iota of it. Displaying none of the virtues at which Salieri had worked so hard, Mozart has been writing what can only be divine music. It is obvious

36 The page numbers in parenthesis after quotations from *Amadeus* (including 'Authors Notes') in this chapter all refer to *Amadeus* (1981b, USA: Harper & Row) printed in *Landmarks of Modern British Drama: The plays of the Seventies* (1986), Great Britain: Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd.

to Salieri that Mozart has received the divine grace at birth which he has been struggling for all his virtuous life.

Up to this point Salieri has considered himself a special vessel of God, a divinely chosen instrument, whose task is to reveal God's glory on earth through music. Mozart's music declares to him his obvious mediocrity. He is incensed, as God has been listening to Mozart's music. God's preference of a libidinous, foul-mouthed, and extremely uncouth Mozart to the dutiful, hardworking and devoted Salieri is outrageous to him. God has broken their bargain by giving Mozart the voice He has denied Salieri. Sticking to his bargain, he has been the dedicated artist, but now he cries out to God in protest. "The idea of a disappointed lover of God taking revenge on his favoured but unworthy mouthpiece in full power" (Anonymous 1981: 33) not only dramatises the moment; it also gives it sublimity (Anonymous 1981: 33). His duologue with God arises partly as a response to the situation, while the rest can be seen as an explanation for what he stands for: his philosophy, his ambition, his failure, or even his obsessions, desires or fears.

He finds it morally outrageous that, ignoring his devotion, God has bestowed His esthetic blessing on a man he regards as amoral and unworthy of divine favour. He sees Mozart's genius as an open mockery of his merits. His God of Bargains is now mocking him with it. For Salieri, God has defied both religion and morality by choosing to bestow His highest rewards on a careless child who has no respect for the sacred, and

indulges every whim for the lack of self-control. Salieri's sudden realization that he has been a woefully inferior musician all his life brings him to the theological issue of blasphemy. Bestowing favour on Mozart equals rewarding a blasphemous artist. He feels tricked out of his rightful reward as he considers himself the most righteous of God's musical servants. His anger towards this God who has given "a giggling child" what turns his "most considered [notes] into lifeless scratches" leaves him with no choice but to declare war — a war of pride he knows he is bound to lose in the end. The religious morality of art has always been the most sacred premise of belief for Salieri. God has not only slighted the ethics of effort, but even worse it seems to him that God has called into question the very basis of religious morality. God has renounced his virtue; he in turn will renounce God.

However, we see that his religion has always been shifted by orthodoxy, practised through manipulation. His prime motive has always been his desire to be famous through music. Material success means little to Salieri as he has been seeking spiritual fulfilment. When he fails in this, however, he links his fate with Mozart's to gain immortality. In order to destroy God's beloved, the offensive device of Shaffer's protagonist is to weaken the material/financial back up of the Alter Ego.

He listens to Mozart with warm sympathy. Only he knows how great Mozart is, so Salieri is Mozart's most avid listener. He is the perfect ear, appreciating every subtlety, recognizing the genius behind it. Salieri never

tries to get rid of Mozart's music; instead his stance against Mozart has to do with his revolt against God's will. That is how he achieves his tragic stature as "Mozart's friend and Amadeus' enemy" (Conroy, Jr. 1989-90: 33). He is angelic when he listens to his music, and diabolical when he appears as The Messenger of Death. This combination of his villainy and aesthetic sensibilities creates the tension in the play.

In revenging himself on an ironic God with whom he has made a bargain, he learns that

Bargains made with God are as unpredictable as those made with the devil. (Smith 1982: 468)

God has kept His promise but He has sent Mozart to mock Salieri's mediocrity, not just in music, but in his bargain as well. This God, his Lord, is a mocking God. Suicide is violence turned against self, and his extreme gesture to be heard by God is suicide. He is voicing his complaint against the world in which the right-thinking and pious are mocked in their devotion, while the boorish and insensitive are rewarded to excess. As he dares to rise up in anger against God, we sympathise with him, and feel his pain:

His blasphemy is less the result of his evil nature than it is the product of a wilful God who has stacked the deck against him. (Conroy, Jr. 1990: 34)

According to Huber & Zapf:

...there is a degree of thematic and structural complexity to *Amadeus* which makes it, beyond its sensational popularity, *a dramatic masterpiece in its own right*. [Emphasis my own] (1984: 312)

Gianakaris (1991b) believes *Amadeus* obtained the most praise for its dramaturgical strength. As Shaffer did in the previous plays, *Amadeus* is also comprised of major scenes with haunting theatrical effects to create an unforgettable picture as well as symbolic moments to conclude each act. These add far more to the visual and aural senses. Shaffer embodies crucial truths in a single image, thus creating an understanding that is a new revelatory whole.

The unifying themes that carry on in *Amadeus* include the theme of Cruelty in the Artaudian sense, the clash between a young and an old man, along with the mysteries of God and religion. According to Plunka the unconscious, the id, the archetypal images that form the core of Artaud's drama, are there in *Amadeus* as well. Artaud believed that "in true theatre a play disturbs the senses' repose, frees the repressed unconscious, incites a kind of virtual revolt..." (Artaud quoted in Plunka 1988: 42). Shaffer also believes that theatre is supposed to incite the imagination, fuelling our inner drives, instincts, and archetypes. Shaffer has said in the Preface to *The Collected Plays of Peter Shaffer*.

I became a playwright finally to be part of the grandiloquent and showy world of imaginative reality. (1982: x)

He believes theatre is supposed to surprise people, as they go there to be "surprised *by* things and *into* things: by beauty and into beauty: by rite into reality" (Shaffer 1965b: 3).

The Artaudian elements are apparent here too. Artaud believed:

The theatre will never find itself again — i.e., constitute means of true illusion — except by finishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit or illusory, but interior. (Quoted in Plunka 1988: 42-43)

This perfectly describes Shaffer's character of Salieri and its relationship with the audience. Artaud's desire to present evil on stage so as to purge and heal the audience from the "sickness" it was suffering can be seen in Salieri's jealousy of Mozart concerning his job and career in *Amadeus*. Music also plays an important role in the play's iconography. Sound and rhythm are important in general throughout the play, especially in the characterization of Mozart; for instance as a sort of noisy, irritating counterpoint to his music is his piercing giggle. Visceral experience here is more aural than just visual. Shaffer has described the correlation between music and playwriting on more than one occasion:

I find that ideas tend to rearrange themselves in the proper order at the keyboard, and this can be very helpful when one is in the throes of working out a plot. (Shaffer quoted in Gelatt 1980: 12)

And again in Plunka, he maintains:

You don't need words. All the great effects in life are nonverbal — which is a galling thing for a writer to admit. (Shaffer quoted in Plunka 1988: 48)

The stylistic variety of the play is unquestionable. Shaffer started with it as a play of ideas, but it unexpectedly developed an operatic element during the creative process:

Amadeus is also part historical drama, part melodrama, part vaudeville, and part music-appreciation course. (Londré 1991: 121)

Shaffer's use of music in the play could be seen as an adaptation of opera for drama, as he used music to enhance the performative dimension of the play. The artistic success of the play has a lot to do with the technical refinement and dramatic richness on one hand, and the intellectual brilliance with which the theme is handled on the other.

I now look back on *Amadeus* and say 'of course! That's what it was! Opera!' I never deliberately sat down and said I was going to compose an opera. But as I worked, I could see operatic elements... (Shaffer quoted in Huber & Zapf 1984: 313)

If we view *Amadeus* as "operatic" in the light of what Shaffer has said, then Act I scene: i which opens with the hissing sounds, whispering, and rapid exchange of words between two Venticelli, appears as the "overture" to "*The Death of Mozart or Did I Do It?*" confession composition. This directly leads the audience to the greater composition of Mozart's at the end transforming it into a melodramatic "grand opera".

I love opera and the operatic technique...I think *Amadeus* is a very operatic play;...I don't just mean rhythmic in structure but also in its stylisation. There's almost something choric about it. For example, the Venticelli in *Amadeus*. They are like the overture in the beginning of *The Marriage of Figaro*. It's an overture to something but it's an operatic one and not naturalistic, obviously; and yet it is conveying how gossips

operate and the effect they create. (Shaffer quoted in Plunka 1988: 48-9)

The play's iconography also bears a strong resemblance to *Equus*. The choric effect of the "Equus Noise" heralding the presence of the equine divine is paralleled here by the presence of the two Venticelli, the gossipmongers. Their "stage whispers" fill the theatre with a snake-like hissing of Salieri's name. The rich iconography also shows Salieri addressing the audience directly, sometimes in an aside while the other characters "freeze" momentarily or the sound track is fleetingly silenced. According to Smith:

It is, in fact, the music that passes through Mozart that makes him, for Salieri, the vessel of God. (1982: 466)

Structurally the play is divided in two acts. The action of the play takes place in Vienna in November 1823, and, in recall, the decade 1781-1791. By effectively using the technique of intermingling two different times, which allows the audience to receive its information irrespective of historical sequence. Shaffer specifies that "the scenes must flow into one another without pause from the beginning to the end of the play" without interruption (1981b: 222). The motif of Salieri's Faustian pact with God in Act I and its perverted form in Act II link the thematic elements relating to fame and genius. Shaffer needed to have Salieri reflect Shaffer's innovative mind at work. After the amazing fact of the immensity of Mozart's genius has sunk in, he must be made to revolt against God's ordained design. The

ending of the first act gives us precisely that. Salieri's actual jealousy and his corresponding plans for revenge dramatize the first Act, while Act II centres on the planned destruction of the genius, Mozart.

Shaffer's way of dealing with his subject in *Amadeus* is highly complex. He has combined his dramatic flair with a wide range of knowledge about subjects such as history, psychology, and sociology. This helps him achieve maximum exploration of the theme and, at the same time, maximum intensity of communication between stage and audience. Shaffer once again presents a story of two widely different men of different temperaments linked by a common spiritual bond. Following the pattern of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Equus*, Shaffer introduces a narrator as the mediator. Like Old Martin (in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*), and Martin Dysart (in *Equus*), Antonio Salieri, court composer of Emperor Joseph II of Austria, instantly engages our attention as the self-confessed murderer of Mozart. According to Simard:

The entire world of the drama, hinged upon external, historical reality, is within the mind of Salieri and is thus subjective; his perceptions are what are at issue in this play, for at this point, even Salieri does not know if he killed Mozart. Ultimately, the reader must assign responsibility and guilt in *the absence of a god who rewards and punishes*.
[*Emphasis my own*] (Quoted in Plunka 1988: 193)

That is how the audience is turned into god. The central key to turn the audience into God is the manipulation of perception, largely through the use of the narrator. It is a psychoanalytical situation, where a troubled

narrator recounts the details of his situation, regressing to the past, thereby confronting, and perhaps exorcising his demons.

The stage is set for a modern audience whom Salieri conjures and thus creates an ideal case of the past becoming alive and actually speaking to us, interpreting itself. Like Brechtian spectators, the audience play the observer, critic, thinker, and judge. Shaffer, through Salieri, has made use of the most conspicuous device of the play in *Amadeus*, the invocation of the modern audience. Interpreting his relationship with Mozart during the last hours of his life in the November of 1823, he calls upon an audience of the future as his "Confessors".

The audience is more likely to identify with Salieri than with Mozart, first because it is difficult to identify with a genius, and second because the young Mozart, as Shaffer presents him, is hopelessly immature, self-centered, and spoiled. He shocks Salieri (and the audience) by his outrageous behaviour and by his obsession with scatological language. One senses that even the playwright was never comfortable with this strange but intriguing phenomenon. (Smith 1982: 466)

The play occurs in flash backs through lengthy monologues as Salieri, narrator and analysand, re-enacts the crucial history contributing to his present psychological state. Just like Dysart, Salieri takes over the additional role of the stage director along with that of the narrator, directing the analytical play within the play. He conducts the play in the form of a continuous interplay between narrative-reflective interpretations and scenic

reconstruction of the past (i.e. from 1781 onward) culminating in the death of Mozart in 1791. The past he recreates for the future audiences gains objective weight, interpreting itself to the audience. Thus, the audience become the interpreters of the interpreter.

Alternating among general historical observations on his times, interpretation of himself, introduction of characters, comments on scenes and events in the play, Salieri is directly in a dialogue with the audience. He is the one who deals with more concrete questions about events, characters motives, along with all the internal and external factors contributing to the eventual catastrophe. That is how the audience perceive the play through Salieri's eyes.

Jones, along with Huber and Zapf, Colvin and many other critics, believes that *Amadeus* surpasses the success of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and even *Equus*. It is Shaffer's most popular work to date. However, once again, critics have complained of what they consider Shaffer's over-whelmingly superficial theatricality. Jack Kroll's analysis on *Amadeus* was:

A large-voiced treatment of large themes, whose essential superficiality is masked by skilful theatricality. (Kroll quoted in Hinden 1985; 15)

For Walter Kerr, the story line is flawed:

No matter how betrayed or jealous or secretly humiliated [Salieri] may feel, it is impossible to believe that he should wish to destroy music that so moves him. (Kerr 1981: 3)

Taylor commented that the dialogue of the play needed “sprucing up”. However, despite everything, the play makes one take interest: “for quite a bit of its length, it does, dammit, work” (Taylor 1980: 48).

Shaffer’s characterisation is as superb in *Amadeus* as it is in *Equus*, *Shrivings*, and *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. He has explored new dimensions to enhance the depth of his characters. The play has, however, created controversy regarding the main characters, especially that of Mozart. Among the critics who object to Shaffer’s characterisation of Mozart, the biggest outcry has been against the character’s vulgarity, and against Mozart’s continuous scatological prose. But they tend to miss Shaffer’s point behind the characterization. According to Sullivan, “Indeed, without Mozart’s scatology (or some other, presumably equally offensive manifestation of his libidinal organization), it is scarcely possible to read *Amadeus* coherently at all” (1988: 48). The uncontrolled side of his character, which at first seems as irritating to the audience as it is to Salieri, gets developed to a degree. His scatological language, his “*unforgettable giggle — piercing and infantile*”, and his arrogant self-assertion, add up to show his capacity for the elemental, the passionate, “natural” life, which Salieri lacks. The rebellious side of his character coexists with a repressive, almost tyrannical side in an unresolved contradiction. It is only in his music that the contradictions are reconciled. Shaffer’s depiction also affirms the aptness of the name Amadeus (Beloved of God) for Mozart, for it is *his* music, not Salieri’s that has become a staple in our heritage (Gianakaris 1991d: 131).

A literary work based on the lives of famous men does not need to be grounded on historical facts. Shaffer has not distorted historical facts about Mozart and the times he lived in, except where Salieri the man is concerned. His relationship with Mozart/Amadeus includes aspects of psychology, sociology, musicology, and theology.

Basically, *Amadeus* is concerned with an archetypal psychological antagonism of an individual (Salieri). He personifies a different mode of opera writing and opposes everything that his opposite (Mozart) stands for: Italian vs. German, the heroic versus the everyday. Through all this, Mozart emerges as a positive character in Shaffer's paradigm, despite the negative attributes critics accuse him of giving Mozart. Along with undeniable musical brilliance, charm and vitality, Shaffer's Mozart is given to arrogance, coarseness of language, infidelity and childish behaviour. Shaffer has explained that it was never his intent to demean Mozart. On the contrary, he wants his audience to know Mozart better as a genius of far greater complexity than standard portraits grant him.

