AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THEME IN THE PLAYS OF PETER SHAFFER

by

JO ANN MUCHMORE

Bachelor of Science

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

1957

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College
of the Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
July, 1968

OKLAHOMA
STATE UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

JAN 30 1969

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THEME IN THE PLAYS OF

PETER SHAFFER

Thesis Approved:

Vivian Locke
Thesis Adviser

Fred Tewell

N. N. Durham
Dean of the Graduate College

696399

PREFACE

This study is concerned with thematic content in the plays of the contemporary British playwright Peter Shaffer. An attempt has been made to establish criteria for analytical examination based on the theories of modern drama advanced by Robert Brustein in _The Theatre of Revolt_ and by Francis Fergusson in _The Human Image in Dramatic Literature_.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the assistance and guidance given me by the following members of my committee: Professor Vivia Locke, chairman of the theatre division of the Department of Speech, and my major adviser; Dr. Fred Tewell, head of the Department of Speech; and Mrs. Jeanne Adams Wray, member of the Department. I would also like to thank Miss Helen Donart, Humanities Division of the Oklahoma State University Library, and Mrs. Jane Stephens, Librarian of the Ponca City (Oklahoma) Library, for their continued willing assistance in the research involved in this study.

In addition, I would like to express my appreciation to my husband Gareth and my son Leslie for their patience and understanding while this work was being completed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

I. INTRODUCTION . . . 1

The Bases and Terminology . . . 1
Review of Literature . . . 7
Biographical Data . . . 10
Organization Plan . . . 11
Review of Criteria . . . 12
Summary . . . 13

II. STUDY OF THEME IN FIVE FINGER EXERCISE . . . 14

Introduction . . . 14
Plot Resume . . . 15
Thematic Analysis . . . 17
Summary . . . 27

III. STUDY OF THEME OF THE PRIVATE EAR . . . 28

Introduction . . . 28
Plot Resume . . . 29
Thematic Analysis . . . 31
Summary . . . 36

IV. STUDY OF THEME IN THE PUBLIC EYE . . . 37

Introduction . . . 37
Plot Resume . . . 39
Thematic Analysis . . . 40
Summary . . . 45

V. STUDY OF THEME IN THE ROYAL HUNT OF THE SUN . . . 46

Introduction . . . 46
Plot Resume . . . 48
Thematic Analysis . . . 51
Summary . . . 63

VI. STUDY OF THEME IN BLACK COMEDY . . . 64

Introduction . . . 64
Plot Resume . . . 65
Thematic Analysis . . . 67
Summary . . . 73

Table of Contents Continued

Chapter | Page

VII. STUDY OF THEME IN WHITE LIES 75

Introduction. 75
Plot Resume 76
Thematic Analysis 78
Summary 83

VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS. 85

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 92

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

It is the purpose of this study to make an analytical examination of theme in the six published stage plays of the contemporary British author Peter Shaffer in an effort to establish a similarity and consistency of thematic content which might link the plays distinctively to each other and to their author. The study has been prompted by curiosity about a group of plays by one author which seems to display such a diversity of style and type as does Shaffer's work. It is hoped that the following analytical examination will reveal a consistent statement of recurring theme throughout Shaffer's work.

The Bases and Terminology

Two earlier thematic studies of playwrights seem to provide a basis upon which to analyze the thematic content of Shaffer's plays: _The Theatre of Revolt_[1] by Robert Brustein, and _The Human Image in Dramatic Literature_[2] by Francis Fergusson.

Brustein maintains that revolt is "the single consuming idea or

---

[1]Robert Brustein, _The Theatre of Revolt_ (Boston, 1964).

[2]Francis Fergusson, _The Human Image in Dramatic Literature_ (Garden City, N. Y., 1957).

attitude . . . which runs through the majority of modern plays."[3] He believes that "a playwright's handling of this theme determines his approach to characters, plot, diction, and style"[4] and thinks that "this method can be fruitfully applied to many playwrights."[5]

He defines theatre of revolt as

> . . . the theatre of the great insurgent modern dramatists where myths of rebellion are enacted before a dwindling number of spectators in a flux of vacancy, bafflement and accident . . . . Yet they share one thing in common which separates them from their predecessors and links them to each other. This is their attitude of revolt, an attitude which is the product of an essentially Romantic inheritance.[6]

He defines modern as being the period in dramatic literature from Ibsen to the present.[7]

Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman describe theme as

> The central or dominating idea in a literary work. In non-fiction prose it may be thought of as the general topic of discussion, the subject of the discourse, the thesis. In poetry, fiction and drama it is the abstract concept which is made concrete through its representation in person, action, and image in the work.[8]

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary gives as the first definition of revolt "a casting off of allegiance; rebellion; insurrection";[9] and

---

[3]Brustein, p. vii.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., p. 4.

[7]Ibid.

[8]William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature, rev. ed. C. Hugh Holman (New York, 1960), p. 486.