Shaffer makes use of dramatic license with the historic facts, but his interpretation is consistent as well. According to Thompson:

The worst crime against history in the play and the film is not in painting Mozart as a brat or Salieri as the lizard of murderous envy; it is in presenting Mozart as unaware of what is going on, while Salieri is a sleek Iago. And it is sheer hypocrisy to try to pretend that this wizard Salieri is a mediocrity. (Thompson quoted in Townsend 1986: 207)

However, comments of critics like Fenton, Thompson or Martin Esslin that Shaffer's Mozart is "a figure of grotesque inappropriateness, a veritable monstrosity" (quoted in Jones 1987: 149) are typical of the criticism Shaffer has received for his portrayal of Mozart. Such comment cannot disguise the subtlety and power of his characterization and central themes. Nevertheless, critics like Gianakaris, Gelatt and Plunka have contested such views, maintaining that Shaffer based his characterization of Mozart on historical facts. Mozart's scatological language, animal play acting, financial difficulties, his marriage, a domineering father, all are well-documented historic facts in his biographies and his personal correspondence.³⁷ All reliable historical documents support Shaffer's views about Mozart's life. According to Gianakaris, "Evidence of Mozart's linguistic eccentricities has been public since 1938, forty-one years before *Amadeus*" (1991d: 129). Gianakaris affirms "Shaffer *has* followed factual sources to a remarkable degree" creating a "candid portrait of Mozart that opens up his more human qualities" (Gianakaris 1991d: 131). According to Gelatt:

Amadeus is the work of a writer who has done his homework fastidiously well. (1980: 12)

Plunka believes that "critics refuse to acknowledge that Mozart, the darling of the bourgeoisie, could be so offensive" (1988: 178), when history proves

37 Even Mozart's sister Nannerl, has been quoted to verify the historic facts:

Outside of music he was, and remained nearly always, a child. This was the chief trait of his character on its shady side. He always needed a father, mother or other guardian. (Quoted in Gianakaris 1991d: 130)

that he was. This is the real and unexpurgated Mozart on stage. Although Shaffer has tried to maintain historical accuracy, he has never tried to hide the adjustments where he has used poetic license.³⁸

Critics also tend to forget that *Amadeus* was never intended to be a biography of the composer or a historical documentary. The historical authenticity of the character is actually irrelevant when one looks into its use as part of a theatrical whole. Mozart is recalled from Salieri's memories and as such is authentic as a caricature beside the smooth character which Salieri attributes to himself. He identifies with his God. His longing to be identified through His art turns into annihilating thoughts. But God — the object Salieri longs for — cannot be annihilated or assimilated. The inevitable result is a backward flow of the destructive instinct upon the self. According to Shaffer, the essential quality of life called "passion" has turned into a paranoid self-exaggeration and consequently into compulsive-destructive behaviour towards anyone who comes between him and his desire. Thus, the question of historical authenticity can be best answered in Scott's words:

I don't remember reading any outraged reviews after *Equus*, asking the author to describe the breed of the horses involved, and questions asked by followers of Jung concerning the academic basis of *The Battle*

38 For further verifiable historic facts on Mozart's accurate historical portrayal through Mozart's biographies and authentic correspondence, see Gianakaris' "*Fair Play? Peter Shaffer's Treatment in Amadeus*" (1991d), and Plunka's "*Amadeus: Just the Right Notes*" in *Peter Shaffer: Roles, Rites, and Rituals in the Theatre* (1988).

of Shrivings seemed crushed at a suitably early stage. While not advocating an age of mass irresponsibility, I would ask that *Amadeus* be considered as theatre, and that audiences accept those concepts of time, place and character peculiar to theatre, as opposed to longing for the more flexible rules of history. (Scott 1980: 41)

Shaffer's intent has not been to create a literal document here.

It is an example of an artist who has taken some facts, put them through a blender and then said something he wanted to say. That's the joy of art. We are able to see a different vision than what facts create. Real life really creates statements for us, but artists take real life and create artistic statements. That is what Shaffer has done and regardless of one's opinion about his observations, Mozart lives on in his music. This is his glory and you can forgive almost anything because of that. (Morey quoted in Townsend 1986: 217)

Moreover, as Smith puts it,

But this is rather like objecting to the "pound of flesh" plot in *The Merchant of Venice*. Who can complain when it has produced both Shylock and Portia? (Smith 1982: 468)

Shaffer's protagonist, Salieri's relationship with Mozart appears as the mutually destructive relationship between the ambitious mediocrity and genius. Salieri's character is different from his earlier protagonists. Critics have argued that Shaffer's central theme of God hunting as an attempt to

define God has shifted. Hinden, objecting to Salieri's "static character" (1982: 57) notes a thematic shift in Shaffer's work:

The protagonist now abandons his quest for union with divinity and becomes the antagonist of the God, setting himself against the Deity in personal confrontation and defiance. (Hinden 1982:57)

Salieri's uncompromising pessimism, Hinden notes, denotes a shift of theme in Shaffer, an aspect we will discuss in the detailed analysis of the play. Instead of searching for transcendence through an understanding of God, Salieri is seen attempting to bring God down to his own level. This makes Shaffer's consideration of the nature of God and the questions of belief more complex than in earlier works. Contrary to the suggestions, Shaffer has not abandoned his "god-hunting"; instead he continues to explore it in the ineffable embrace of Art.

Salieri's personal involvement in the action, though, gives him a compelling force of authenticity. Just like Pizarro and Dysart, Salieri is a rationalist. In Mozart, he also confronts someone who presents a fundamental challenge to reason. However, there is much more to Salieri's character than that. He has a remarkable intellectual ability to understand and analyse his situation.

He recognises the pathological nature of his relationship with Mozart: "we are both poisoned, Amadeus. I with you: you with me." In an effort to try

to find his identity, Salieri is trying to defend his vocation by justifying it to others.

He is the only character in the play to fully understand, and thus communicate to the audience, the greatness of Mozart's music. Expanding on Salieri's ability to recognise the divinity in music from Mozart's pen, Shaffer says:

What I wanted to emerge clearly from the play is the obsession of a man, Salieri ...with finding an absolute music. (Shaffer 1984a: 22)

Salieri has dedicated his life to serving God in God's own art, music, and is scorned and takes up the fight to show God that man is not mocked, though he is bound to lose, which he does, of course. Through him, once again, Shaffer carries on with his quest for spiritual meaning, but in a more complex way than ever.

...grace is a free gift of God. You can't bargain or beg for it. God gives it to whom He will. Salieri, who is a good and virtuous man, thinks otherwise and that's the nature of his dilemma. God won't grant him his sole ambition in life which is the opportunity to create music that reaches beyond him. Instead He gives it to Mozart who is a foul, offensive, scatological little pig. (Townsend 1986: 218)

Salieri appears to be deeply religious, but he is as hollow a character as are Pizarro and Dysart. Despite his hypocrisy and spiritual aridity, he revolts against God. Salieri is capable of utterly reproachable behaviour — interfering with Mozart's life, spitefully influencing the Emperor against him on the one hand, but, on the other, he is an authority on duty, on the

finer things in life. By blending evil attributes with the cultured and refined taste of a discriminating man, Shaffer has unfolded a character that can be loved and hated simultaneously.

Ultimately, as Lounsberry puts it, Shaffer's is an attempt "...to strike through the mask to know what is beyond man's capacity to know" (1984: 31). In *Mark Askelon*, we saw the torture of a spirit who could not create any more. *Amadeus* is a deeper discussion than that. Shaffer has moved from his search for God in nature to the next level of trying to find the divinity in art. "Music is God's art", Salieri affirms. "A note of music is either right or wrong — *absolutely*". There is no other way. "Not even Time can alter that". That is how the play enhances the relationship between morals and ability. Shaffer's unlimited access to imagination, thus, has created a fantasia on the life of two men, which ultimately turns into his own speculation concerning the nature of man's relationship with God. In order to illustrate his theme he has taken some liberties with the characterization of Mozart and Salieri, but such provocative thinking illustrates the heart of Shaffer's idea.

His new operatic approach in characterization is shown in his creation of the two Venticelli, who are devoid of any individualistic characteristics. They represent social and political intrigue and gossip. Watson deems them "the most symbolic human characters created by Shaffer" (1987: 188), with a choric quality.

The opening scene of *Amadeus* is set in a street in Vienna in 1823, which Salieri describes as “a City of Slander” (231). The rumour circulating the streets is that Salieri might have been responsible for Mozart’s death in 1791. From the very opening of the play we hear hissing merged with the savagely whispered word “assassin” with the names of Salieri and Mozart. Shaffer brilliantly employs the two “Venticelli” (“little winds”) who, as carriers of information and gossip, function in the Oriental tradition, without ever evolving as characters in the play. It is through these “purveyors of fact, rumour and gossip” (225) that we learn how Salieri, thirty-two years after Mozart’s death, is confessing to murdering him. The audience see an old man confessing to the murder of Mozart — not in the literal sense of the poison to which Mozart’s tragic death is traditionally attributed. He is confessing to the machinations of his act:

Perdonami, Mozart! Il tuo assassino ti chiede perdono! (228)

Amid all this gossip, we make our first acquaintance of Antonio Salieri, “a man of seventy” (230). With “a non-realistic invocation” (Gianakaris 1991b: 9), Salieri turns to the audience directly and entices them with an irresistible summons:

Vi Saluto! Ombri del Futuro! Antonio Salieri — a vostro servizio!...I can almost see you in your ranks — waiting for your turn to live. Ghosts of the Future! Be visible. I beg you. Be visible. Come to this dusty old room — this time, the smallest hours of Dark November, eighteen hundred and twenty-three — and be my Confessors! (230)

To raise “the Ghosts of the distant future” (231) in flesh to be his audience, like Milton and Faustus, he soon turns to an “Invocation”. This also bears

a strong resemblance to Alan's genealogy in *Equus*. Salieri frames the story of his fateful vendetta against Mozart as a recall.

Ghosts of the Future!
 Shades of Time to come!
 So much more avoidable than those of Time gone by –
 Appear with what sympathy Incarnation may endow you!
 Appear You –
 The yet-to-be-born!
 The yet-to-hate!
 The yet-to-kill!
 Appear – Posterity! (231)

This confirms Salieri as the voice of the narrator-interpreter; he is the central speaker and the mediator between stage and the audience, past and present, reflections and actions. By the end of the second scene, Salieri, the narrator, has promised the audience one last performance entitled "*The Death of Mozart; or, Did I Do It?*" (234) on what he has decided will be the last night of his life. From here on, the play soars with Salieri and Mozart's music. Thus, starts another intelligent exploration into man's struggle for meaning in a world in which death dominates and neither religion nor God hold the prospect of salvation.

Before Salieri confesses anything else to us, he confesses his sin of gluttony; his oral gratification around the cakes is his "Italian gluttony!" (232). He starts by giving us details of his origin, where God serves as the main subject. Born to a Lombardy merchant and his Lombardy wife, all he saw was an ambitionless existence in his parents. They were content in their

anonymity and expected God to protect their lives and “commerce”, keeping them forever unnoticed. Salieri’s unquestioned conception of the God of Bargains has its roots in the “Lombardy merchant”, his father. The line of influence from father to son, in Salieri’s case is traced concretely in terms of specific values, like a merchant mentality on both aesthetic and religious levels.

The basis for his enmity with Mozart lies in the fact that on his last day in his hometown, Salieri made a pact with God:

I don’t mean Christ... I mean an old candle-smoked God in a mulberry robe, staring at the world with dealer’s eyes. Tradesmen had put him up there. Those eyes made bargains — real and irreversible.

‘You give me so — I’ll give you so! No more. No less!’ (233)

It was not like the one Faust made; it was a straightforward mercantile bargain, typical of the region of his origin. Salieri’s apprehension of God came through music, which he deems to be “God’s art” (232). It is the absolute power of music and the ultimate sense of its being either right or wrong which gives Salieri the notion that it is the voice of God. Music made him dizzy when he was ten; “by twelve, I was stumbling about under the poplar trees humming my arias and anthems to the Lord. My one desire was to join all the composers who had celebrated this glory through the long Italian past!” (232)

Salieri, the son of a merchant, tries to make a deal with God. He applies the terms and conditions of the bargain. He clearly states:

‘Signore, let me be a *composer*! Grant me sufficient *fame* to enjoy it. In return I will *live with virtue*. I will *strive to better* the lot of my fellows. And I will *honour You* with much music all the days of my life.[Emphasis my own] (233).

The God Salieri serves is a God of self-righteousness, egotism, and pride. He is equally a God of rational cold calculation — self-serving calculation — a God of Bargains. After presenting the bargain, he hears God’s answer:

[*as God*] *Bene*. Go forth Antonio. Serve Me and Mankind, and you will be blessed!’ (233)

His luck starts to change from there for the better; but, at the same time the fame of a ten years old prodigy, Mozart, is heard as well. Nevertheless, he does not feel threatened by it until 1781, when he is thirty-one and extremely well established as a composer in the court of Emperor Joseph II of Austria.

He is living a life of virtue. The “vow of sexual virtue” he has fulfilled in his wife:

I require only one quality in a domestic companion — lack of fire! And in that omission Teresa was conspicuous.

As for his “vow of social virtue”, he has fulfilled it in charitable work on behalf of poor musicians. His day-to-day routine is in pursuit of his rigid principles. Being faithful to his wife, authoritative behaviour as Kapellmeister, fulfilment of the pact with God, all lead to his complete acceptance and internalisation of the prevailing social rules at the court.

This Salieri possesses appealing characteristics which include his lustful adoration of the sweetmeats, his chic cynicism, and his musicianship. All his thoughts, feelings, and actions are connected with only one goal and obsession — to be the most successful composer of his time. In his pursuit he has suppressed everything else. His life has virtually been forced into a state of psychic self-castration. His extremely tense inner state seems to result from the repression of basic emotional and sexual needs. His inexhaustible desire for pastries and cakes can be seen as a symbolic expression of self-alienation, a surrogate for other, more real desires he suppresses.

The essential quality of the Court of Joseph II represented in the play is its unreality. Salieri as Court Composer identifies with the rules, norms, and forms of behaviour of the aristocratic Establishment. It is depicted as an artificial, hypocritical, mediocre world of appearances, with “fêtes and fireworks” on the surface, and intrigue and power struggle beneath it.

With Mozart’s arrival on the scene at first, it is not just Salieri who feels threatened by Mozart. It is through Rosenberg that we learn Mozart’s father was “a bad-tempered Salzburg musician who dragged the boy endlessly round Europe...”(238) Mozart’s adult relationship with his father is far from ideal. Rosenberg is uncomfortable as well.

He was a child prodigy. That always spells trouble... All prodigies are hateful — *non `e vero, Compositore* [Salieri]. (238)

The outcome of this satirical depiction of society is Shaffer's sympathy for the individual outsider as opposed to the social conformist. His preference is for a "passionate" life rather than institutional order. During an interview with Gianakaris in 1980, Shaffer specified why the Emperor Joseph II was alarmed about Mozart's compositions:

...those sort of people who shared the sort of common eighteenth-century language of very, very simple harmony. Mozart was a threat to him — the sound he made — because I think he thought it morbid like a lot of Viennese of his day. Because of all that chromaticism — it worried him. (Shaffer quoted in Gianakaris 1985: 98)

Mozart has intruded into a rigid society of role players who refuse to change with time. Flaunting their "plumes and sequins", these role-players are devoid of imaginative capabilities.

The play can serve as a historical variation on a story all too familiar in life: that of an original or courageous voice silenced by the authority of the state which had assumed the power to determine whose voices should be heard at all. (Londré 1991:115)

Entering this artificial microcosm, though Mozart is not a threat to anyone, he is perceived as an outsider. Being a genius, he does not need to play by the rules of the court. That is why his music appeals to the masses, yet the court finds it reprehensible.

Salieri decides to go and meet the man at a social gathering, and from that day on everything changes for both of them. When we meet Mozart for the first time, he is described as a small, pallid man:

.... He is an extremely restless man, his hands and feet in almost continuous motion; his voice is light and high; and he is possessed of an unforgettable giggle – piercing and infantile. (241)

Mozart is not what Salieri has expected him to be as a person. Hidden from view, he witnesses a scandalous encounter between Mozart and his fiancée. Mozart's lack of manners and use of sexual and scatological language disgust him. This is instantly followed by Mozart's music. As he listens, he realises Mozart's gift at once. Salieri's reaction to Mozart's wind serenade is quite paralysing:

... long lines of pain around and through me. Ah! The pain! Pain as I had never known it. I called up to my sharp old God '*What is this?...what?!*' ...the pain cut deeper into my shaking head until suddenly I was running... '*What?! What is this? Tell me, Signore! What is this pain? What is this need in the sound? Forever unfulfillable yet fulfilling him who hears it, utterly. Is it Your need? Can it be Yours?...I was suddenly frightened.* (224)

However, even worse was the realisation that the source of the voice was Mozart:

It seemed to me that I had heard a voice of God — and that it issued from a creature whose own voice I had also heard — and it was the voice of an obscene child. (244)

Through Mozart, he is drawn into the fundamental expression of worship. Burying his fear in his work, he avoids Mozart from then on. He prays for just one thing:

Let your voice enter *me!* Let *me* conduct you!...let me! (245)

We see his fear lulled into false security, as he decides the Serenade is an exception compared with the rest of the conventional work he comes

across. In spite of the amusing and suave figure which Salieri cuts in scenes in Viennese court and society, there seems little substantial material within its character to justify the partially sympathetic attitude with which we view Salieri. He composes a march in Mozart's honour, but Mozart changes his composition into a composition lesson.

From the night he meets him, he lives in envy of Mozart's musical genius. This envy will later turn into a devotion to the task of destroying Mozart, even at the cost of his own most prized values like dedication to the betterment of humanity and sexual virtue.

Salieri confesses that initially Mozart's life is not in danger. "In art it was a different matter" (253). However, when he decides to fall from grace, his first attempt at seduction is Mozart's young bride, Constanze, under the pretence of furthering her husband's musical career. When Constanze leaves Mozart's manuscripts to try to persuade Salieri to help them, he "*contemplates the music lying there as if it were a great confection he is longing to eat, but dare not*" (273). While Salieri is reading the written musical scores, Shaffer makes his audience share the music Salieri hears in his head, which manifests "how transcendent the moment stands in musical history" (Gianakaris 1991b: 15):

[Music sounds instantly, faintly, in the theatre, as his eye falls on the first page. It is the opening of the Twenty Ninth Symphony, in A Major. Over the music, reading it.]