[9]Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Mass., 1961), p. 726.

as the second definition "a movement or expression of vigorous dissent or refusal to accept."[10]

Brustein divides the revolt idea in dramatic literature into three categories, which he calls messianic revolt, social revolt, and existential revolt, defined in these ways:

> Messianic revolt occurs when the dramatist rebels against God and tries to take His place . . . Social revolt occurs when the dramatist rebels against the conventions, morals, and values of the social organism . . . Existential revolt occurs when the dramatist rebels against the conditions of his existence.[11]

These are the tenets of messianic revolt as set forth by Brustein and summarized here:

1. The play is a dramatization of the Romantic quest for faith.
2. The drama is conceived on a grand scale, falling into the category of myth or romance, almost always very long, and sometimes almost unstageable.
3. The hero, often autobiographical, is a superman who thinks himself destined to replace the old God and change the life of man. But he never quite reaches divinity.
4. The language of the drama is lofty and elevated.[12]

Tenets of social revolt as described in detail by Brustein and summarized here are these:

1. The play concentrates on man in society, in conflict with community, government, academy, church, or family.
2. The structure of the play is tight, compact, well-made.

---

[10] Ibid.

[11] Brustein, p. 16.

[12] Ibid., pp. 18-22.

3. The characters are usually contemporary and middle-class; the hero is neither superior to other men nor to his environment.

4. The language is simple.[13]

The tenets of existential revolt shall not serve as criteria of this study because they seem to be primarily applicable to the Absurdist[14] form, a form in which Shaffer has not written. Instead of these tenets, an additional criterion of thematic examination shall be an idea that Francis Fergusson sets forth in The Human Image in Dramatic Literature:

> The authentic life of Humane Letters is to be found, now, in the diverse achievements of individual artists rather than in any common, central vision. Each modern master grows to maturity in his own unique way from the ancient roots: from the life of literature itself, which is incarnate in so many arts and languages, and from the instinctive need for an ordered vision of human nature and destiny. All literature exists in the tension between what we naturally need and what we get; modern writers reflect it in countless ways. And the critic, lending ear to the artists as they lend ear to modern experience, must accept it, too: he must recognize both his instinctive need for an overall order, and the multitude of divers strange and beautiful forms in which, in fact, man is reflected in modern art.[15]

Fergusson suggests that "the instinct to project images of human life is basic [and] . . . may be read as an outward and visible sign of the spirit's life."[16] He urges the recognition of the centrality of

---

[13]Ibid., pp. 22-26.

[14]Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Garden City, N.Y., 1961), pp. xix-xx: "Absurd originally means out of harmony . . . the Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought."

[15]Fergusson, p. xx.

[16]Ibid., p. viii.

literature for "all who seek to be aware of the human in his changing world"[17] and invites the reader of modern drama to witness the work as a mirror of the times. Fergusson's remarks about the "diverse achievements of individual artists" seem to agree with Oscar Brockett's description of modern drama as electric[18] and to invite an examination of contemporary dramaturgy which recognizes this concept, an examination which focuses upon the individual vision of an artist rather than that artist's place in a particular segment of literary form.

Peter Shaffer's own comments about his work would seem to echo Brockett's and Fergusson's ideas. Therefore, from the Fergusson concept of drama as human image, these additional criteria have been formed:

1. Each modern playwright has conceived in his writing his own individual image of humanity.
2. Each play presents a reflection of this image within the framework of man's need for an over-all order.
3. Each play contains its author's own idea of the search for destiny.

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines humanity as "The quality of being human; the peculiar nature of man by which he is distinguished from other beings."[19] Destiny is defined as "The predetermined course of events often conceived as a resistless power or agency; fate."[20]

---

[17] Ibid.

[18] Oscar Brockett, The Theatre an introduction (New York, 1964), p. 277.

[19] Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 402.

[20] Ibid., p. 225.

While definitions of stylistic techniques in literature are somewhat more difficult to clarify than the foregoing terminology has been, an attempt will be made to define in abbreviated form for the purposes of this study the terms Romanticism and Expressionism. George Steiner's working definition of Romanticism seems to fit this purpose:

> There is in every literary movement a part of revolt and a part of tradition. Romanticism arose in rebellion against the ideals of reason and rational form which had governed taste in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the mythology of Blake the wings of imagination are liberated from the cold blight of reason put into them by Newton and Voltaire . . . the romantic movement strove to establish for itself a majestic lineage. It aspired not only to the heritage of Shakespeare and the renaissance. It claimed for its ancestry Homer, the Greek tragedians, the Hebrew prophets, Dante, Michelangelo, Rembrandt - in short, all art in which it discerned grandeur of proportion and the high lyric tone. The romantic pantheon is like a gallery of the sublime.[21]

Expressionism is explained by Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman as

> A movement affecting painting, the drama, the novel, and poetry, which followed and went beyond impressionism in its efforts to 'objectify inner experience.' Fundamentally it means the willing yielding up of the realistic and naturalistic methods, of verisimilitude, in order to use objects in art not as representational but as transmitters of the impressions and moods of a character or of the author or artist.[22]

The basis of analysis of theme in the plays of Peter Shaffer, then, will be formulated from the preceding criteria. The thesis of this study shall be that Shaffer's six published stage plays are related in thematic content and that this thematic content can be categorized in terms of revolt and of human image.

---

[21] George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (New York, 1961), pp. 186-187.

[22] Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman, p. 194.

Review of Literature

The reason for the continued use of the phrase "six published stage plays" is that Shaffer had written, previous to these, two plays for radio in Britain and one play for British television.[23] This study is not to concern itself with these three earlier works of Shaffer, but only with the six plays specifically written for the public stage, namely: Five Finger Exercise (1958); The Private Ear and The Public Eye, two one-acts written as one evening's entertainment (1962); The Royal Hunt of the Sun (1964); and White Lies and Black Comedy, another brace of one-acts (1966, 1967).[24]

An examination of source materials would indicate that no thorough analysis of the work of Peter Shaffer has yet been attempted. No other academic studies appear to have been made of Shaffer and no biographies have been published, other than his listings in such biographical reference books as the Current Biography Yearbook and the International Who's Who. Indeed, the one inclusion of Shaffer in a recent full-length published study that the present writer was able to trace (five pages in John Russell Taylor's Anger and After; consult footnote twenty-two) mentioned the "enigma" of Shaffer, whose "personality is still elusive."[25]

Brief statements of the quality, style and theme of Shaffer's plays

---

[23]"Shaffer, Peter (Levin)," Current Biography Yearbook (New York, 1967), p. 385, lists The Salt Lands and The Prodigal Father for radio, Balance of Terror for television. John Russell Taylor, Anger and After (Baltimore, Md., 1963), also mentions two of these, not including The Prodigal Father.

[24]"Shaffer, Peter (Levin)," Current Biography Yearbook (New York, 1967), p. 386.

[25]John Russell Taylor, Anger and After (Baltimore, Md., 1963), p. 252.

have been made in the reviews of the productions of the plays. These will be cited within this study where applicable and are enumerated in the bibliography which follows.

Other material pertinent to this study seems to be provided by Shaffer himself in various publications. His views on actors and a comment on his first encounter with the cast of one of his plays, his first for radio, is discussed in an essay called "The Cannibal Theater."[26] His aversion to classification, to receipt of the information that "the tiny strip on the Drama map labeled 'Shaffer' is already fully settled" is expressed in Theatre Arts.[27] In an article headlined "Peter Shaffer's Personal 'Dialogue'" in The New York Times,[28] he sets up an imaginary interview of himself by an "obliging friend" in order to answer certain questions about his life and work. The Royal Hunt of the Sun is accompanied by an "Introduction" and an "Author's Note,"[29] containing some brief statements of his intentions in its writing but primarily concerned with methods suggested for production.

Life Magazine, as an accompaniment to its review of Five Finger Exercise, comments on the "amiable but crusty young man" Peter Shaffer, and quotes him as referring to England as the "last authentic home of nonconformity" and as believing that a play "should be so eloquently written 'you ought to be able to quote six lines when you leave the

---

[26]Peter Shaffer, "The Cannibal Theater," Atlantic Monthly, October, 1960, p. 48.

[27]______, "Labels Aren't for Playwrights," Theatre Arts, February, 1960, p. 20.

[28]The New York Times, October 6, 1963, II, 1:2.

[29]Peter Shaffer, The Royal Hunt of the Sun (New York, 1964), pp. vii, xi.

theatre.'"[30]

The Transatlantic Review published an interview with Shaffer in 1963, written by Barry Pree, in which Pree centered the questioning around Five Finger Exercise and The Private Ear and The Public Eye. In this interview as well Shaffer would seem to emerge as an enigma. When Pree asked if Five Finger Exercise was autobiographical, Shaffer replied:

> All art is autobiographical in as much as it refers to personal experience. This is so in both the plays and in the Inca play I have been working on . . . The torment of adolescence in all the plays, and the essential pessimism in the face of death. These tensions and obsessions are autobiographical. But of course they are dressed up as stories, myths. That is theatre.[31]

Joseph Loftus in The New York Times added certain personal comment about Shaffer as a man and as a thinker to his pre-opening story on Five Finger Exercise.[32] Loftus points out that the pronunciation of the playwright's name rhymes with "staffer" and describes him as a "large-boned square-jawed, bespectacled bubbling bachelor of thirty-three" who "will talk about the theatre till the milkman comes, and it is only then, when he is worn down, that he will discuss the content of his own play."[33] Loftus says:

> Probing the unconscious interests him but does not dominate him. Nor does plot . . . He regards the theatre as a medium of words. When he writes he speaks every word aloud - 'many

---

[30] "A Playwright's Twisty Road Toward Success," Life, March 21, 1960, p. 97.

[31] Barry Pree, "Peter Shaffer," Transatlantic Review, Autumn, 1963, p. 62.

[32] The New York Times, November 29, 1959, II, 1:2.

[33] Ibid.

> times' - . . . He gives his characters plenty to say. 'Grunts and shrugs are all right - in small doses,' he said, 'People on a stage should be able to say something besides My God, Jennifer.'[34]

Comments which Shaffer made to Barbara Gelb the day after The Royal Hunt of the Sun opened in New York have specific relation to this study. Gelb says:

> He will enthusiastically enlarge on the theme of religious destructiveness and hypocrisy that forms the core of The Royal Hunt of The Sun. 'I resent deeply all churches,' he said, 'I despise them. No church or shrine or synagogue has ever failed to misuse its power.'[35]

In the chapter dealing with The Royal Hunt, these remarks will be dealt with in greater detail.