SALIERI: ...first and only drafts of the music... [He resumes reading, and the music also resumes: a ravishing phrase from the slow movement of the Concerto for Flute and Harp] The truth was clear...I was staring through the cage of those meticulous ink strokes at an Absolute Beauty! (274)

For Antonio Salieri in *Amadeus*, the pain of human incompleteness manifests itself concretely—as a sound. Salieri is a mediator to describe this pain to the audience through Mozart’s music. He has known for years the shallowness of his talent and its conventional taste. However, we must remember that the bitterness that stems from it goes far deeper than mere professional jealousy:

Music, for Salieri represents a covenant with “the God of Bargains”...
(Hinden 1985: 21)

His first readings of the scores show him perfection yet unknown to men. Realizing that Mozart has the ability to produce a first draft that requires no revision, Salieri is even more furious with God. When he sees Mozart’s effortless and flawless music, he sees absolute beauty and perfection:

What was evident was that Mozart was simply transcribing music—completely finished in his head. And finished as most music is never finished. Displace one note and there would be diminishment. Displace one phrase and the structure would fall. Here again — only now in abundance — were the same sounds I’d heard in the library... — agonizing delights. (274)

The devastation this causes Salieri is seen when the composer is made to fall into a swoon. This raises the question of what Salieri is to do about it. The unspoken query in the mind of the reader and the audience turns into

Salieri's new resolve and Salieri confronts God. His audacious challenge to God is:

I'll not accept it from *You*. [Emphasis my own] (276)

It is unbearable to Salieri that despite his virtue and chastity, a foul-mouthed, immature creature like Mozart has been endowed with a genius which seems the very incarnation of the Creator in the realm of art, while all he has been granted is fame.

...in Salieri's eyes — [the gift granted] to the immoral, irresponsible, unworthy Mozart...[is] a fundamental injustice on the part of God.

(Huber and Zapf 1984: 308)

He is enraged with God for having bestowed a seemingly effortless capacity to compose such magnificent music upon so undeserving an individual. Shaffer himself acknowledges the ease with which Mozart created his music.

Mozart appears to me the most baffling phenomenon in the whole history of art... Mozart's work appears to have been less composed than of simply having been written down at the dictation of ...God.

(Shaffer quoted in Hamilton 1995: 270-71)

Now, when God sends Mozart as his mouthpiece against him, the Lombardy merchant in Salieri is outraged. Listing his grievances, he feels betrayed:

Grazie, Signore! You gave me the desire to serve you — which most men do not have — then saw to it the service was shameful in the ears of the server. *Grazie!* You gave me the desire to praise you — which most men do not feel — then made me mute. *Grazie tante!* You put into me perception of the Incomparable — which most men never know! —

then ensured that I would know myself forever mediocre... *Why? What is my fault?*... (275)

He complains himself:

I have worked and worked the talent you allowed me. [*Calling up*] *You know how hard I've worked!* (275)

And all that work he has put into music has been to achieve one goal:

Solely that in the end, in the practise of art which alone makes the world comprehensible to me, I might hear Your Voice! (275)

While Mozart is the unconscious artist, Salieri is the only one who can hear Mozart's music for what it is. He sarcastically addresses God:

And *my* only reward — my sublime privilege — is to be the sole man alive in this time who shall clearly recognize Your Incarnation!

(*Savagely*) *Grazie e grazie ancora!* (276)

This sense of betrayal will soon make him feel justified in destroying the composer whom he believes is God's voice on earth. The rapture and the depth of the young rival's music bring out the ultimate mediocrity of our protagonist's music. He realises that his music has never risen above the mediocre. Only now he realises that in 1781 it has *appeared* that both God and he have kept their parts of the bargain, but, now that he has heard such sublime pain and sublime fulfilment in Mozart, God's betrayal has become evident to him. He declares war on God, "*Nemico Eterno*" (276). Since he views Mozart as God's vessel on earth, he decides to get even with God

through Mozart. Declaring a war on this God, he reveals in pride his bitterness:

From this time we are enemies, You and I! I'll not accept it from You,
Man is not mocked!... I am not mocked. (276)

He feels that by endowing the gift of music on Mozart, God has turned him into a trifling anecdote, commonplace at the core. In swearing to block God on earth, he exclaims:

What use, after all, is man, if not to teach God His lessons. (276)

When Salieri decides to block Amadeus, he is striking back at God. In Mozart, Salieri sees not his God, but His “sole conduct” (275) —“his preferred Creature” (276), and the Creature’s work. He is not just a jealous competitor; he is a rival musician who is actually pleading for his own futile existence. He is trying to escape the harsh reality of his own mediocrity, as he knows he can do more than out-manoeuvring an adversary in ruthless court-politics. In sabotaging Mozart, he intends to punish God for preferring Mozart to himself:

I'll tell you about the war I fought with God through His preferred
 Creature — Mozart, named *Amadeus*. In the waging of which, of
 course, the Creature had to be destroyed. (276)

Shaffer’s Salieri becomes satanic in his attempt to defy God by killing his musical anointed. His justifying his rebellion through injured virtue, reminds us of Milton’s Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Unrewarded, the suffering protagonist of virtue becomes the murderous evil. He decides to teach God his lesson. The play, thus, is also a study of envy, an analysis of the

alarming reunifications of the problem of intellectual and imaginative rivalry.

... Salieri like Faust and Milton's Satan, is a proud man, and will revenge himself on the humiliating agent through whom God's music flows, even at the price of his own damnation. (Smith 1982: 468)

In spite of the appalling cruelty with which he destroys his victim, he wins an astonishing interest and sympathy from the audience, which makes him a tragic hero and a convincing character in his own right. This is not the pride of one man; this war he wages is symbolic of the resentment and frustration of all the mediocrities that are denied what they aspire to and work for. He is aware that he cannot destroy those God-given sounds. However, he knows that he can destroy the source of His music on earth. That is revenge enough for him. Mozart is just an instrument.

On that dreadful Night of the Manuscripts my life acquired a terrible and thrilling purpose. The blocking of God in one of his purest manifestations. *I had the power. God needed Mozart* to let himself into the world. and *Mozart needed me* to get him worldly advancement. So it would be a battle to the end — and Mozart was to be the battleground. (277) [Emphasis my own]

We can clearly comprehend that *Amadeus* is not about Mozart. It is about the conflict within Salieri. On the one hand is his Lombardy outlook — that of a merchant cheated in the form of a contract, a bargain gone sour. The audience feel compelled to sympathise with Salieri on some level, without condoning his behaviour. On the other hand there is his phenomenal ability to recognise the greatness of Mozart's music from his first hearing

even though he cannot create great music. It arouses in him a feeling of jealousy directly of Mozart, and through him of God as he later admits that

My quarrel wasn't with Mozart — it was *through* him! Through him to
God who loved him so...(*Scornfully* :) *Amadeus!* ... *Amadeus!* (279)

Breaking his vow of chastity the next day, he takes a mistress behind his wife's back. Salieri's sexual exploitation of the singer Katherina as a way of defying God for failing to reward his long years of sexual virtue dramatises the dehumanising effects of a precariously balanced Salierian morality-structure. That same evening, he resigns from "all my committees to help the lot of poor musicians" (280).

He improvises and implements numerous ingenious ways for the destruction of Mozart. Through intentional and systematic stratagems he ruins Mozart's career by working on, firstly, a realization of his own ability and importance; and secondly, the persistent failure of his contemporaries to recognize and acknowledge Mozart's genius. To get rid of Mozart, Salieri's decision is: "there was only one way. *Starvation*. Reduce the man to destitution. Starve out the God!" (320) He persuades the Emperor not to appoint Mozart as a tutor for Princess Elizabeth. A quiet word with the Emperor here and there is enough to keep students and commissions away. A word here and there, and the enthusiasm Mozart's music engenders is tempered; a little advice to the "quintessentially mean" (300) Emperor and Mozart's allowance as Chamber Composer is reduced to a pittance.

From now on, Salieri seems to be all-seeing, all-hearing, all-knowing when it comes to Mozart's private life. His stormy marriage, his debts, his inability to keep pupils, the little enthusiastic reception of his music, are not enough to fool Salieri. He still recognises God's love (*Amadeus* means loved by God) pouring through his music.

From now on he is a friend of Mozart and an enemy of Amadeus. Salieri creates a false image of himself to become the kind of person he secretly yearns to be on the one hand, while on the other this false image helps him destroy Mozart in the garb of a friend, so that Mozart will suspect nothing. Shaffer has endowed his character with tragic irony in that the more he becomes the compulsive destroyer of Mozart, the more he becomes the voice of and mediator of supreme praise and admiration for Mozart's artistic genius on an intellectual level. Salieri hears Mozart's music in terms of a zealous religious experience.

In his hatred, he feels pity for his victim. Salieri wants to demolish Mozart on the one hand and magically attain his rival's superior musical prowess on the other. While he is repulsed by Mozart's uncontrolled, rash temperament, he secretly desires to be like him, not just in music but also in life (e.g. his secret meeting with Constanze). The psychological aspect of their relationship reveals a Freudian contrast between the two protagonists. Salieri, dominated by his super-ego, has the need to be in control himself. Mozart, dominated by his id, represents the natural man. Salieri's strangely paradoxical and schizophrenic attitude towards Mozart, caused by the

unresolved contradictions of his character, gives Salieri dimensions beyond the mere role of Mozart's super-ego. Thus, he goes on to destroy Mozart "the instrument and voice of God in the world, His personified 'Magic Flute' — as a revenge of Man on God" (Huber and Zapf 1984: 308).

As a representative of order and authority, of obedience and hierarchy, Salieri becomes an antagonist. According to Sullivan (1988: 46), Shaffer characterises the antagonist in *Amadeus* in Freudian terms, which are recognisable. He believes that Salieri's defining motif is his orality — his apparently insatiable appetite for fame, confections like *crema al mascapone*; gluttony, which he regards as a part of his Italian heritage. We see him eating, snacking, tasting, offering Nipples of Venice (brandied chestnuts) to Constanze, and lustfully watching her as she eats them. We see him describe Katherina Cavalieri's "sweet, eatable mouth" in such a way that it verges on being sexual. Even the object of his worship — music — is also the object of his lust. All these indicate an insatiety in him, which has turned into an obsession.

While Salieri consumes and devours sweetmeats and ultimately "God's poison", Mozart cleanses his spirit in his work. Salieri is fixated on one thing while Mozart grows psychologically and symbolically. Oblivious of his role, while pawing the girls and using scatological language and gross sounds, he can still hear the world almost as God hears it. When Van Swieten tries to be spokesman for a transcendence theory of opera, Mozart's response is deflationary and scatological yet honest:

You're all up on perches, but it doesn't hide your arseholes. You don't give a shit about gods and heroes! If you are honest — each one of you — which of you isn't more at home with his hairdresser than Hercules?
Or Horatius. (285)

He believes beauty can be interpreted in terms of a special inner sense responsive to harmony. Before *Amadeus*, Bob possessed this sense in *The Private Ear*, Mark and David in *Shrivings*. The artistic beauty is revealed in a speech of Mozart's, where he endorses the idea that beauty depends on an unadulterated unity, in which every part contributes to the quality of the whole. Mozart expounds the comic-realistic principle of his music — attempting paradoxically, to achieve the utmost truthfulness to life in an artistic fabric of utmost complexity:

I tell you I want to write a finale lasting half an hour! A quartet becoming a quintet becoming a sextet. On and on, wider and wider — all sounds multiplying and rising together — and then together making a sound entirely new!...I bet you that's how God hears the world. millions of sounds ascending at once and mixing in His ear to become an unending music, unimaginable to us! (285-86)

However, Salieri's final recognition of the genius of this "obscene child" comes as he listens to the Fourth Act of *The Marriage of Figaro*. He sees and hears God:

What shall I say to you who will hear this act for yourselves? You will — because whatever else shall pass away, this must remain! (294).

As his financial condition worsens, Mozart confides in Salieri of his thoughts of going to England:

I was there when I was a boy; they absolutely adored me. I had more kisses than you've had cakes!...when I was a child people loved me.
(297)

Salieri makes it his mission to learn other dimensions of Mozart's life beside his music. Mozart's father is his real antagonist. The moment Leopold's name is mentioned the "*sense of fun deserts*" Mozart. We even see him criticizing his father in front of Salieri for kissing the ring of the "Fartbishop" of Salzburg. Mozart even confides that he actually loathed his father. He felt his father was envious of his musical genius. Constanze admits that she has always hated his father for turning Mozart into an emotional cripple and a perpetual child. We have seen this childish behaviour when we first see him on stage with Constanze at the library of Waldstätten, playing an obscene private game with his fiancée, producing cries of pleasure when she whacks him with a ruler. Immediately after declaring his hatred for his father, Mozart gets the news of his father's death and grieves:

He watched for me all my life —and I betrayed him. (297)

Mozart has been extremely dependent on his father and, when he dies, he starts having a recurrent dream where he is in constant struggle with his father, a masked figure beckoning him to come. However, we see him triumph over his father by substituting his own creative ideals later in the play, when Salieri describes to us how he immortalised his father:

... And in this sun — behold — I saw his father! No more an accusing figure but forgiving! — the Highest Priest of the Order — his hand

extended to the world in love! Wolfgang feared Leopold no longer: a final legend had been made! (314)

Here, we are once again introduced to the theme of the estranged father and son, which Salieri uses next to his advantage when he goes to Mozart as a masked figure. Mozart's relationship to his father is one of the focal points of the play. Mozart is the eternal child, and we see him suffering under the influence of two fathers. The first one is his biological father, Leopold Mozart, whose acceptance he craves, and the other is his socially (though not musically) superior mentor and fatherly friend, Salieri, who betrays him. Mozart dies of enigmatic causes between these literal and figurative "ties of blood". However, the fact remains that amid all this, the play's problem centres around questions of belief and power.

Mozart's finances improve slightly. Van Swieten sends Mozart some Bach Fugues to arrange, to keep bread at his table. Another fellow Mason, who is also an actor, commissions him to write an opera about brotherly love. The result is *The Magic Flute*. The feeling intensifies even more when later Salieri hears *The Magic Flute*. He sees and hears the eternal God when he recognises that Mozart has beautifully externalised the Masons into the opera:

He had turned them into an order of Eternal Priests. I heard voices calling out of ancient temples. I saw a vast sunrise on a timeless land, where animals danced and children floated and by its rays all the poisons we feed each other drawn up and burnt away! ...Oh, the sound — the sound of that new found peace in him — mocking my undiminishing pain! *There* was The Magic Flute — there beside *me!* —

Mozart the flute and God the relentless player! How long could the Creature stand it — so frail, so palpably mortal? (313-14)

Salieri characterizes himself as a special ear. He alone recognises Mozart's genius:

My pungent neighbours *rolled* on their benches at the jokes — and I alone, in their midst heard ... *The Magic Flute*. (313)

Shaffer, who added this scene in the revised version, admits a special fondness for it:

It is rowdy and vigorous; it contains devices of mime which are pleasantly theatrical; it dramatizes the moment — previously only hinted at —when Salieri perceives Mozart to be himself the Flute of God... (1982: xvii)

For Shaffer, this dramatizes the moment when Salieri understands the truth of Mozart's being himself the flute of God. In stark contrast to Mozart's Eternal Priests is the "old candle-smoked God" of Salieri staring at the world with dealer's eyes. Mozart, the artistic creator, embodies everything Salieri has expelled from his mind: instinct, chaos, freedom, humour, and play. With these qualities, Mozart's God opposes the spirit of calculation of Salieri's God of rationalist pride.

This new Mozartian God brings out a personality crisis in Salieri's psyche. The split between the old devotion and a dawning consciousness of a seemingly less dependable god of grace brings the dilemma of choosing. Salieri decides to stick to his old God rather than this new one.

Once again, the excellence of *The Magic Flute* is not recognised by any of Mozart's contemporaries.

All in all, nothing but the very essence of Mozart's music — the radical, literary an-archic character of art itself — is the ultimate reason for his conflict with the established society of the Court: the greater the works he writes, the more he writes himself out of this society. (Huber & Zapf 1984: 309)

The Abduction from the Seraglio, designed as a musical representation of real love, is judged as indecent and as having “too many notes”, when it is explicit, sensuous, and comic in theme. *The Marriage of Figaro* is received even more negatively than *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, because it is regarded as politically questionable, “vulgar”, and “too long” (Emperor Joseph). This time they do not only condemn *The Magic Flute* as a “vulgar show” but Van Swieten considers it as a betrayal of the Freemasons. This response leads to the withdrawal of the Freemasons' support for Mozart, and thus, his final ruin.

Salieri's thin, controversial music in contrast appears as the artistic correlative of the unreal, artificial quality of life at the Court. It makes him, as he has hoped, the most famous composer of his lifetime. He is regarded as “infinitely the superior composer” to Mozart. The truth dawns on him as he realises that, through his obsessive struggle for success and revenge, he has killed off the last remaining creative potential in himself. Despite his adversity, Mozart's ability to write music stays sharp. Salieri's hollowness within is revealed more and more in contrast to this. Even the success of his plan is incomplete as he himself confesses:

I heard my music calmed in convention — not one breath of spirit to lift it off the shallows. And I heard *bis* — ...The spirit singing through it, unstoppable to my ears alone! (298-99)

The better musician and the voice of God, Mozart, must be silenced. Mozart confides in him that in his dreams he is visited by a masked figure, beckoning him to write a Requiem Mass. However, he is not sure if the apparition of the Figure in the Mask is a dream or a reality:

It had the force of real things! ... to tell the truth — I do not know whether it happened in my head or out of it... (311)

These apparitions psychologically destroy Mozart. However, the passion in his music increases. The meanest of Salieri's acts against Mozart has to be his successful attempt to make Mozart believe that he is dying.

The final and the most despicable blow he uses is when he disguises himself in a cloak and mask and appears under Mozart's window, terrifying him into believing that he is a messenger of God.

...there is no blasphemy a man will not commit, compelled to such a war as mine! (316)

Each night, Salieri puts on a grey mask. To a fretted and exhausted mind he could well represent some fearful and spectral emissary. He haunts Mozart at every moment. But that is not all. He indicates to Mozart that death is one day closer to him.

Every night I showed him one day less — then stalked away. Every night the face he showed me at the glass was more crazed. Finally — with no days left to him — *horror!* I arrived as usual. Halted. And

instead of the fingers, reached up beseechingly as the Figure of his dreams! 'Come! — Come! — Come!...' (317)

On that final night, Mozart beckons him to come in, and pleads for a little extension to finish the Requiem Mass. A dying Mozart confesses to Salieri, disguised as the figure:

I've written nothing finally good. One month and I will. (318)

This humble confession of Mozart's is a direct contrast with Salieri's outbursts where he lists his grievances against God, as it brings to light the conflict of faith and the mysteries of God's ways. Going over the Requiem Mass, he tries to reassure Mozart: "it is good. Yes. It is good" (318).

Earlier in the play, we have seen him contemplating Mozart's music as if it were a great confection he is dying to eat but dare not. However, now "he tears off a corner of the music paper and elevates it in the manner of the Communion Service, places it on his tongue and eats it" (318) before telling Mozart:

I eat what God gives me. Dose after dose. For all of life. His poison.

We are both poisoned. Amadeus. I with you: you with me." (318)

Mozart removes the mask and thus, his identity is revealed. Underneath, he sees a "frustrated aesthetic Job" who has satanically taken upon himself "the role of an avenging God of Bargains, standing up for the rule of compulsive calculation against the realm of grace" (Bidney 1986: 193-94). Mozart, falling on his knees, pleads to God for mercy. Salieri's contemptuous reply tells us his state of mind:

God does not love you, Amadeus! God does not love! He can only use... He cares nothing for whom he denies! You are no use to Him

anymore. You're too weak, too sick! He has finished with you! All you can do now is die! (319)

Mozart reverts to a child-like persona, singing a nursery tune. Salieri's idea of God becomes even more bizarre when he assumes a victory, seeing Mozart transform into a child, calling Salieri "*In a childish voice — Papa!*" (319).

Salieri's speech also announces his transformation from mediocre but powerful rival to an intriguing murderous man we might call insane. Thus, we see "the God in music dying in his slum, watched by the worshipper who has destroyed him" (Shaffer quoted in Scott 1980: 40). It is this contradiction which lies at the root of Salieri's schizophrenia.

Reduce the man: reduce the God, Behold my vow fulfilled. The profoundest voice in the world reduced to a nursery tune. (320)

After Mozart's death, Salieri's pity and relief, he feels, complete his version of God:

I felt the pity God can never feel. (322)

Shaffer, through Salieri, has revealed a God who, though he feels pain and need, yet lacks essential emotions such as pity and love. This revelation turns this God into a mere insensitive user and exploiter who "does not love! He can only *use!* ... He cares nothing for who He uses; nothing for who He denies!" (319) The result is

The flute split in the mouth of His insatiable need. (322)

“God blew —as He must” (322) suggests that He is forced to keep up with the need that we as men have created in Him.

After Mozart’s death, Salieri remains in Vienna for thirty years, but the sense of victory is short lived. Soon he realizes that reality is crueller than ever:

And slowly I understood the nature of God’s punishment! (322)

His desire has been to excel in God’s art, music.

I wanted Fame... I wanted to *blaze* like a comet across the firmament of Europe! And yet only in one especial way. Music. (232)

He finally comes to realise that he has tried all the time to destroy something with the help of publicity and political strategy, which must forever be beyond the reach of such a strategy.

This was my sentence — I must endure thirty years of being called ‘distinguished’ by people incapable of distinguishing! (324)

He has been given the fame he has asked for: “I was to become — quite simply — the most famous musician in Europe!” yet he also realizes that he will be “bricked up in fame! Embalmed in fame! Buried in fame!” (324) for the work he knows to be “*absolutely worthless*” (324). His punishment is not extinction but that he must “survive to see [himself] become *extinct!*” (324). Salieri tells us that he has to live to hear “Mozart’s music sounded louder and louder through the world!” while his “faded completely till no one played it at all!” (324)

Nevertheless, Salieri's heroic stature becomes known when we see his strong willed conviction that he can still win his battle against an unjust Deity. Salieri still refuses to be judged by God. This time the strategy is even more daring than before. He has wanted to use music to religious purpose. Now that he has been denied that, he will achieve a place in history as a candidate assassin of Mozart. This is the last minute attempt of a forgotten but pathologically ambitious composer to immortalise himself.

I did not live on earth to be His joke for Eternity...*I will be remembered!*
— if not in fame, then infamy. One moment more and I win battle
with Him. (324-25)

Mozart's actual death is attributed to various causes. He plans to convince everyone that he poisoned Mozart. If he does so, his achievement will be

After today whenever men speak Mozart's name with love, they will
speak mine with loathing! *I am going to be immortal after all! ...* (325)

God, he believes "is powerless to prevent" (325) this, as he is making a choice of ultimate free will, yet we see this plan fail completely too. The irony persists to the end: no one believes his story. Salieri goes to his grave with the knowledge that his torment has transformed him into the "Patron Saint of Mediocrities". However, he at least has stood up for his rights. That alone makes him great.

Towards the end of the play, Salieri's predicament is the same as we have seen earlier on in Pizarro and Dysart, and even Mark. The determination of "our protagonist's relentless lust to snatch a piece of divinity for himself"

(Shaffer quoted in Jones 1987: 152) remains bitter. Just before his suicide attempt, Salieri gives his greatest and truest confession, which gives him a tragic glory:

I was born a pair of ears and nothing else. It is only through hearing music that I know God exists. Only through writing music that I could worship... All around me men hunger for general rights. I hungered only for particular notes. They seek liberty for mankind. I sought only slavery for myself. To be owned — ordered — exhausted by an absolute. Music. This was denied me, and with it all meaning. Now I go to become a Ghost myself. (325)

In the presence of “the taunting of unachievable, uncaring God”, he declares himself “Antonio Salieri: Patron Saint of Mediocrities” (325), and finally cuts his throat. However, his God does not even let him win in death. His attempted suicide fails and “no one believes it in the world”.

In *Amadeus*, Shaffer’s is an attempt to make us see that God has become a mere tool to justify our ascendance to power. For Salieri, each step away from God becomes a more satisfying state of egomania. The outcome is dialectic between a religious conformist who betrays God and the trust of his family, and a free spirited gambler with a loose sense of morality. Salieri realises at the end that common man’s own mediocrity creates heroes like him.

Nevertheless, Salieri (the narrator) has reached his apotheosis of perception. If he has failed to win the war against God, at least he has achieved a moment of godlike insight through his experience. This is what gives him the capability to forgive others as the Patron Saint of Mediocrities. He believes that in killing Mozart he has avenged in advance the failures and frustrations of future generations of Salieris. Finally, when he tries to kill himself by slitting his throat, he is convinced that he has become "Patron Saint of Mediocrities". His last words "Mediocrities everywhere — now and to come — I absolve you all. Amen!" (327) turn into his final gesture where he "finally folding his arms high across his own breast" (327), suggesting sanctification. Like them, he has experienced God, but he cannot affirm Him. The way God works is completely incomprehensible to him; God's choice of Mozart over him is unacceptable to him to the end. However, more than that, he cannot comprehend the paradox that Mozart is. Like Pizarro, Salieri feels cheated; like Dysart who has a sharp chain in his mouth, he stares "*out front like an astounded gargoyle...a lone figure in the darkness*"(326-27). This pain underscores his predicament, and his final gesture of self-benediction is not of mockery but of humility. The suffering inflicted upon him as tragic hero, someone who has dared to engage in battle against God, is seen when "Salieri lowers his head, conceding defeat"(326). We sympathise with him not because he is a sinner and a mad man, but because he dares to rebel against a divine order that is inexplicable and perhaps unjust. Such inequalities and injustice constitute a common cause of suffering among human beings. The only difference here is that Salieri stands up against the inequality, demanding

justice. In Jones's words, "Salieri who desired only to be 'owned — ordered — exhausted by an Absolute' affirms what he can" (1987: 153).

Mozart, describing the core of his music, has said earlier in the play:

That's our job, we composers: to combine the inner minds of him and him and him and her and her — the thoughts of chambermaids and Court Composers — *and turn the audience into God.* [emphasis my own]
(286)

Salieri's last composition, as he calls it, "*The Death of Mozart or Did I Do It?*" has been done in Mozartian style. He has turned the audience into God. In his final gesture as the Patron Saint of Mediocrities, he copies the sublimated image of the High Priest in *The Magic Flute* while Mozart's music plays. Thus, with Salieri's lapse into anonymity except for the rumour that he himself has started, Shaffer at the end of the play leaves the question unresolved.

Amadeus, thus, is a study of the love of God. We cannot tell whether we are dealing with a loving God who embraces His creatures, or we are dealing with the love which the creature directs at his God. Despite all this, Shaffer attempts to explore the possibility of love and reconciliation between the unknowable and destructive God and his destructive and despairing creations. Mozart's tragedy as an instrument, relentlessly played to death by his Creator, is no less certain.

The play is concerned with the plight of the Salieris in this world through one Salieri. The setting of the play is an emblem of the human condition as the playwright sees it.

Shaffer offers comfort for our shortcomings, and says himself he is not influenced by anything specific 'save my own inadequacy'. The amazing thing is that he gets so many people to applaud *not* the recognition of a common, resilient humanity, but of a shared, accepting mediocrity. (Chambers 1980:13)

In Salieri, man's search for immortality or for some meaning in life continues. Salieri's struggle echoes Pizarro's words to Young Martin:

it's the only way to give life meaning! To blast out of time and live forever, *us*, in our own persons. This is the law: die in despair or be a God yourself!

Salieri knows that Mozart's music will be remembered in future while no one will even remember his name. Like Pizarro, Gideon, and Dysart, Salieri has created a world of roles and codified behaviour. Pizarro told Martin:

Men cannot just stand as men in the world. It's too big for them and they grow scared. So they build themselves shelters against the bigness, do you see? They call the shelters Court, Army, Church. (1964: 8)

Mozart, in his refusal to be influenced by roles and codified behaviour, stands with Atahualpa, Mark, and Alan. Salieri's world is threatened by the arrival of this outsider. However, the threat does not stop there. For Salieri, their relationship gains theological dimension. In it he sees an expression of

his personal struggle with God, with its roots in his early bargain with God. Now he implores God to confirm upon him musical proficiency as great as Mozart's. When his overtures to God are ignored, he sets out to ruin Mozart. He has no choice but to eliminate the threat. This revenge results in Mozart's total isolation marked by poverty, alcoholism, begging, and finally, a pauper's funeral. Salieri's God, like Pizarro's and Dysart's before him, is "the emblem of unfulfillable desire, and those who seek union with him cannot fail but to uncover their own mediocrity" (Hinden 1985: 21). Our need to worship perfection, or glory in immortality, for Mark in *Shrivings* is "halitosis of mediocrity". Mark says in *Shrivings*:

God cannot make anything infallible. Who needs Forever?

Salieri knows that if God is infallible, then his beloved Amadeus cannot be infallible. According to Klein:

In the last analysis, the theme of *Amadeus* is the granting of godly gifts, just as *Royal Hunt*'s is the ability to believe and *Equus*'s is the ability to experience passion...all three are about a loss of faith in conventional religion and the destruction of the gods of the new religion. (Klein 1983b: 38)

What Salieri fails to comprehend is that, if men do not live their lives to be approved by the rest of mankind, God also does not need approval to do what He pleases. Once again, life without a sense of the divine is turned into a dismal existence for our protagonist. His antagonistic approach is more like that of an angry Job lashing out in an effort to understand divine wisdom. Shaffer's intent is not to stand against an unjust God. It is an

attempt to illustrate the progression in the understanding of theology and its effect on human life. Hence, in Smith's words:

Amadeus continues a theme that began at least as far back as *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. Salieri's God, like Pizarro and Alan Strang's, is simplistic, primitive, and anthropomorphic. But the search for meaning that lies behind these primal images is a search for some spiritual meaning in Peter Shaffer's — and our own — incomprehensible world. (Smith 1982: 4 68)

The search carries on in the next coming play *Yonadab*, in which we see the protagonist questioning the very existence of God.

CHAPTER 6

YONADAB

Dan Jacobson's fine novel *The Rape of Tamar*...produced in me an almost instant desire...to write a play that could avoid the clichés of biblical drama and, at the same time, explore and express my own feelings about one of the few unavoidable texts in the world – the blood-spattered chronicle of death and deception, racial arrogance and magnificence known as the Old Testament. (Shaffer from Preface to *Letitice and Lovage & Yonadab*. 1989)³⁹

We have seen Shaffer targeting various human follies, in an effort to seek answers to the universal enigma that religion is. Until now, through the dominating theme of the quest for worship, Shaffer has ended up finding that conventional religion's restrictive nature obstructs and thwarts the full development of self. We have already explored the themes of the quest for wholeness through dimensions of religion (as was done in *The Royal Hunt of*

³⁹ All subsequent references to the text (including "Preface, December, 1988") of *Yonadab* in this chapter with page numbers in parenthesis are quoted from *Letitice and Lovage and Yonadab* [London: Penguin Books 1989].

the Sun, Equus), politics and ideology (as was done in *Shrivings*), religion and sexuality (*Equus*), and granting of godly gifts (*Amadeus*). With *Amadeus*, the philosophical debate has reached the sublimated level where the “other” for whom the rivals contended is no longer man, but God. Shaffer’s platform for disquisition has reached larger philosophical issues, drawing greater attention to the religious yearnings of his central characters; now, they openly compete with God. This continued insistence on themes and symbols related to spiritual awareness of human beings reflects his continued quest to understand the nature of God.

His next drama *Yonadab* (1985) is his fable of high aspirations and human capacity for evil to achieve them. Shaffer also puts forward the notion that skepticism is as destructive to the soul as is man-twisted belief. The play is about the opposition of a young man (Yonadab) against an old man (David). In *Yonadab*, the structuring device is a biblical story. The plot, in brief, concerns the devilry of King David’s obdurate nephew Yonadab in Jerusalem long before the Christian era. Yonadab, an atheist Jew and dedicated voyeur, sits on the sidelines of history and watches the House of David, with a little help from himself and destiny, tear itself apart. Here, Shaffer creates another protagonist seeking God. He is aware of the fact that a powerful family like David’s is more exposed to temptation, to error, to disastrous reversals of fortunes than the rest of us. The more powerful people are, the greater are the risks they are going to take.

The Bible describes Yonadab as “a very subtil [sic] man”, though the Hebrew word used is *haham*, which has a wide range of meaning as per context from wise to crafty. Shaffer’s Yonadab is very crafty, an interesting compound of cynicism and credulity. Moreover, he is a mediocrity, a plebeian to whom we as an audience can relate. He knows that we will be able to recognise the conflict within him and the motives which drove him to do what he did.

The questions of belief and of the nature of God are more complex here than in Shaffer’s earlier works. Though Yonadab aspires to godhead, he yearns for finite proof of God’s existence. In the process, we see Yonadab shuffling around with whatever truths one claims to believe out of fear of disapproval of others. He suggests that one continues to show oneself as one man to oneself and another to a friend, and yet another to an enemy who is stronger than oneself. To achieve his goal, he challenges God on every front. In Yonadab, Shaffer once again undauntedly establishes that fear cannot make one revere religion any more than it can make a child love and respect a strict parent.

In this biblical epic, fraternal rivalries and unnatural desires are bluntly expressed in terms of murder and incest. For a modern audience, fraternal rivalries, incestuous desires, and struggles between a father and his sons, the greed for possession and power are easy to contemplate. As in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus*, and *Amadeus*, in *Yonadab* Shaffer’s narrator Yonadab probes his particular universe for answers to philosophical and theological

puzzles surrounding him. In his mind, Yonadab wants to know the truth. He seeks to discover how far man might assume the powers of God and *become* God. Our protagonist narrates the plot and in the course thereof reveals his own problems. He offers to supply the motivation of deceit on the part of all the characters in the drama that have been omitted. Thus, the play actually is a study of the title character. David, Amnon, Absalom, and Tamar are the catalysts who bring forth the protagonist's dilemma into full view and alive for the audience.

The play repeats the structure, character types, and themes we are accustomed to in a Shaffer play. The focus, however, rests on a single male figure. Yonadab is a non-believer, who has longed to see the gods come down and walk the earth. In him Shaffer has presented an Iago of the soul. He establishes an Iago-like relationship with Amnon and Absalom, helping the brothers cloak lust in religiosity and foster a dubious belief in their own exceptional natures. Meanwhile, he himself stands on the sideline to watch as those he misleads attempt to become earthly deities through arrogant actions usually reserved for gods alone.