Biographical Data

According to Current Biography Yearbook,[36] Peter Levin Shaffer and his twin brother, Anthony, were born at Liverpool, England, on May 15, 1926, the sons of an Orthodox Jewish couple, Jack and Reka (Fredman) Shaffer. Their brother Brian was born in 1929. The family moved to London in 1935, where Mr. Shaffer, the father, was engaged in the real estate business. When World War II began, the family started a series of moves during which the twins were enrolled at St. Paul's public school.

In 1944, Peter and Anthony Shaffer were conscripted for duty as coal miners in the mines of Kent and Yorkshire, where they remained for three years. In 1947, Peter won a scholarship to Cambridge University

---

[34] Ibid.

[35] The New York Times, November 14, 1965, II, 1:1.

[36] Current Biography Yearbook, pp. 384-386.

and he entered Trinity College there. He was for a time editor of a college magazine, and upon his graduation from Cambridge in 1950, he tried to find employment in a publishing house. When none in England could offer him a job, he went to New York where he worked briefly in a Manhattan bookshop, and then, for nearly two years, he was employed in the acquisitions department of the New York Public Library. While he was working in the library, he wrote his first play, The Salt Land.

He returned to England in 1954, having been promised a job in a London music firm, Boosey & Hawkes. He is a piano-player by hobby. His job as a publicist with the music firm lasted only a year, when he relinguished it in order to spend more time writing the play which became Five Finger Exercise. At the same time, he collaborated with his twin brother in the writing of two mystery novels, How Doth the Little Crocodile? and Withered Murder, which have been published in the United States by the Macmillan Company. He also augmented his income with periodic stints as a literary or music critic for certain English publications, such as Truth, Time and Tide, and the Illustrated London News. He remains a bachelor and continues to maintain residence in London, though he is a frequent visitor to the United States.

Organization Plan

This study shall be divided into eight chapters, including the present one, and concluding with a summation chapter. The intervening chapters shall be concerned with thematic content of the plays of Peter Shaffer and shall deal with them consecutively according to the dates of publication. Chapter II, therefore, shall deal with Five Finger Exercise; Chapter III with The Private Ear; Chapter IV with The Public Eye; Chapter V with The Royal Hunt of the Sun; Chapter VI with Black Comedy;

and Chapter VII with White Lies.

Review of Criteria

Each play shall be examined in an effort to apply if applicable the criteria of revolt and of human image detailed earlier in this chapter. To review:

I. Messianic Revolt - a rebellion against God.

1. The play is a dramatization of the Romantic quest for faith.
2. The drama is conceived on a grand scale, falling into the category of myth or romance, almost always very long, and sometimes almost unstageable.
3. The hero, often autobiographical, is a superman who thinks himself destined to replace the old God and change the life of man. But he never quite reaches divinity.
4. The language of the drama is lofty and elevated.

II. Social Revolt - a rebellion against the conventions, morals, and values of the social organism.

1. The play concentrates on man in society, in conflict with community, government, academy, church, or family.
2. The play is tight, compact, well-made.
3. The characters are usually contemporary and middle-class; the hero is neither superior to other men nor to his environment.
4. The language is simple.

III. The Human Image - authentic humanity as reflected by the playwright.

1. The play presents an ordered vision of human nature.
2. The author reflects within the play his unique vision

of destiny.

It is not presumed by the present writer that each play will fall neatly into any one or two or all three of these classiciations, but that all or part of these classifications may be applicable to part or all of the six plays.

Summary

Curiosity about the dissimilarity in style of the six published plays of Peter Shaffer has caused this writer to wish to examine the plays thematically in an attempt to delineate similarity in that area. Criteria for the examination have been formulated on the bases of earlier studies of dramatists by Robert Brustein and Francis Fergusson. Little has been previously written about the British playwright Shaffer, whose life seems to be typically middle-class British, with emphasis upon the arts caused by his interests in literature and music.

The six published stage plays of Shaffer, namely, *Five Finger Exercise*, *The Private Ear and The Public Eye*, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Black Comedy* and *White Lies*, will be studied chronologically, according to publication dates, with one chapter given over to the perusal of each. The study will conclude with a chapter of summation.

This writer hopes to show in the following research report that Peter Shaffer consistently makes the same general thematic statement in each of his plays, rephrasing and ramifying it in each context. The recurring theme which seems to emerge is a plea for freedom of the individual.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THEME IN FIVE FINGER EXERCISE

Introduction

Five Finger Exercise was written by Peter Shaffer in 1958. It is his first play for the public stage, and it received the London Evening Standard Drama Award and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award that year.[1]

Shaffer has said that the title was taken from a book of piano exercises with which he had been experimenting and on which these instructions, here paraphrased by Shaffer, appeared: "for the exercise of five interrelated elements and how they react to one another, and how they strengthen each other or weaken each other, if you use them wrong."[2]

The form of the two-act play is quite conventional, even conforming primarily to the tenets of the well-made play, described by Oscar Brockett in this manner:

> The basic characteristics of the well-made play are: clear exposition of situation and characters; careful preparation for future events; unexpected but logical reversals; continuous and mounting suspense; and an obligatory scene; a logical and believable resolution.[3]

---

[1]"Shaffer, Peter (Levin)," Current Biography Yearbook (New York, 1967), p. 386.