Though Amnon and Absalom are used as instruments, the real war is between Yonadab and God's beloved David, through whom he is questioning the basis of faith. Like Martin, Yonadab watches the growing rivalry at King David's court between his cousins Amnon and Absalom. Bereft of passion and faith, Yonadab attaches himself first to one brother, then to the other, inflaming their incestuous desires for their sister. The

motives behind this at first are worldly. They are the pleasure of instigating it all and the pleasure, if possible, of getting away with it too. He wants to gratify his voyeuristic lust and to increase his power over the brothers, who are likely to win the throne. Nevertheless, like Salieri, he also intends to provoke some response from a silent God. Falling victim to his own manipulation, he actually begins to believe the fantasy he has encouraged in his cousins — the notion in Egyptian Mythology that the incestuous union of royal siblings can change them into gods. He convinces his cousin Amnon that Amnon can take whatever he desires and thereby define his godhead. If that can happen, then Yonadab might dislodge the Israelites' tyrannical deity, "Yaveh the savage, with no female consort to soften Him" (89). Thus in *Yonadab* one perplexed resident of ancient Israel convinces a foolish prince that, through a forbidden sexual act, he can bring about the kingdom of Perpetual Peace — an objective Shaffer's characters seem incapable of attaining.

Religion and agony of mind and spirit, along with a horrifying crime of sexuality and brutality, are under scrutiny in *Yonadab*. The interrelation of sex and religion has been an historical fact. The great mystery of sex and its necessity has been used as the central focus of religious thought since ancient times. In its origin, the worship of sex was pure in intent; it was never associated with anything unclean or obscene. Instead, the instinct of union was considered the greatest fact in human experience. Sex was considered the source of life and of nearly all its deepest pleasures as well as grief. Wall is of the opinion that "whether idealized as love or accepted

as sex, the instinct for union is ‘the greatest fact in human experience, the source of life and of nearly all its deepest emotions; the wellspring of our intensest pleasures as well as our deepest griefs’” (quoted in Stacey 1991: 105). Historically, there was a long struggle to dissociate the worship of Yaveh from the corrupting influence of its neighbouring fertility religions in ancient Israel. Here this age old conflict provides a solid platform for his story, which takes place in those times. For Shaffer, sexuality and worship are two aspects of human experience that share the common ground of ecstasy. Like Alan, Shaffer makes his Yonadab fuse these two chief forces of life – sex and worship – into his fantasy about a Kingdom of Perpetual Peace. His intent is to present the “sickness” and frenzy of the period as seen through the eyes of Yonadab. It is not a desire to purge and heal, but to encourage facing this frenzy. The conflict is between two ways of life and thought. It is a dexterous disentangling of a web of hypocrisy, in which he pinpoints and explores different areas of these aspects to create another ecstatic or alarming experience. Thus, by inextricably linking religious experience with sex, Shaffer once again looks into the inexhaustible theme of human incompleteness.

The source is Samuel II in The Old Testament, where King David’s nephew Yonadab advises the King’s eldest son Amnon to commit incest with his half-sister Tamar, David’s daughter. However, it was not just The Bible that triggered the play for Shaffer. Shaffer has freely acknowledged another essential influence in his writing of *Yonadab* — the 1970 novel *The Rape of Tamar* by South African writer Dan Jacobson.

I read the book and thought what a good play it would make, and I met Jacobson briefly, who suggested I should go ahead with it. I said I would think about it and fifteen years passed before it all erupted. (Shaffer in Colvin 1986: 11)

In the past Shaffer had been inspired by a lot less (as was in the case of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus* and *Amadeus*). This time, however, “there was rather more material than the footnotes or fleeting legends from which he has created other plays” (Colvin 1986: 11). Nevertheless, his other work kept him occupied, postponing it for later; “always, however, through fifteen years the desire remained with me” (Shaffer quoted in Hinden 1991: 154). In his interview with Colvin, he admitted that, while working on another play, failing to find the perfect form and shape for it, he decided to give *Yonadab* a try:

I put it aside and looked at my notes on *Yonadab*, and they were saying “write me, write me!” There was a scent of invitation coming from them, but I had no idea of the labyrinth I was going to plunge into. What I had imagined were just notes and thoughts was actually a sort of draft of the first act, very sketchily done and with a lot of things missing, but sufficient for me to say “I think this is my next piece of work”. (Shaffer in Colvin 1986: 11)

The theme of divinity as the alleged Shafferian premise, along with Yonadab’s argument that incest, far from being a sin, can be the birthright of gods, claimed the play for him:

The play began to find its own independent life, feeding, I may say, very happily from the source of the novel and the Old Testament, but

also ignoring it, amplifying it or forgetting it altogether whenever instinct dictated it. It is by no means straightforward dramatisation. As soon as you begin to write, other things suggest themselves, more richness of texture, more unpredictability, a fulfilment of the impulse behind it, which is not quite evident to the conscious mind. (Shaffer in Colvin 1986: 11)

Shaffer used many of the features the book contained, including making Yonadab the central perspective for the narration. The play premiered on 4 December 1985 at the Olivier Theatre, under Peter Hall's direction. Whenever a play of such epic proportions is staged, critics question whether or not the drama has depth, and the initial reception to *Yonadab* was mixed. Though the critics recognized the potential of the play, they found some areas in the play lacking profundity of thought. The areas of concern included the rather routine nature of the Biblical story itself, the vaudeville style brought to the role by Alan Bates and the undercutting of the play's essential theme by Yonadab's constant cynicism. However, greater problems occurred with the character of Tamar. Her character failed to portray the profound transformation on stage and was considered as under-written. According to Benedict Nightingale of *New Statesman*:

Yonadab occurs some 2,500 years before *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, 2700 before *Amadeus* and 2900-odd before *Equus*, yet brings together ideas and obsessions to be found in all three. (1985)

However, he did not find Yonadab plausible or interesting in himself.

Yonadab...seems a Biblical Iago or Mephistopheles, an anachronistic version of the archetypal man-in-the-dirty-mac, a humanist idealist and

searcher-after-truth, and a sardonically alienated rebel, depending at how Shaffer is feeling and what his plot is wanting. (Nightingale 1985)

All this could, he believed, add up to an intriguing intricate character. For its failure, he partly blamed the actor, who, though he was good, yet failed to present himself to the audience as someone who cared very much about metaphysical ultimates. This Yonadab was not strong enough to carry the play as “it is too large, curious and unwieldy a burden for so fragile, feeble and lazily conceived a support” (Nightingale 1985).

Daily Mail found the play stunning, declaring Shaffer to be a playwright who has never been scared to confront his audience “with the dilemmas of man’s unresolved inner torments and sends us out into the night pondering the great imponderables” (Tinker 1985). Hurren (1985) declared that despite Shaffer’s eloquence the play lacked profundity to persuade the audience of its depth. Christopher Edwards of *Spectator* found Shaffer’s approach clinical and expository. Criticising Alan Bates’ portrayal of Yonadab, he concluded, “it is he [Yonadab] who is largely responsible for the dramatic sterility of the evening” along with “Shaffer’s dispiriting tendency to over-write the part” (1985). However, he found the scenes of Amnon’s murder and the final death tableau showing Absalom immensely theatrical. *Daily Telegraph*’s John Barber (1985) found it interesting. However, he felt disappointed with the end result as

The plot ‘though exciting’ had been slow to get going. Shaffer fails to get to grips with his tremendous themes both dramatically and verbally — the nature of godheads and the dubious helpfulness of religion to

man — while his depiction of an ancient society seems curiously under nourished.

For Michael Billington of the *Guardian*, *Yonadab* was Shaffer's fifth play on the same basic theme, projecting a conflict between cold calculation and dangerous ecstasy, with God as the invisible protagonist:

Pissaro [sic] in *The Royal Hunt*, Gideon in *Shrivings*, Dysart in *Equus*, Salieri in *Amadeus*, are all obsessed by other men's passion or capacity to become divine instruments. But here it makes for curiously unsatisfying drama and one reason is the contradiction in the character of Yonadab himself. (Billington 1985)

Ratcliffe described the character of Yonadab as “the smart, omniscient narrator, sententious with references to the present age (pills, the bomb)” (1985). However, he did not find the play as well knit as *Amadeus*, *Equus*, and *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. He believed that, unlike the rest of Shaffer's plays, the ideas came before the people throughout, leaving it empty with “no argument, no antagonism, no debate” (Ratcliffe 1985). Hence, it amounted to a pseudo-tragedy in which, had things not gone a bit differently after Tamar's rape, there would be no play. Milton Shulman, writing for the *London Standard* declared it as nothing more than “perfumed biblical bosh trying to smell like something pungent and significant” (1985). Thus, overall, the play could not generate the conflict of genuine drama for the critics, as his other works had done. However, most of them realized the potential of the play, concluding that the play needed a bit more work to reach its desired effect.

Shaffer accepted the criticism and was philosophical about the play's reception. He accepted that "the play was not yet ripe" as it was still evolving in his head, striving to achieve clarity and credibility, thus "the piece itself...remained opaque" (viii). He responded with typical verve by thorough revision and an eighty per cent rewrite in 1987.

The story has been made clearer; the action has been given greater tension and texture; the characters have been strengthened in the drawing. (viii)

In its final version, Shaffer believes, the play says what he wanted it to say; it possesses a shape which helps it accumulate the power he intended it to possess.

It was a difficult delivery, but there have been difficult deliveries before. I think because it was started off by Jacobson's book it took longer to free itself: There was something hybrid about it. I've found the more I've engineered it and let the play grow inside me, the more I've enjoyed writing it. It is now, I hope, a much better play. (Shaffer in Armitstead 1987: 7)

In its revised form, the play provides a powerful study of envy, passion, kinship, lust, faith, and feminism. It is an awe-inspiring world of extraordinary vividness, which Shaffer describes as:

Yonadab exists in a world of superstition, of prophecies, interlocking dreams and the deep-running insistence of Semitic fear and wilfulness.

It is a world of desert and judgement: the limitless void of sand and the exact limitation of the Law. (viii)

Due to difficulties concerning the availability of the right director and the appropriate casting, it has not been produced in the United States like the rest of his plays, and remains the least known of Shaffer's works. It still awaits production. Shaffer finds the delay frustrating, leading to the passing of valuable time, but thinks, "one must press on" (Shaffer in an interview with Gianakaris 1991c: 27).

Repeating the outline motif of his previous plays under discussion, *Yonadab* reasserts Dysart's revolt in *Equus* against mainstream theology as the only acceptable category for religious experience and the "Normal" as the only acceptable category for sex. *Yonadab* explores the idea that we live in a world of deceit, hypocrisy, and artificiality. Much too often we are more at home with lies and pretence than we are with truth. Once again we find a dialectic between a threatened and isolated individual (Yonadab) trapped in a world of roles and codified behaviour and "the Lord's anointed" (David). Once again, we see that the prevailing values are shown to be based on double standards (as in the court of King David), even though David is blessed with a transcendental quality, living his life as an expression of divinity. Yonadab, however, yearns to find an expression of divinity that is not reducible to any time or place nor to any moral or religious system, especially Jewish Law.

In order to explore the depth of these issues, Shaffer divided the play into two Acts. The real episode appears near the end of the opening act. The second Act describes the aftermath in fourteen scenes. Employing mime, ritual, dance, and music, Shaffer attempts to disclose the mysterious ambivalence of the self when presented with the opportunity of transcendence. The overlapping of images and movements takes its climax through the collision of objects, silences, shouts, and rhythms, or in a genuine physical language with signs, not words at its roots.

Helping the imaginative muscle of his audience through narrative, which is what theatre is based on, in *Yonadab*, as in his other plays, exposition is shared through enacted flashbacks. In a Brechtian style narrative framework, providing a *raisonneur* in the plot who steps outside the enacted story to comment directly on the proceedings to the audience, the narrator, Yonadab, in the eponymous play rivets the audience's attention. He interrupts the action of the play, darting backward and forward and addressing the audience directly, inviting them to participate in the experience of epic theatre as Brecht articulated it. He is the central mediator who performs a highly sophisticated process of interpretive interaction between the stage and the audience. The direct address by the narrator recognises the audience's participation in the presentation, but the confessional tone indicates that the audience's role will not be merely that of spectators. Instead, the audience will serve as confessors or judges for Yonadab, as they did for Martin in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Dysart in *Equus*, and Salieri in *Amadeus*, enhancing their own moral development.

The only difference is that our narrator never allows us completely to involve ourselves with him, as he keeps titillating us without ever losing himself in the action. This time Shaffer's narrator keeps himself at a distance from the events. The audience are forced to watch everything over Yonadab's shoulder.

Yonadab takes us into the past as the major voice of the narrator/interpreter. He keeps alternating among historical observations on his time, factual information, and self-interpretation, introducing us to the characters, scenes, and events, while all the time in direct dialogue with us. Though he is the competent analyser who holds intimate knowledge of the events, he does not involve himself prominently; he sticks to his role of a watcher, compelling the audience to watch behind the watcher. He interrupts the action of the play in order for the audience to keep a distance, re-focussing their attention on the ideas presented on the stage. Shaffer, thus, has distanced the audience in time, in place, and in action under Brechtian influence. Having introduced himself and the general subject of the play, Yonadab moves into the centre of the action, where he assumes an active role in the enacted scenes of the story. However, at regular intervals he breaks the illusion to comment to the spectators about the action. This serves as a clarifying commentary on the plot. Thus the audience traverse the action of the plot, moving faster and slower with Yonadab as their guide.

As in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* before it, we are asked to assess the guilt of the protagonist. Between the two opposing forces in the form of the believer (David, Amnon, Absalom, Tamar), and the sceptic (Yonadab), the reader is forced to choose sides without losing a sense of objectivity.

Just as the audience were actually involved as the “ghosts of the future” in *Amadeus*; Yonadab compellingly involves the audience (in the present) in the interpretation of history that is taking place on the stage, capturing the age-old tension between ecstasy and order in a comprehensive way on stage and dealing with worship, faith, and the issues of social conformity. The audience *is* the court, the judge, and the jury, listening to him defending his conduct from the moment the play opens.

The opening monologue is closely related to its predecessors. Unlike Salieri, who was interpreting his relationship with Mozart during the (apparently) last hour of his life for a future audience, Yonadab, by means of a continuous interplay between narrative-reflective interpretations and scenic reconstructions of the past, addresses the present audience with the urgency of Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*, thousands of years after his death, stuck in a limbo. Though he is going to make the past alive for us, he has not conjured a future audience like Salieri. He has been waiting for us to hear his side of the story. But his is not a last minute attempt to immortalize himself like Salieri’s. Salieri’s prime motive was his desire to be famous as well as gain immortality by linking his fate with that of Mozart,

while Yonadab's sole intention is to include the audience in the fictional process and relate the truth — his side of truth of the story.

Yonadab has its own code of movements with appropriate gestures, signs, and hieroglyphs, intonations, lighting, music, and dialogue – all designed to create unified rhythmic sensibility and effect on stage. The narrator is not Shaffer's sole method of creating simultaneous time and place. A stage within a stage, referred to as the *inner stage* and *outer stage*, is used for this purpose. This stage setting is reminiscent of *Equus*, and is stylised with actors sitting around the stage. Sitting around the "Outer Stage", these six anonymous "Helpers" bring to focus our gaze on what the stage directions describe as the "Inner Stage". These Helpers are innovatively used as non-individualized characters, as was done previously in various roles in *Equus*. They play all the parts other than the ones in the List of Characters in the play. They never speak and use their gestures to communicate the graphic authority that any scene demands. Their appearance "in white anonymity provides a radically new formulation for the entire play" (viii) lending it a remoteness and an immediacy, generating a special atmosphere for the events.

Even as he greets the audience at the start of the play, Yonadab, the title protagonist, begins to spin his web of enticing intrigue:

This is a singularly unpleasant story. The Rabbis of the Middle Ages omitted it entirely, when they read out the scriptures, to spare the ears of their congregations — and they didn't know the half of it. I alone

know it all — and let me assure you, I don't intend to spare yours.(87)⁴⁰

Thus addressing the audience from his post, first as an outside observer of the respective story line and later, by blending into the inner plot as an active participant, he, as a watcher and possessor of a unique perspective, instantly engages the attention and curiosity of the reader and the audience alike. Thus enticing us into the world of the play, Yonadab gives us an account of the events that culminated in his tragedy.

This is a tale of total deceit. Every person in it is both deceiver and deceived. And I mean every single one. (87)

As the action progresses we see the truth of his revelation. We see Yonadab deceive Amnon, and later Absalom, into believing that they can fulfil divine destiny by committing incest. Amnon deceives his father and sister by claiming that he needs Tamar to help him back to health. Absalom deceives David, first by claiming that he wants Amnon killed in the name of the Jewish Law while he actually wants him out of the way of his achieving the throne of David, and later lies to David that he has made

40 The first version of the unpublished play based on the original production quoted by Klein in *Yonadab: Peter Shaffer's Earlier Dramas Revisited in the Court of King David* (1988) was quite different from this one. There, Yonadab explained his predicament as:

Over and over, that's my life now that I'm dead. Tied to telling the same tale over and over – no changes allowed. Nothing can be altered, in all the squalor.

peace with Amnon when he intends to kill him in front of all his brothers. In addition, David deceives his people by refusing to enforce the law that is his responsibility. Tamar deceives Absalom into believing that some magical spirit led her to his house, and she deceives everyone by planning Amnon's murder after overhearing a conversation between Yonadab and Absalom.

Yonadab's revelation that the story focuses on deceit and ruin, suggests a theme similar to that of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. Yonadab's problem, like his predecessors' (Pizarro, Mark, Dysart, and Salieri) is his inability to believe in conventional divinity. He feels empty, devoid of passion, and separated from the rest of humanity. Like Pizarro and Alan Strang, he feels the need of a form of worship that does not include God. Yonadab describes the House of David and the followers of the Law of Jerusalem as moral hypocrites. Among them, he sees himself as a searcher for truth. Therefore he tries replacing Jewish Law and its practices during the time of King David with something gentle and personal. As the first scene progresses, we see Yonadab describe his internalised conflict which has kept agonizing him during his lifetime and now in his death for eternity. Though he reveals himself in relation to Amnon, King David's eldest son, it is David who poses a problem for him. Yonadab is a passionless man who lives vicariously through watching the passion of his antagonist – David. As with Pizarro, the hole in the middle of Yonadab's life is his lack of faith, lack of belief that would give meaning to his existence. He is sceptical about David's simple faith in Yaveh. In Yonadab's mind, Yaveh is

like Alan's god Equus who judges and punishes. This God of *Thou Shalt Not* is similar to Alan's Deity (he created under his mother's influence) who sees everything, misses nothing. He describes Jerusalem as a "world of perpetual anger" (90) with a God of the Commandments of *Thou Shalt Not*. Yaveh "the Savage" (89), a "ferocious Judge" (91) is the "ravenous God" (90) of this Jerusalem, where "the air stank of blood. Human blood in the gutters: animal blood for the altars. And beyond in the desert, for miles, the blood of our chopped enemies soaking the sand" (89). Describing his people's continuing fascination with violent forms of belief, those passionately fanatical, sometimes sacrificial manifestations of religious ecstasy, he feels alienated among the rest of His creation who are everything that he is not:

...alone in all the tribe *I was delicate...I was delicate*. God clearly was not. How could He possibly have made me in His image? I saw no resemblance. Here was *Yonadab the Sensitive* – *there was Yaveh the Savage*, with no female consort to soften Him, and not one trace of humour to keep Him in temper. *That is, if He was there at all*. [Emphasis my own] (89)

He is a non-believer in a place where expressed doubt would end in stony death; but in his heart faith flickers momentarily. Like the rest of Shaffer's protagonists, he yearns for a faith that is not tainted like the institutionalised forms of faith in his time and which has been experienced by the protagonists in the previous plays. Yonadab admits to be living in fear, falsely playing the role of a believer of Yaveh when he does not believe in the Jewish God. He explains to the audience:

Yonadab the Creep. That actually is what you become when you bow to One God because you're terrified of stones —but long in your heart for another altogether, who has no use for stones. (89)

In the name of this God of Commandments, His chosen “Gracious, audacious, mendacious, salacious David” (88) rules the Chosen Race. Yonadab’s quarrel is philosophical. He mocks the Jewish dietary Law about mixing certain foods; he cannot distinguish between David’s faceless sons; and he denies any distinction between Israel’s enemies, pronouncing them together as the “Ites” (88):

We smote the whole world in the name of our God of Commandments. (88)

Yonadab’s question is why God’s word should lead man to such cruelties, when it could bring a world of perpetual peace as well. The question gnaws relentlessly into our conscience throughout the play.

Feeling out of place in this Israel, Yonadab searches desperately for meaning, for understanding of the world he would so like to behold as his real home. He longs to be assured of some basic congruence between his aspirations for intelligibility and the essential constitution of reality. He yearns for a Kingdom of Perpetual Peace. Yonadab describes to us a peaceful vision he had all his life – a vision that ultimately brings about the tragedy that follows. He holds on to a belief in a kind of divine coupling by pairing royal siblings, which will magically transform the couple into divinity:

Every night I would...dream... of the Kingdom of Perpetual Peace... ruled over jointly by a King and Queen, young and deep in love. Both beautiful — and both immortal... A place where flutes filled the air — not the squeal of rams' horns, or rams themselves dragged shitting to slaughter for a ravenous God. A place where walls showed pictures of undying pleasure — not simply letters of proscription, *Thou Shalt Not!* A place not simply glared over by *a ferocious Judge* but smiled on by this radiant couple, filling their worshippers with the scent of their joy... It was a totally imbecile fantasy, I admit. Far more to do with sex than celestial matters — and far far too soft a myth for the ruffians around me. All the same — *it gave one a little comfort in this place of fear and duty.*
[Emphasis my own] (90-91)

Though he lacks faith or creed, Yonadab longs for both.

The story begins in the Court of King David. David, the supposedly self-righteous champion of the Jewish God, has been described by Yonadab as a blood-thirsty almighty law-giver. If Walter in *Five Finger Exercise* had a crush on the Harrington family, Yonadab is extremely envious of the household of David as they hold him in low esteem. He suffers from his own invisibility in the Court of David, where he is always ignored. He is the “Despised nephew” (87), who is known in the capacity of “Yonadab the Insulted” (87). He reminds us of Clive, of whom Pamela says:

At home, everyone keeps on at him but no one really takes any notice of him. [*Brightly*] Clive spends his whole time not being listened to.
(1976a: 63)

Thus, he turns himself into a treacherous fixer and a voyeur who makes up for his own emotional vacuity by manipulating their passions.

The Court of David presents various levels of dishonesty, hypocrisy, and unreliability. It is more a world of appearance on the outside with intrigue and power struggles beneath it. King David exercises absolute power and control over his sons, stirring them to rebellion. His sons, especially Amnon and Absalom, envy God for being Almighty and Alone above and their biological father below. Yonadab is a voyeur in this curtained court where dangerous ambitions are masked by obedience and obeisance. As Nathan so rightly puts it:

The court is a place of sophisticated savagery and beauty, a benign tyranny in which King David can proclaim “I rule by love not terror” in such a way that everyone falls flat in terrified abasement. (Nathan 1985)

Role-playing is at its height here. In the Court of David, everyone is playing a role: Absalom, Amnon and the rest of David’s sons are playing the role of obedient and loving sons; Yonadab admits to be living in fear, falsely playing the role of a believer of Yaveh when he does not believe in the Jewish God. David is playing the role of the just King. These roles provide them all with a sense of security that has been sanctioned and approved by others. This produces a sense of distortion and unreliability, which constantly undercuts the validity of their views, transferring the task of interpretation to the audience, who form their own judgements of the ideas and actions presented on the stage.

David himself wants to be loved and appreciated by his sons. His children are his weakness, which ultimately will be the reason of the fall of his House. In David's family, the first signs of tension and difference of opinion we observe are between Amnon and his brother Absalom, focusing on why Amnon has made himself scarce from the Court. The King tries to cover up for Amnon by insisting that it is as much his right to be "dark and hidden" if he wishes, as it is Absalom's to be "open and shining" (93). Amnon is David's "most debauched son, a maladroit man...filled with malaise" (Klein 1988: 77). He is described in the play as "a man in early thirties, stocky and powerful – 'thick' in several senses of the word" (91). Amnon is David's firstborn, whom he has nicknamed The Bull. He is Yonadab's only friend among his cousins, "the sort of powerful fool an intelligent creep really needs in a place like this" (92). In contrast to him is Absalom, David's "Shiner" (91) and "the Favourite" (91), whom Yonadab describes as "popular and shining as the sun – he is yet, *like the star, finally impossible to see into*" [emphasis my own] (91).

The themes of trust and betrayal in Shaffer's plays that go as far back as the relationship between Young Martin and Pizarro in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Mozart and Salieri in *Amadeus* appear here in the relationship between Yonadab and Amnon.⁴¹ Amnon is going to make the same mistake that destroyed Young Martin and Mozart before him: he trusts the man he thinks is acting in his best interests, here Yonadab. He confesses to

41 Here David is suspicious of his sons' motives towards him.

Yonadab, his only friend, whom he has summoned to hear the cause of his grief, that he is consumed by the desire to “uncover the nakedness” of his half-sister Tamar, who is David’s only daughter. Yonadab, Amnon’s confidant, actively encourages Amnon when Amnon confides to him that he wants to sexually possess his half-sister Tamar more than anything else. Bound by the two emotions of lust and guilt, Amnon’s sexual desire for Tamar has exceeded the point of denial, but he also knows “Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy sister. Nor yet thy half-sister” (98). The penalty of such an action is stoning to death and Amnon is well aware of that as well. Yonadab makes it his job to turn sin into obligation: “Thou shalt, Thou must!” (Klein 1991: 146). Just like Mark Askelon in *Shrivings*, who complains about “Rabbis of Repression” (1976b: 173), Yonadab refers sarcastically to the “Priests [who] keep you in remarkable ignorance” (99), taking it upon himself to mastermind a plan that will enable Amnon to commit incest with Tamar. Yonadab encourages Amnon toward incestuous rape, on the grounds that the chosen distinguish themselves by smashing taboos. He has various reasons for his action, one of which is that he is seeking revenge against David, who has never taken him seriously. He is also getting back at Tamar, who hardly consents to look at him; and in part, he is “currying favor” (Klein 1991: 147) with the legitimate heir to the throne. However, even more than all this, Yonadab is at war with God (like Salieri), the only being Who can stop his evil plan. His chilling explanation of it is:

To make it happen – ruin! Ruin to the great who despise me! To the House of David for whom I didn’t exist! Ruin even to the *God* of

David! – why not? Let Him defend Himself! Prove that He exists,
finally! Let Him stop me if He is there –Yaveh the Prohibitor! (98)

Yonadab tells Amnon that in congress with his sister he will become immortal. Yonadab, thus, stimulates Amnon's curiosity and vanity. He explains to Amnon:

Yaveh shares his divinity with no one, not even a wife. But by the Nile it is all different! There, if you are a true prince, you are immortal. Immortality is your birthright. It is *inside* you, waiting to be born. (99)

He convinces Amnon that by committing incest with Tamar, the brother-sister lovers instantly will become gods. He preaches that divine copulation between royal siblings "is actually ordained" (99). Shaffer has explained in an interview what convinces Amnon of the possibility of immortality:

Yonadab draws examples from ancient Egypt where the pharaohs, in their union between brother and sister, become demigods. It was the passion that was the privilege of those chosen to rule. It was also practised among the Egyptians to keep the blood pure, to give you a special wisdom. With purity of blood comes purity of mind. So Amnon becomes convinced that he will attain divinity. (Shaffer in Colvin 1986: 11)

The prospect of being immortal is irresistible to Amnon. He will not only be able to satisfy his lust; he will also become a god. Yonadab promises to help Amnon fulfil his Destiny, as "even the plans of Gods have to be helped by men" (101).

As a strategy in order to achieve his goal, he advises Amnon to feign a mortal illness. This is supposed to bring David to his house. After the King restores him from pain and suffering through prayer, he must coax him to send Tamar to nurse him to get back to his health. And if all goes as planned, and the King grants him his wish, Amnon will have Tamar in his house to commit incest.

Yonadab admits that he started slightly to believe the lie that he had started about Amnon's touching divinity. However, he is not only enthusiastic at the prospect of getting a proof of the existence of God, but also of His reaction to his devious plan:

Ruin! Ruin! Ruin! Could I do it! Could I actually bring down the Lord's anointed and his insufferable family? Or would He stop me – the Great Punisher above? What a test! What a marvellous, courageous challenge! Let's see Who's really there! (102)

David rushes to see his son. As David successfully prays for the restoration of Amnon's health, Yonadab looks on with rapt envy at man becoming the instrument of God. He longs for an understanding of the power of prayer. In David, what is essential is the belief he represents, and the challenge such a belief presents to Yonadab. The rest is not important. It is precisely his passiveness and the “unknowable” quality of his strength, which serves as the perfect foil to Yonadab's beliefs. On this occasion, as everyone goes down on their knees “in a transport of faith” (108) and David's head goes up praying to an Unknowable God, we see Yonadab yearning to know

what could be in “his Believer’s skull” (108). Jacobson’s Yonadab describes David as the unknowing knower, known by the Unknown. When he prays, he ceases to be himself, yet he is never more himself than he is then. His presence, his need, his being is acknowledged before he can even formulate his prayer. And yet his faith is restored and refreshed by it. Shaffer’s Yonadab also sees this intensity in David. Yonadab longs to feel this too:

What must it be like to launch a massive appeal to the Unknown? To send out to It what also must be unknown to me – I mean my very *Self* : the Self of Myself without reservation?...Unknowable God confirmed as surely as the existence of myself! *Oh*, the wonder of that! To be Its entire resounding instrument! Not myself – yet never more myself! (109)

If only he could confirm the existence of the Unknowable God and could feel like “Its entire resounding instrument” (109), he could feel fulfilled. However, he is utterly devoid of such feeling.

David’s prayer heals his son and he consents to Tamar’s coming and nursing Amnon. Absalom tries to stop his father from permitting this. But David refuses to listen to him.

Amnon actually believes that he is “in the hands of Gods” (105) about to experience something holy. He believes it to be his destiny. For Yonadab, to have a destiny is nothing as each of us has one. However, to believe in it, even ephemerally, to accept it as the only one possible for you is what makes it great. This is what makes the wrong right, the bad good, and the ill well. Jacobson’s Yonadab believes

Princes do what we dream...they are not our masters but our slaves. We commoners, fantasists, voyeurs, movers of furniture, carriers of messages, extras -- we are free men... But princes are slaves and bondsmen, compelled to act out every whim of ours, every fleeting impulse, every lewd desire...which they dare not disobey if they wish to become or remain our princes still" (Jacobson 1970: 145-46).

Shaffer's Yonadab is more banal:

Princes make our dreams happen, or what is their use? (101)

Yonadab admits that he "*had to watch it*" (106). He tries to coax Amnon that in return for the favour of delivering Tamar to his bed, Amnon must let Yonadab watch:

What is about to happen will change you forever...let me be a witness.
To share -- as common men can only share -- in the glory of the royal ones. (114)

Amnon refuses claiming that consummation of this sacred passion "is a holy act...between her and me, alone" (114). Through careful planning they send all the servants home and trick Tamar into going to Amnon's bedroom. Once alone with her, Amnon reveals his true intentions towards her. She remains unresponsive to his seduction, so Amnon, losing patience, rapes her. During the rape, Yonadab is the voyeur hiding behind a plant near the bedchamber to observe. He is our guide to the deed that ultimately leads to the demise of David's house and his unrivalled empire. However, to his dismay, Amnon drops the curtains surrounding the bed at the last

minute, leaving Yonadab unable to watch anything but silhouettes of the act.

The rape scene is typical of the way the dramatic action of the play generates a highly charged atmosphere, and this effect is reinforced by the set itself. This ingeniously constructs a visual version of a momentous event in ancient history. Everything is described through a narrated account of shifting shadows. According to Hinden (1991: 154), the play presents “Shaffer’s most disturbing yet spectacular pantomimes” on stage. Hidden from view, Yonadab watches and awaits the epiphanic climax as Amnon brutally rapes his half-sister, Tamar. The shadows of their writhing bodies are cast on the bed curtains “like the letters of some grotesque language formed long, long before writing” (127)⁴². On some level Yonadab has also believed his own argument that coupling of royal siblings will magically transform the couple into divinity on the spot. However, nothing new happens. The reality turns out to be its complete opposite. As he watches, he realizes the brutal truth:

There on the fall of a Jerusalem drape I saw, writ enormous — like the
parody of our Hebrew consonants — the archaic alphabet of the Book
of Lust. (127)

42 We remember Jacobson’s Yonadab who describes the rape as “You could not believe there would be so much silence, in the course of a rape” (1970: 72).

Amnon fails to achieve the divinity he has hoped for. The supposedly celestial love turns out to be “the oldest puppet show in the world” (127). Frustrating Yonadab’s hope to witness the birth of divinity, in bitter disappointment, Amnon reports it to be the basest of all acts – “just another fuck” (128). Holding her responsible for his disappointment and failure after the incestuous rape, Amnon in disgust orders his “Witch-whore” (128) of a sister to be thrown out of the house into the streets.

Though, in all the other plays, roles of the women are of little consequence, in *Yonadab* Tamar is given a stronger role than any other in the play. Though Yonadab has been describing her as the “Single most spoilt creature in the kingdom” (95), “intolerable Princess”(95), “hateful little girl” (95), “immemorial daddy’s girl” (102), “Tamar the Insolent” (103), the abused Tamar who leaves the palace is determined to have justice. The first Act ends with Tamar’s unaided arrival at Absalom's palace, where she tells the world:

I am Tamar, daughter of the King. My brother Amnon has raped me
and thrown me in the street. (130)

Absalom, putting his cloak around her, takes her in. He swears to get justice for her in the court of the King. However, in the end, his quest is to be defeated.