[2]Joseph A. Loftus, "A Playwright's Moral Exercise," The New York Times, November 29, 1959, II, 1:2.

[3]Oscar G. Brockett, The Theatre an introduction (New York, 1964), p. 263.

Upon being questioned by critics regarding his reasons for the use of such traditional form, Shaffer has said, "All attacks on the citadel of Truth have to be oblique to succeed."[4] He told a Life Magazine reporter that he had deliberately chosen the typical English parlor play setting for Five Finger Exercise because "To audiences it's familiar ground and their guards are down. You can do more damage if you want to."[5]

In mild departure from the well-made play form, Five Finger Exercise does not have a traditionally distinct ending. Shaffer has said, in reply to the thought that the story seems unresolved at the end, "That's because it's about the fabric of life itself. Life itself is continuous."[6] Theatre Arts Magazine had this to say about the structure of the play:

> Five Finger Exercise unfolds and piles its effects so casually that you are almost fooled for a while into thinking it simply another well-done drawing-room piece, possibly defter than most. Among its effects are a sprightly flow of dialogue, full of surprise in charm and unexpected but easy turns of thought . . . [but] the author wisely refrains from giving easy solutions.[7]

Plot Resume

As the title implies, the play is about five people. They are the father, Mr. Harrington, who is a furniture manufacturer; the mother, who

---

[4]Peter Shaffer, "Peter Shaffer's Personal 'Dialogue'," The New York Times, October 6, 1963, II, 3:1.

[5]"A Playwright's Twisty Road Toward Success," Life, March 21, 1960, p. 97.

[6]Loftus, II, 1:2.

[7]"The Openings," Theatre Arts, February, 1960, pp. 14-15.

is a cultural snob and a social climber; the son, Clive, who is entering Cambridge in compliance with his mother's ambitions; the daughter, Pamela, who at fourteen, seems happy, normal, and pretty; and the daughter's tutor, a young German who thinks he has found contentment in this relationship with this seemingly commendable family, since what he recalls of his own is a nightmare: they are Nazis.

The German serves as a catalyst and provides a technical hook for exposition and character revelation. The audience can come to know what the family is really like as they reveal themselves to Walter, the German tutor. The setting is the Harringtons' country house, a relatively new acquisition which Mrs. Harrington has thought essential to their social position.

The tutor is enamored of them all, even of Mr. Harrington, whom no one else seems to notice very much, but especially of Mrs. Harrington, whom he wishes were his mother, too. Here is contained the major plot complication. Mrs. Harrington's attachment for the tutor is of a different nature, and when he mistakes her tentative advances for an endorsement of his adoptive-mother image of her, she is so insulted and frustrated that she demands that her husband dismiss the tutor. Clive, the son, provides additional complication with his position as the apex of an unfortunate triangle: he is at once jealous of his mother's love for another young man and of the young man's love for his mother, not only because he would also like to have the love of the young man. Clive is anguished to discover this latent homosexual aspect of his personality and this added torment whips him into denunciations of his mother, the tutor, and his father. While his entanglement in the plot may be subordinate to the tutor's, his place in the theme seems major.

The tutor can bear his discoveries of the foibles and falsities of

this family he has wanted for his own, though he is shaken by the ugliness he sees. What he cannot bear is their rejection of him. It causes him to attempt suicide. He does not succeed and the audience is in no way given to believe that his attempt either caused the family to invite him to remain with them or caused the family to re-examine their relationships to one another and recement themselves into a valid unit.[8]

Thematic Analysis

Without absurdist form and without pandemonium, Shaffer has exposed the modern family as a mismatched conglommerate of human beings who often detest one another, who certainly would not live together if they were not bound by blood and convention, and who probably would not even seek one another in friendship. These attitudes reveal an image of contemporary society reflecting Shaffer's view of humanity and its destiny.

He attacks at once. At the rise Clive is being served breakfast at a deceptively sunny table by his deceptively cheerful mother whose initial remark is a sizzling belittlement of her husband:

> LOUISE. Your father's going back to nature.
> CLIVE. How far?
> LOUISE. Wait till you see. He's got one of his open-air fits. This morning we're going shooting with that dreary stockbroker from the Gables . . .[9]

The use of "we" appears to be another of Louise Harrington's disparagements of her husband, for only he is going shooting. She adds that he will wear "one of those vulgar American hunting jackets made out of a car rug."[10] In a moment she asks her son what time he came home the

---

[8]Peter Shaffer, Five Finger Exercise (London, 1958).

[9]Ibid., p. 2.

[10]Ibid.

previous night.

CLIVE. Midnight.
LOUISE. I suppose you were still in London.
CLIVE. (resentfully) I was out. Just plain out.
LOUISE. Yes, dear.
CLIVE. O-U-T.[11]

Thus Louise's feelings toward her husband and the feelings of her son toward her are illustrated in the first page of action. Her service of the meal to Clive indicates visually the hovering quality of her motherhood.