The first half is the biblical narration of the events in Yonadab’s words. The second Act brings us to the aftermath of the tragedy. In this half we

plunge into the complexity of Yonadab's spiritual crisis. We see him wrestle with the stirrings of faith and its subsequent extinction. We see him admit that the superstition he started has reached its apex, destroying his friend and leading to his own destruction. The “*irrational*” (133) hope of seeing “two quintessentially average figures” attain immortality and “spill it by proximity on to *me*” (133) makes him realize his own primitiveness. As for the question of on whom a Divine Choosing should fall, his answer is emphatic:

...the more average the undeserver, surely the better. The more muddled, greedy, vapid, vulgar and generally pathetic the better – because the more in need of change. *The more like me. And you.*
[Emphasis my own] (134)

After the rape and Tamar's declaration of it to him, her full brother, Absalom, goes to the Court and demands that the King uphold the Law and decree death for his son. However, Absalom's motives are as political as they are emotional. Absalom wants everyone to see him as a man of truth and power. In openly expressing his long-standing hostility against Amnon, he also puts the King in a tight spot. In demanding that David endorse the law, we see him change his tone from the first act, where he has spoken to David in the most appeasing manner, into a commanding and accusatory one. Absalom's impertinence in suggesting that David is not resolute enough to dispense justice on his own incenses the King. Absalom reasons, “for the sake of our Law – which alone distinguishes us from beasts” (134), Tamar, his wronged sister, must get her justice. Amnon must

be put to death. Tamar's turning to her brother, Absalom, instead of her father, has made the King angry with her to such an extent that he rejects her. However, David, devoted to both his sons, holds his hand and refuses to be dictated to by his son, claiming

I rule by love – not terror. But I rule. Amnon is my son, and I alone will decide his fate – alone. You will not touch a hair upon his head. Swear that, upon your own. (137)

Absalom vows to do as the King has bade him do. David has loved his children exorbitantly. What is he to do now that he knows that the son whom he has given so much of himself at their last meeting, has violated his adored daughter? He has blindly sent his daughter to her destruction. He is supposed to be the King who has a strict undeviating regard for justice, but the end result is that David acts and serves in the role of a father, not a King. Because Absalom has sworn an oath never to kill his brother, Amnon goes unpunished for a while. David reserves his judgement, but he is in a tight spot. He asks God for help:

Is it to be Mercy or Justice? If Mercy for the boy, the girl is wronged. If Justice, then I must kill the boy. And I *will*...But if I am still even a little acceptable in your sight – I beg you: let it be Mercy. Forget Justice for this once. (150)

While David is busy asking for mercy, Tamar is secretly plotting her own revenge. We will soon see her character evolve into a formidable force to reckon with. Her deception is the basic force behind the second act.

Yonadab has admittedly fallen victim to his own manipulation, as he has started believing the fantasy he started. Amnon's prophetic outburst that he is just an instrument in the scheme of things to "prepare the roads: [so] the Beauties walk on it" (141) makes him feel sure that Amnon's rape has been nothing more than a prelude to what has to follow. 'Absalom, a virgin at twenty-two, longhaired, beautiful, shining, desirable is Tamar's full brother. Her apparently unaided arrival at Absalom's palace seduces Yonadab into believing that divine forces are at work. The Princess and the Shiner have to be the Chosen ones. Yonadab shares with Absalom a dream he has had three nights in succession.

Absalom and Tamar, riding together upon huge golden horses —
 jouncing and gleeful up the high road to Jerusalem! On their heads sat
 golden crowns. On their shoulders golden cloaks. And from their
 palms streamed golden light. (151)

They repeat over and over the word "Peace". This convinces Yonadab that his dream is prophetic. Even Absalom is captivated.

We observe that though he lacks in faith or creed, at this point Yonadab is longing for both. Though Yonadab has been motivated by jealousy and revenge at the beginning, he ends up yearning for his fantasy to be true. His conviction is that the union of, first Amnon and Tamar, and later Absalom and Tamar, will be the beginning of a new breed of divinity through which peace and love will replace the tumult of religious fervour which until now

he has seen destroying his world. In Yonadab's actions we intuitively perceive his infatuation with divinity.

I know Gods cannot walk on earth: *let it be!* I know lovers cannot infect kingdoms: *let it be!* Let there be an end to this world of blood-soaked worship — and to my own world too, which owns no worship! *Make me see It!* Change my unchanging world! Set this manipulating man at last in ways of *Meaning!*...Let me believe! (160)

Yonadab is hoping against hope for it to be true. It is his prayer to make him believe in prayer, addressed to a God in Whom he does not believe.

However, he has underestimated Tamar. She has secretly listened to every word Yonadab and Absalom have exchanged, and decides to play along. By feigning belief in the royal incest myth, she tantalizes Absalom with the promise of eternal bliss if he will forswear his oath and kill Amnon. Absalom is seen falling for his sister's temptation to make an ordained, incestuous marriage — he feels the stirrings of faith. It also stirs his ambition of ruling Jerusalem, so he decides to give himself into the hands of Gods:

We simply ride into the city like in the dream — and David will *topple!*
The Gods will strike him dead. Isn't that right? They will make the way clear for us? (161)

However, what follows is carnage and deception.

Yonadab enters Absalom's service and sets about manipulating events. He even plans to witness their transformation into gods. Tamar's deception makes him dare to believe that his fantasy can bring about the Kingdom of Perpetual Peace. She asks him to be Absalom's Samuel and convince Absalom to kill Amnon. However, the ironic truth is that Absalom is reluctant to shed blood as he believes in the myth of Peace. Yonadab convinces Absalom to kill Amnon, without knowing that they are doing Tamar's bidding and are playing into her hands:

Everything on earth begins with blood... Even Peace itself Amnon is the violence you rebuke. Let the world see you do it...Man thirsts for Righteousness...Just one act of blood and no more. One blow for the Kingdom of Peace. Raise the sword once – then lay it down forever.

(164)

According to their plan, Absalom publicly proclaims that he has forgiven Amnon. David, who has been desperately asking for a sign from God, takes it as a good omen. Absalom, under false pretences, gets David's permission to have Amnon at his estate. He allows Absalom to take Amnon and all his brothers to his estate for a feast.

The moment of reckoning arrives and Absalom has his servants ready who stab Amnon repeatedly. Amnon's murder, a ritual spearing accompanied by mime and music, is spectacular.

A rumour starts that Absalom has killed all David's sons. In a revealing moment Yonadab tells David that only Amnon has been slain and his other

sons are alive. David realises that Yonadab has been the brains behind the whole catastrophic chain of events, causing the destruction of his family.

In the end I knew it would come through you...I see it! Its in your eyes! (171)

Yonadab confronts David on his charges, claiming that David as God's anointed has been blinded by his own weaknesses. How could David have not known what has been ailing his son? What are David's powers and prayers worth if he has no idea what his son was planning to do? The "all-seeing David" (172) and his God have done nothing to stop it. He claims that David is the one responsible:

Your pride – your rages – your looks at me everyday: everything was bearable if you were *true*. True servant to a True God – seeing more than us. Speaking for us to Him. Loving us to Him! *Without* this, who are you –*more than me or anyone? Why could you not have seen? Stopped me? Struck me down? SHOWN ME – SHOWN ME HE IS?* (172)

What he receives from David is a curse to suffer for eternity:

Be a Watcher and no more, for life. See it as through a veil drawn before your eyes. Be as a dead man in the midst of the living – warmed by nothing. And may my daughter, whom you have brought to such bitterness, bring you a bitterness even beyond grave. (172)

However, his faith in the Divine couple's bringing mercy for everyone has taken all the fear from him. He mocks David and laughs at his God,

claiming it to be nothing more than “one last effect” (173). He feels as if he has been an instrument of Gods, bringing about a new era of hope and mercy. In that moment he is as close to transcendence as he ever can be:

I had dismissed King David! Some Spirit had lent me a tongue of fire to save my life and scorch his. Suddenly I was without fear – no longer creeping. I was out of Yonadab’s world. Upright. (173)

He goes out of the city to receive what is given to him, but no coupling follows, nor any new dispensation. Instead, David’s curse starts to sink in as a reality for Yonadab.

Tamar has always wanted justice, not love, and certainly not ecstasy. She is the one who achieves what she has desired. Yonadab meets her at the outskirts of the city waiting for his dream to come true. Instead of ending with a golden couple riding in on glorious steeds, Yonadab finds Tamar. She tells him the horrible truth that she has never believed in his Kingdom of Perpetual Peace ruled by sibling lovers. She mocks Yonadab, claiming that for her it has always been a blasphemy. Yonadab, however, has felt alive only during the time he believed in Absalom and Tamar. Otherwise, he has felt alive only against a background of other people’s affairs.

She reveals that after Amnon’s death, she has confronted Absalom. Now that Absalom has fulfilled his promise, she backs out on hers, telling him “it’s over” (176). “For the sake of our Law — which alone distinguishes us

from beasts”, Absalom has demanded of his father that Amnon be put to death, and so he is eventually. However, in bringing this about, he has broken an oath to his father. Tamar enforces Absalom’s banishment on the legalistic ground that he has violated an oath. However, in her eyes his real crime, like Amnon’s, has been his incestuous desire for her. In her rage at Absalom she tells him:

Did you think I would believe such evil? You and I —
Gods?...GODS?... there is but one God in Heaven! . How I loathed
 you when you spoke all that wickedness! I made myself smile at you—
 kiss the blasphemy on your lips! (176)

She has dramatically changed from simpering virgin to violated, vengeful warrior – an instrument of God – doing “what [her] Father wouldn’t do. Or anyone”- working in the capacity of “His right hand...His arm” (176) doing God’s work. God has put upon her the burden of restoring the moral order:

That very night God spoke to me. ‘*Thou, Tamar, must do it! What no man will do for me. Avenge!* ...I will not suffer Unrighteousness to go unpunished in Israel... Cleanse the People. Root out iniquity from their midst.’ (176)

In doing so, she also reaffirms the authority of her father, whose rule has been jeopardised by her rebellious brothers. Absalom’s rebellion fails, his death follows, and the old order in the kingdom is reinforced for the time being. Fleeing the wrath of his father, the King, Absalom is caught in a tree

by his tresses and is hanged. No individual prevails in the battle in the end. All lose something. No philosophy is seen as dominant. We see Tamar pronounce his epitaph in one of the play's most revealing lines:

There was no difference between the brothers. Not in the end. No difference: Bull or Beauty. (177)

She becomes an Old Testament sibyl, much visited by wronged wives and feared husbands. As for Yonadab, like Pizarro, Mark, Dysart, and Salieri before him, he has wanted meaning, substance, and faith in his life. Unfortunately he is condemned to retell and relive the story of Amnon's rape of Tamar and its fatal consequences. In the closing moments of the play he describes his plight:

I saw all their transports, this royal family, their lusts for transcendence: — and I saw nothing. Always the curtain was between us. ... Always between me and men that curtain of separation. (181)

The curtain here serves as a metaphor for those who cannot experience the passion of life, only alienation. Moreover, the curtain becomes a unifying device to bind Yonadab to his predecessors — Shaffer's other protagonists who are victims of their own existential anguish. He sees his lack of faith as his great curse:

Always on me the curse of that man [King David]! To watch forever unmoved. To see the *gestures* of faith in others, but no more. The

consonants of credulity, but never the vowels which might give its feeling. (181)

At the end Yonadab is left feeling more peripheral, sceptical, and relinquished than ever. In his final speech, we see Yonadab mourn his separateness, which is the opposite of the brothers' incestuous desire and yet another kind of death. In the final moments, after the failure of the endeavour is more than obvious, he offers a final consideration:

Hateful to me are they who stink of Faith, and murder in its name. But hateful to me as fully are they who bear King David's curse and stink of Nothing. Who have no sustenance beyond themselves. What choice, then, is this? You tell me, my dears. The fanatic in her blazing simplicity – the sceptic in his chill complexity? Creed and the ruin that makes all over the earth. Or No Creed, and the rape *that* makes. She or me? What choice, I ask you, is this – between Belief and None, where each is lethal? (181)

Like Salieri, he is a ghost, floating in some perpetual limbo, waiting to share an audience, condemned for eternity to be unattached. Dysart's last lines are echoed in Yonadab's final pronouncement:

Yonadab hangs in Yonadab's world attached to the Tree of Unattachment. Who will cut me down? (182)

We remember Dysart asking:

Can you think of anything worse one can do to anybody than take away their worship? (1976c: 272)

It happens to Yonadab; after a flicker of hope of finding some kind of belief, it is taken from him. Like Mark Askelon's "never", he is left with nothing and that nothing makes crueller murderers than conviction or creed. Unlike Pizarro, Dysart, or Salieri, who carry their own quest to its tragic end, Yonadab simply starts a process and is left to watch the results. If the play began with a search for divinity, it ends in resignation. The conclusion is that transcendence is masked and unknowable. It is clear that transcendence is possible, but it is impossible to understand how it is achieved. As a result, disappointment reigns supreme in the play. Trapped between reason and faith, Yonadab fails to compel himself to believe the way David does. Finding a religious outlook on life remains his chief problem even in death. His haunted cry is about the need for a balance between riotous creed and sterile reason – what Billington called a balance between consuming heat and consuming cold (1985).

We remember Pizarro saying:

To make water in a sand world: surely, surely... God's just a name on your nail; and naming begins cries and cruelties. But to live without hope of after, and make whatever God there is, oh, oh, that's some immortal business surely... (1964a: 62)

As for Dysart's predicament, his conclusion was:

I need — more desperately than my children need me — a way of seeing in the dark. What way is this. *What dark is this?* ... I cannot call it ordained of God. I can't get that far. I will however pay it so much homage. There is now in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out. (1976c: 301)

Yonadab's predicament lies between these extremes. Like Dysart with his "sharp chain" in his mouth, and Salieri who "stares ahead in pain" towards the end, Yonadab admits to being *attached* to the Tree of Unattachment forever.

Thus once again, through David and his House vs. Yonadab, we see Shaffer present a dialectic between religious conformists and a free-spirited gambler with a loose sense of morality. Like his predecessors (Pizarro, Dysart, Salieri), Yonadab momentarily glimpses the soul of the object he envies. Yonadab attempts to attain universality and transcend the curse of individuation, but it is a private and incomplete form of transcendence that does not lead to a rebirth of divinity. This satirical depiction brings out Shaffer's characteristic general sympathy for the individual outsider as opposed to the social conformist. Intense passionate life is preferred rather than institutional and functional values. This subliminal preference for intensity is a part of all his work and gives it the typically provocative appeal we associate with his plays.

In order to challenge the authority of the religious world, the themes of social, political and religious structures illustrate the nature of the authority which Yonadab seeks. Each temporal authority is found inadequate, and this awareness forces Yonadab to move beyond loyalty and creed, turning his search into a matter of belief. However, what Yonadab seeks is not found in politics or the religious system of the times he lives in.

On the structural level, like *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (Peru), and *Amadens* (Austria) before that, *Yonadab* also takes place in a royal court. It lives up to Shaffer's desire to create "total theatre". The audience hear sounds of rams' horns, exotic music, and see dance, and spectacle much as they did in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. Similarly, Amnon's assassination is hidden from our view by a huge woollen carpet, which the Helpers spread on the Inner Stage. The guards drive the sharp tips of their staves repeatedly through a rug till Amnon is lifeless. Bloodstains begin to seep upward through white texture. On the other hand, before that when the rape is committed, we see shadows on a curtain of the naked bodies of Amnon and Tamar, creating a great theatrical moment. The final visual cameo shows Absalom's dead body hanging by its long black hair, serving as a summing-up of the entire play. Gianakaris calls it "realistic narrative joined to an unforgettable visual emblem" (1991b: 19). Shaffer himself has said that the play's dominant image for him remains one of curtains "hiding what must not be looked on" (quoted in Hinden 1991: 156). Yonadab remains

Shaffer's ultimate play of veils, a work whose symbolism, according to the playwright's own testimony, resides in "the many different kinds of curtains suspended before the eyes of my protagonist". (Hinden 1991: 160)

Obsession with gods walking on earth — as found in the earlier plays — is very much present in *Yonadab* as well. We remember Pizarro's saying

What if its possible, here in a land beyond all maps and scholars, guarded by mountains up to the sky, that there were true Gods on earth, creators of true peace? Think of it! Gods, free of time. (1964a: 58)

For Dysart multiplicity of life makes life comprehensible. In his mind Yonadab has also been plagued with such images in his fantasies about the immortal divine couple, but the sceptic in him keeps him in doubt, never letting him believe in anything permanently.

Shaffer, in his introduction to *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* has stated that he is examining how man "*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" (1965a: vii). In *Yonadab*, we see this process happen again as he puts all his faith and hope in Absalom. The play deals with the nature of the divine and the hard won illusion of religious belief. The reader becomes an accomplice in the resolution of the drama and is forced into

subjective evaluation, for no easy answers exist in Shaffer's distinctive world of existential myth. As Bach so rightly puts it, as in the rest of the plays under discussion, the debate, the riddle presented to Shaffer's characters is as easy and as difficult to answer as the question of the Sphinx to Oedipus. This problem centres on questions of belief and power.