When Stanley Harrington, the father, comes downstairs to breakfast, his niche is established with equal speed. Clive's manner becomes nervous and when he attempts to make light table conversation about his younger sister's approaching French lesson, Stanley says:

STANLEY. You know who we are? We're millionaires.
CLIVE. What?
STANLEY. Now we've got a tutor we must be. We don't send our girl to anything so common as a school, . . . Apparently the best people have tutors, and since we're going to be the best people whether we like it or not, we must have a tutor, too . . . What's money after all? We had a town place so we simply had to have a country place, with a fancy modern decorator to do it up for us. And now we've got a country place so we've simply got to have a tutor.
LOUISE. Are you starting on that again? Please remember it's Walter's first weekend down here and I want everyone to be very sweet to him. So just keep your ideas to yourself, would you mind? We don't want to hear them.[12]

She refers to herself and Clive in the use of "we" thus instigating a short by-play illustrating the use of Clive as a weapon that she and Stanley have apparently made all his life. Stanley retorts that Clive agrees with him about the tutor, Clive tries weakly to change the subject, and Stanley retaliates with a chastisement about his son's late

---

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., p. 4.

arrival home the previous night.

When Clive protests that he stayed in London because he had work to do, his father deprecates the work because it involved seeing and reviewing a play, the type of activity which Stanley later terms "arty-tarty."[13] Louise leaps to her son's defense and when it develops that the play was Elektra and Stanley has never heard of it, she says, "You can't mean it! . . . You just can't mean it. Really, Stanley, there are times when I have to remind myself about you - actually remind myself."[14]

Having established disrespect for one another's friends, one another's interests, and one another as human beings, they continue to bicker for several minutes. When at last Stanley has finished his meal and punctuated his departure with a last jibe at Louise through Clive, Clive says, "(with dull rage) Breakfast as usual."[15]

Indeed, if Shaffer's initial attack were not handled with restraint as is the case in the writing and as is obviously the intent of the playwright for the interpretations of the actors, the play could become melodramatic, even comic, because of its underlying intensity. Gore Vidal calls Five Finger Exercise "the first anti-family play since Strindberg" and adds that he means "'anti' in the sense that there is no alternative to the unhappy family except non family."[16] It is Vidal's theory that Shaffer

> . . . suggests, and I think it a fact, . . . that the family in the West is finished. The family as we know it has evolved over the millennia, from the tribes of

---

[13]Ibid., p. 6.

[14]Ibid., p. 5.

[15]Ibid., p. 8.

[16]Gore Vidal, "Strangers at Breakfast," The Reporter, January 7, 1960, p. 37.

> pre-history, and its origin was primarily economic. Yet once a woman can support herself in society and bring up her children by herself if she has to, and once there are sufficient jobs, scholarships, and economic opportunities for the young, then the patriarchal system is at an end; the odd group of strangers that make up every family no longer have any reason to live together, to suffer from one another's jagged edges.[17]

Vidal says in the same article that he doubts Peter Shaffer recognizes his "anti-family" theme. Perhaps Vidal has overstated the theme and what Shaffer did intend, and recognizes, is a somewhat less total indictment of contemporary family life. Shaffer is opposed to arbitrary groupings. He condemns the notion of "joining things"; he says he believes that the church and synagogue as organizations have done more harm than good.[18] With these views of Shaffer in mind, one sees his theme emerge as a possible indictment of forced membership in a social unit called the family. For Shaffer, perhaps an individual should be able to choose the groups to which he would declare allegiance.

In the character of the daughter, Pamela, and her relationship to her brother, Shaffer shows a biological connection which is also a connection of mutual consent. Pamela and Clive apparently would be friends if they had met as casual acquaintances. They seem to like one another. Early in the play, it is Clive whom Pamela seeks to help her with her lessons. At the close of the play, when the tutor has attempted suicide and Pamela is awakened by the attending commotion, Clive says to her, ". . . It's all right. It's all right. Walter fell down and hurt himself. Like you did. Now, go back to bed. Go on." "Kindly," state the

---

[17] Ibid., pp. 36-37.

[18] Barbara Gelb, "[About a Royal Hunt] and Its Author," The New York Times, October 6, 1963, p. II; 3:1. and Peter Shaffer, "Labels Aren't for Playwrights," Theatre Arts, February, 1960), pp. 20-21.

the stage directions, "he pushes Pamela gently to her bedroom."[19]

Clive and Pamela cloak their love for one another in a series of bantering games of make-believe. They appear together as a sea captain and a little girl, as Orientals, and as themselves. They invent together, over a history lesson, a "Perhapsburg" dynasty peopled with men like Thomas the Tentative and Vladimir the Vague.[20] Immediately when one of them assumes a game character or begins to build an in-joke, the other replies in character and in rapport.

Conversely, the strained quality of the rapport between Clive and his mother, Louise, is emphasized by the contrast of their similar games. When Clive and his mother pretend to be characters or share the in-joke of pet names for one another, Louise's brittleness and superimposed image of herself intrudes into the gaiety, creating an atmosphere of artificiality. After the breakfast scene, for example, she says to her son, "Oh, Jou-Jou . . . you've just got to be happy."