Though Yonadab's scepticism appears to be antithetical to the religious belief of his times, it cannot diminish the importance of doubt as part of the intellectual process of religious belief. Yonadab seems to be questioning faith in order to find answers about the existence of God, which can be seen as an effort to authenticate what would be nothing more than a mere blind nodding without either intellectual content or moral decision. For Yonadab, authentic belief should not sidestep doubt.

Yonadab's belief in the Legend of the Kingdom of Perpetual Peace parallels the visions of Pizarro and Dysart we have come across earlier in the previous plays. Pizarro tells De Soto of the thoughts a setting sun used to bring to him:

...if only I could find the place where it shrinks to rest for the night,
I'd find the source of life, like the beginning of a river. I used to
wonder what it could be like. Perhaps an island, a strange spit of white
sand where people never died. Never grew old, or felt pain, and never
died. (1964a: 25)

Dysart recalls a similar peaceful vision; he wants to share it with at least one "unbrisk" person in his life:

Look! Life is only comprehensible through a thousand local Gods.
 And not just the old dead ones with names like Zeus —no, but living
 Geniuses of Place and Person! And not just in Greece but modern
 England. (1976c: 254)

Similarly, in his desire is to overthrow Yaveh and to usher in the era of the divine couple, Yonadab yearns for one such chance that will enable him to believe. However, he is capable of utterly reprehensible behaviour. By blending evil attributes with the cultured and refined taste of this discriminating man, Shaffer has revealed a character that can be loved and hated simultaneously. The brutal scheme which leads him to a moment of such hope, denotes the humanness of his very being. It ventilates the tragic glory of the soul Shaffer intended him to have. He is a commoner, a mediocrity like the rest of us, who in his diminutiveness and even madness attempts to understand the real meaning and rationale of faith. Living in Jerusalem of his day, instead of deducing what others believe in, he makes an effort to seek the divine that he can believe in. In a world of fear, Yonadab dares to commend himself to the hostile current with his whole existence, striking through the mask to know what is beyond man's capacity to know. And it is this determination of our protagonist's relentless lust to snatch a piece of divinity for himself, which makes him great.

Yonadab has always been troubled by the fact that humanity has been created in the image of the Great Creator/Destroyer, and simply reflects His nature. Yonadab is a cynic who has always considered himself

“delicate”, so it is beyond his comprehension that he should consider himself to be created in Jewish God’s image – Yaveh the Savage of 1000 BC. On the other hand, he realizes that his life without a sense of the Divine is nothing more than a hollow and abysmal, dismal existence. Shaffer in the Preface to the play writes what attracted him to the character of Yonadab:

I became obsessed by the figure of a cynic lured for a moment into the possibility of Belief: An anguished figure forever caught between the impossibility of religious credo and the equal impossibility of perpetual incredulity. (1989: vii)

Yonadab’s dilemma seems to be a conflict between logic and instinct, which culminates in a plea for the individual to follow his own values, free from the advice and harangues of others. Despite his scepticism and lack of faith in one God, he seeks some kind of belief. His quest is for the ultimate spiritual freedom. He prays and yet he does not believe in the Deity he prays to. Like *the Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Shrivings*, *Yonadab* reiterates the pattern demonstrating loss of faith on all sides. All is lost for Yonadab in the end. Though in earlier plays it has seemed that Shaffer is talking about only Christianity’s inadequacy to channel man’s need for belief and worship, this time he has gone thousands of years back to find the reason why, or rather what drives his characters to embrace the ritualistic and primitive rather than the institutionalised religious system. Shaffer clearly understands the complexities of the human mind; he understands that the

motivation behind complex individual acts cannot be bluntly defined. Through Yonadab, Shaffer carries on with his quest for spiritual meaning.

The vital thought process behind the play is not directly the nature of God, but the nature of Man. Here scepticism is not the realm of the Devil but that of a Man. The human predicament is to be caught up in the furious tension between *what might be* and *what really is*. The essence of religious conflict and internal strife is hard to decipher, so the quest is to try to see how far man will go to find some sort of faith. The central point of Shaffer's exploration, once again, is the need of worship in human beings. Once again, he embarks a protagonist on a journey to seek the meaning of life and the existence of God. Once again the answer found is that we do not and cannot know with certainty the meaning of life and existence of God, but life without a sense of the divine is meaningless. His exploration of this poignant paradox is apparent here too.

In the last analysis, *Yonadab* is Shaffer's fifth play on the same basic theme. A quest for divinity dominates the play, as Shaffer questions the very existence of God. Thematically, it is about finding the ability to believe, loss of faith in conventional religion, and the destruction of the gods of a new religion. It is a theme that goes as far back as *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. Yonadab's divine couple are as simplistic, primitive, and anthropomorphic as Pizarro, Alan, and Salieri's God. However, the search for meaning that lies behind these primal images is a continued search for some spiritual meaning. Watson, closing his chapter on *Amadeus* concluded:

In the earlier plays the audience learned that God was unknowable. Now the audience learns that God is inescapable. Pizarro's tears, Dysart's sharp chain, and the strains of Mozart's music stand in testimony to the human condition as presented in Shaffer's plays. (Watson 1987: 193)

Now we can add *Yonadab* to that list as well.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Peter Shaffer is a very successful dramatist whose plays have had a major impact on theatre, but over the years many critics have accused Shaffer of attempting to be profound beyond his own capacity. The main aim of the study has been to provide a balanced discussion about loss of faith in conventional religion as a dominant theme in all of Shaffer's work. The thesis has attempted to accomplish a much-needed revision of the widely held critical view of Peter Shaffer's plays as anti-religious, and to establish that they show loss of faith in religion as rendering life a meaningless existence.

Discussion about religion and faith is an age-old topic which has been going on since time immemorial. Man's need for worship has been an undeniable fact in the history of mankind; the subject of the awareness of and necessity for faith has always been of fundamental concern to man. In fact religion is one of the most important subjects in the human condition, with which we all come face to face at some stage in our lives. In the context of Shaffer's plays, there was a need to understand what makes it important for Shaffer. This research has shown that Shaffer has repeatedly declared that life without a sense of the divine is perfectly meaningless for him.

Though he has always been critical of institutions and their methods, his intent has never been to demean religion. Instead we find that he has tried to illustrate how it affects the individual. Shaffer shows that life may be possible without an institutionalised form of religion, but that it is not possible without belief in something – that it is important for human beings to have some kind of faith in a deity and some sort of worship to give them a sense of meaning in their lives. In fact the plays show that the need to hold onto faith, even when conventional faith has failed us, is the most persistent struggle for a human being.

Shaffer's is an unwavering retaliation against a web of hypocrisy in the name of institutionalised religion. He believes that one of the many causes of loss of faith in conventional religion is that conventionality does not allow one individuality as it needs to promote uniformity. On the one hand, the approved side of religion with its drive for uniformity often causes great conflict, rather than providing man with the answers without which existence becomes a torment. On the other hand, the same primordial need for worship makes him yearn for a purity of faith which is not tainted like the faith presented by conventional religion.

For Shaffer, consciousness of God is a most primitive but most basic human need. Shaffer realises that human beings have an inherent need to create worship, as life is incomprehensible without God. Man always aspires to reach a knowable God because God's existence implies a universal order. Throughout the study it is clear that there is every reason

to believe that God exists; what is not comprehensible is the way He works. He doesn't seem to be bound by human values of order, consistency, duty or logic.

It has been pointed out that Shaffer's exploration of the nature of being and the existence and the nature of God started with *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. The detailed analysis of the play has shown that the perpetual and demeaning oligarchy of institutions which debase and control individual behaviour create modern man's dilemma of a sense of loss, and the passionless existence this loss brings about. The work confirms his idea that social institutions of state, army, and church corrupt and destroy the real values they profess to uphold. By openly attacking the institutionalised power of the Church and religion, he has gone on record with his dislike not of the institution, but of how the institution forces the individual to play roles. To establish a possibility of religious experience in a world that has abandoned faith, he presents a conflict of men and civilizations. We have noted that the society puts stress on the liberated or uninhibited individual to be more predictable about everything, about belief system and faith, even about God. Shaffer attempts to break from such inhibitions through his play about the conquest of Peru; raising the question as to whether it was a conquest on the part of Christianity, or a defeat of everything that it stood for. Through his protagonist's quest for immortality, Shaffer provides an understanding of man's struggle for meaning in a world dominated by death and devoid of a religion that gives and holds salvation. The evaluation of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* proves that

the play entails a rejection of the superficiality of the institutionalised version of faith, and not anti-religious fervour on the part of the playwright. Shaffer's findings are that worship defined by a band, limits the individual to certain norms outside which he cannot act. So why not individualize worship and seek many gods? The same goes for identity. Consistent identity also lays the load of social expectations on the individual and compromises the individual's capacity as a person.

In his next serious venture *Shrivings*, ideology, and not God, becomes a tool to justify an ascendance to power. Here, the effort is to try to see how far man will go to keep the faith. It probes the metaphysics of the human mind in a perspective universe in order to find an answer to the philosophical puzzle: is human nature alterable or unalterable? Through a debate, Shaffer proves that any philosophy is mere words and thoughts until we put it to the test. Shaffer also demonstrates that to be fully human, one needs to suffer the pain of incompleteness with intensity.

His next play, *Equus*, more than ever, raises the question of humanity's true metaphysical status, concerning the theological puzzle of a direct knowledge of God. In *Equus* we see him speak of the ability to experience passion — intense passion. The study also presents Shaffer's suggestion that man and the object of worship can be indivisible, and that man has a need both to dominate and to be enslaved. However, loss of faith in conventional religion and its consequences stay as the central theme of the play. If *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* is a quest to find God incarnate, here,

Shaffer's intention is to try to fathom how far man will go to assume godly powers and become god. To divine the mystery of faith, Shaffer presents the relationship of a mortal with an immortal deity. The main idea of the play, once again, turns out to be the loss of faith in conventional religion and the resultant scars it leaves on the human soul. We see that conventional religion's failure to provide spiritual fulfilment results in the distortion of the spirit of the individual.

After exploring the inexhaustible theme of the quest for wholeness through dimensions of religion (*The Royal Hunt of the Sun*), religion and sexuality (*Equus*), and politics and ideology (*Shrivings*), Shaffer's next stop is *Amadeus*, which brings together religion, sexuality, politics, and professional fulfilment. Shaffer brings to our attention the notion that the human assumption that God automatically rewards virtue needs to be re-worked, as this assumption reduces God into a cold, calculating "God of bargains", which could lead them into such frustration that they actually declare a war on God.

He does not stop there. In his next drama *Yonadab*, Shaffer puts forward the notion that skepticism is as destructive to the soul as is man-twisted belief. The conflict presented is between two ways of life and thought, and the play involves a dexterous disentangling of a web of hypocrisy. Thus, by inextricably linking religious experience with sex, Shaffer once again looks into the inexhaustible theme of human incompleteness.

Through the dominating theme of the quest for worship, Shaffer has ended up finding that conventional religion's restrictive nature obstructs and thwarts the full development of self. We have already explored the themes of the quest for wholeness through dimensions of religion (as was done in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Equus*), politics and ideology (as was done in *Shrivings*), religion and sexuality (*Equus*). With *Amadeus* and *Yonadab*, the philosophical debate reaches the sublimated level where the "other" for whom the rivals contend is no longer man, but God. Shaffer's platform for disquisition reaches larger philosophical issues, drawing greater attention to the religious yearnings of his central characters; now, they openly compete with God. This continued insistence on themes and symbols related to spiritual awareness of human beings reflects his continued quest to understand the nature of God.

All his protagonists covet the same thing. Perhaps Yonadab best describes their yearning:

I know Gods cannot walk on earth: *let it be!* I know lovers cannot infect kingdoms: *let it be!* Let there be an end to this world of blood-soaked worship — and to my own world too, which owns no worship! *Make me see It!* Change my unchanging world! Set this manipulating man at last in ways of *Meaning!*...Let me believe! (1989: 160)

This forms their ultimate desire.

In the final analysis, this thesis substantiates the claim that the vital thought process behind Shaffer's work is not only the nature of God, but also the nature of Man. In Shaffer's world, scepticism is not the realm of the Devil but that of Man. The question seems to be how far man will go to find some sort of faith.

The human predicament is to be caught up in the furious tension between *what might be* and *what really is*. While exploring the idea that we live in a world of deceit, hypocrisy, and artificiality, Shaffer accepts that authentic belief does not sidestep doubt. Shaffer, like Kant, seems to be of the view that to find a place for faith, one might need even to deny the knowledge of God, freedom and immortality. The will to doubt is not necessarily an act of faithlessness, but can also be seen as an active pursuit of lively faith.

Though the essence of religious conflict and internal strife is hard to decipher, the central point of Shaffer's exploration in all the plays under discussion *is* the need of worship in human beings. The quest for divinity dominates his work. All five of his major plays share the same basic themes; they are about finding the ability to believe; loss of faith in conventional religion; and the destruction of the gods of a new religion. According to Shaffer, we do not and cannot know with certainty the meaning of life or whether God exists. Despite this reality, we seek meaning and worship. Life without a sense of the divine, according to Shaffer, seems meaningless, as he has been searching for a powerful root

experience, which can bring spiritual fulfilment. When we see his work in this light, nothing he has written so far seems frivolous.

The introductory chapter has stated that this study was prompted by the need for a re-evaluation of Shaffer's work in order to give us a better understanding of his attitude to the word religion, the nature of the Divine, and the human need for worship. In conclusion, we find that to hold on to faith even when conventional religion has failed us, is the most persistent need for human beings. With it, we come full circle. Through this continued insistence of themes and symbols related to spiritual awareness of human beings, Shaffer has given expression to his continued quest to understand the nature of God.

Consciousness of God not only makes the subject of his plays very important but also gives them a greater audience appeal. To be popular with the playgoers does not serve as an indictment of his plays' worthiness; it also does not devalue Shaffer's work and its effect on audiences. For Shaffer, drama is an ornate rite, which produces catharsis for the audience. People relate to his work because Shaffer brings together mediocre attitudes of human beings to the most important aspect of their lives – religion. Shaffer's theatre makes the audience feel dissected, even tormented, before being healed. They recognise their own frustrations and anxieties by what they see on stage, which makes them think about their own lives. The plays deal with the condition that we all face when we conform to values that are not our own instead of seeking our own sense

of identity for ourselves. Shaffer delves into some areas of each individual's distress in attempting to curb passion in order to function acceptably within the norms of society.

Though all discussed plays show a picture of the extinction of divinity, yet they also show a ray of hope in the lives of these protagonists when for a moment they believe in something and this momentary belief brings them a new hope. Whether he looks into the ability to believe, granting of godly gifts, ability to experience passion, Shaffer is talking about one thing, namely that life is not possible without belief in something or someone. Thus, his work is not anti-religious; instead his work is a valuable attempt to define the concept and idea of God, which gives our existence a meaning.

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ABSTRACT

Man's need for worship has been an undeniable fact in the history of mankind; the subject of the awareness of and necessity for faith has always been of fundamental concern to man. Man always aspires to reach a knowable God because God's existence implies a universal order.

For Shaffer, consciousness of God has always been a most primitive but most basic human need. Shaffer realises that human beings have an inherent need to create worship, as life is incomprehensible without God. Through the dominating theme of the quest for worship, Shaffer has ended up finding that conventional religion's restrictive nature obstructs and thwarts the full development of self. His continued insistence on themes and symbols related to spiritual awareness of human beings reflects his continued quest to understand the nature of God.

This thesis provides a balanced discussion about loss of faith in conventional religion as a dominant theme in all of Shaffer's work. It is a revision of the commonly held critical view that his work is anti-religious. But we find that for Shaffer, belief, spiritual experience, and human need for worship are undeniable facts. Life without a sense of the divine is meaningless.

Research shows that though Shaffer's work presents an unwavering retaliation against a web of hypocrisy in the name of institutionalised religion, his intent has never been to demean religion. Instead, his work endorses the idea that life may be possible without an institutionalised form of religion, but it is not possible without belief in something – that it is important for human beings to have some kind of faith in a deity and some sort of worship to give them a sense of meaning in their lives. The need to hold onto faith, even when conventional faith has failed us, is seen as the most persistent struggle for human being.

We see him openly criticising the institutionalised power of the perpetual and demeaning oligarchy of religious institutions which takes away passion from the lives of the individuals. A thorough study of his work shows that society determines every thing by the generic value term *normal*. Another key word for every concept or institution was and still is "*approved*". By "*approved*", he means the overlay of artificialities imposed upon human nature in the name of civilization by human beings themselves. Shaffer believes that a mind or a reason that is aware of its own brokenness might prove a better guide than one committed to *normal* and *approved* healthy-mindedness. What we find in Shaffer is this determination: his search for the truth beyond these terms about belief and the kind of faith such truth brings. Drama, for Shaffer is a kind of religious expression of the human state, as he believes that religion is what makes us into who we are. Whether he looks into the ability to believe, granting of godly gifts, ability

to experience passion, Shaffer is talking about one thing, namely that life is not possible without belief in something or someone.

List of Key Terms

1. Drama
2. Shaffer, Peter
3. Religion
4. Faith
5. Belief
6. Institution
7. Approved
8. Normal
9. Conventional Religion
10. Worship, need for
11. Passion
12. Identity
13. Incompleteness, human
14. Wholeness, quest for