"Votre Majeste. My Empress!"

". . . Darling. My darling Jou-jou!" Louise replies, embracing him.[21] It is a forced portrayal-within-a-portrayal: Louise plays her self-styled image of a charming and beautiful woman who is both mother and Ideal Sweetheart to her son, and at the same time she plays The Empress Louise in a charming and beautiful little scene with him. The real Louise is entirely absent.

It seems logical to assume that part of Shaffer's reason for assembling these two contrasting types of playlet within the play might be

---

[19]Shaffer, Five Finger Exercise, p. 78.

[20]Ibid., p. 17.

[21]Ibid., p. 8.

to point up the differences in underlying feeling for each other between the two sets of characters involved. If so, the idea that Five Finger Exercise condemns arbitrary groupings by reason of blood ties alone but does not condemn entwined relationship by individual choice would appear valid.

After the pattern of family friction is set,[22] the pace of the play accelerates, bringing the hostilities into open barrage. With deadly coolness, Stanley interrogates Clive about a visit to the manufacturing company during which Clive has used the terms "shoddy and vulgar"[23] to describe the furniture which provides the Harrington income. He has used these terms to his father's plant manager. In the ensuing argument, Louise attempts to protect Clive, and Stanley, cornered, shouts:

> You get this through your head once and for all; I'm in business to make money. I give people what they want. I mean, ordinary people. Maybe they haven't got such wonderful taste as you and your mother . . . but they know what they want. Before you start sneering again, my boy, just remember one thing - you've always had enough to eat.[24]

Open warfare between Louise and Clive is longer in coming. It takes the threat of their individual, twisted loves for the tutor to rip off their masks. First, in a desperate effort to regain her son's respect, Louise scolds Clive in his father's name, apparently for the first time in his life. Clive, however, sees through her at once:

> CLIVE. Do I detect a new note in the air? 'Your father and I.' How splendid! The birth of a new moral being. Your-father-and-I. When did you last see your-father-and-I? Or is it just a new alliance?[25]

---

[22]Ibid., p. 13. "This isn't a family. It's a tribe of wild cannibals. Between us, we eat everyone we can."

[23]Ibid., p. 20.

[24]Ibid., p. 21.

[25]Ibid., p. 65.

In his rage at his mother's affection for Walter and his own desire for Walter's affection, Clive places himself with Stanley against Louise, another "new alliance." He is drunk as well as heartsick when he tells his father that

> I saw them. I came in and there they were. The light was turned down. They were kissing. Kissing. She was half undressed. And he was kissing her, on the mouth. On the breasts. Kissing. And before that I think the light had been turned off.[26]

His accusation is a lie. Louise has been telling Walter how very young she was when she married, and how pretty she was, and how French, and she was cuddling his head in her lap when Clive crossed silently behind them, but Walter has accepted her fondness as motherly.[27] The following day he inadvertently humiliates her and ruins himself in her household by saying so.

By this time, the whole system of allies has pivoted, with the exception of the one stable relationship in the play, that of Clive and Pamela. The original alliance of Clive/Louise against Stanley has become Louise/Stanley versus Clive, then Clive/Stanley versus Louise, and in between has been Louise/Walter versus Clive, Clive/Walter versus the parents and Clive against Walter. When Louise turns directly against Stanley, a pathetically nasty row occurs with the instrument, as usual, Clive:

> LOUISE. . . . you can't see beyond the end of your stupid, commonplace nose.
> STANLEY. Shut up! . . . he's going peculiar. Yes, looney, if you want to know. He talked to me last night and I didn't understand one word he said . . . He was my son.
> LOUISE. He still is.
> STANLEY. No. Not any more. You've seen to that.

---

[26]Ibid., p. 40.

[27]Ibid., pp. 27-31.

LOUISE. That's the nastiest thing you've ever said to me.
STANLEY. I didn't mean it . . . I don't know what I mean any more. It's all so bloody mixed-up.
LOUISE. Must you swear?
STANLEY. Do you think if we went away it would help? Just the two of us alone together? We could go back to Monte. (Rising, frantic, in an altered voice; not looking at her.)
LOUISE. You know I can't stand the place.[28]

However, Stanley is not entirely an injured partner in their misalliance. He retaliates for Louise's refusal of his peace terms. He dismisses Walter as she asks, but he withholds his confrontation with her over the Walter love scene until Clive is a witness to her disgrace. He faces her with his knowledge of the scene with Walter, and then leaves her alone with her son. Perhaps because their false alliance, that of Louise and Clive, has had the greatest strength and longest duration, its severance is the most scalding:

LOUISE. Clive. You hate me.
CLIVE. I hate. Isn't that enough? Is the war in this house never going to end?
LOUISE. War? What war?
CLIVE. The war you both declared when you married. The culture war with me as ammunition. 'Let's show him how small he is.' 'Let's show her where she gets off.' <u>And always through me</u>. He wasn't always a bully. You made him into one . . . Dearest Mother, who are you trying to fool? I know your rules. Don't give sympathy to a man if others are giving it, too - he'll never see how unique you are . . . .
LOUISE. Do you think you're the only one who can ask terrible questions? Supposing I ask a few. Supposing I ask them. You ought to be glad Walter's going, but you're not. Why not? Why aren't you glad? You want him to stay, don't you? You want him to stay very much. Why?
CLIVE. (in a panic) Maman!
LOUISE. (harsh and pitiless) Why? You said filthy things to your father about me. Filth and lies. Why? Can you think of an answer? Why, Clive? Why about me and Walter? Why? Why? Why?
CLIVE. (in a scream) You're KILLING. . .(he turns and falls.)[29]

---

[28]Ibid., p. 63.

[29]Ibid., pp. 76-77.

It is at this moment that Walter's suicide attempt becomes apparent. He has stuffed his jacket under his bedroom door and turned on the gas jet. The cause for discovery is the fact that he has left his record player on and the record becomes stuck. At the point of Clive's collapse, a portion of music is beginning to repeat itself, underlining aurally the simultaneous climaxes of Clive's torment and of Walter's. Stanley forces the bedroom door and drags Walter out; Louise and Clive can mercifully turn to the business of summoning a doctor and of quieting Pamela. The curtain falls as Clive, alone on the stair landing, says, "The courage. For all of us. Oh, God - give it."[30]

When the play opened in London, Mollie Panter-Downes said in The New Yorker:

> Mr. Shaffer's theme is . . . the game of unhappy families tearing one another nervously apart at unspeakable breakfasts, lunches, and dinners in a weekend country cottage.[31]

When it opened in New York, Harold Clurman, who also drew attention to its conventional form, suggested that the children of Five Finger Exercise "cry out in futile anguish against the homes in which they are decorously imprisoned and consumed."[32] The Nation suggested that it introduced an author "who combines the new material of the English theatre with an old mode of statement. The new material is the sense of impasse in the middle-class family."[33] Time Magazine said, "The

---

[30]Ibid., p. 78.

[31]Mollie Panter-Downes, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, September 6, 1958, p. 121.

[32]Harold Clurman, "Theatre," The Nation, CLXXXIV, 1959, p. 476.

[33]"Five Finger Exercise," The Nation, CLXXXVIII, 1959, p. 463.

Harrington family is slightly non-U and wholly non-unified."[34] Richard Hayes of Commonweal said his feeling was that he had watched "the members of this uncertain family remorselessly chew each other's entrails."[35] These critics would seem to affirm the assertion that the theme of Five Finger Exercise can be categorized as social revolt under the tenets designed by Robert Brustein and distilled by this writer:

II. The play is a rebellion against the social unit, family.

1. The play concentrates on man in society, in conflict with his family.
2. The play is tight, compact, well-made.
3. The characters are contemporary and middle-class; the hero is neither superior to other men nor to his environment.
4. The language is simple.

While these thematic conclusions would also seem to support the contention that Shaffer has evoked a human image in this play, perhaps The New Yorker's idea of his purpose in its writing is a pertinent addition to the total picture:

> His purpose, implicitly moral, is to expose the pain and the rage that ensue when one human being ignores another's plea, however ill-timed or misguided, for sympathy.[36]

The play, then, would appear to fit thematically into the criterion of the human image as defined originally by Francis Fergusson and distilled for this study:

III. The Human Image - authentic humanity as reflected by Shaffer.

---

[34]"New Plays on Broadway," Time Magazine, December 14, 1959, p. 77.

[35]Richard Hayes, "The Stage," Commonweal, LXXI, 1960, p. 395.

[36]Kenneth Tyman, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, December 12, 1959, p. 101.

1. The play presents an ordered vision of human nature.
2. The author reflects within the play his unique vision of destiny.

The tenets of Messianic Revolt, on the other hand, would not appear to be applicable in the case of Five Finger Exercise, since it is not a play executed on a grand scale, does not appear to deal with a conflict between man and God, does not use lofty language, nor concern a superman hero.

Summary

Five Finger Exercise seems to be a conventionally structured play, fitting the classification of well-made. The characters are contemporary, the hero a man like any other. The theme appears to be that the family as a social unit is a sham in today's world. The language of the play is simple. These qualities would appear to place the play thematically in the categories of Social Revolt and reflected Human Image as defined by Robert Brustein and Francis Fergusson and assimilated for this study. Since the play is not executed on a grand scale, does not appear to deal with a conflict between man and God, does not use lofty language nor concern a superman hero, it would seem to be eliminated from the category of Messianic Revolt.

CHAPTER III

STUDY OF THEME OF THE PRIVATE EAR

Introduction

The Private Ear was first produced at the Globe Theatre in London on May 10, 1962, in double bill with The Public Eye.[1] It had been written in four days: "probably why I've never been happy with it," Shaffer said in an interview a few months later. "It's been written over for the American production."[2] The text used for the following examination is that of the American version as first presented in New York on October 9, 1963.[3]

While The Private Ear and The Public Eye appeared in print first, Peter Shaffer has said that the bulk of the work on The Royal Hunt of the Sun had been completed before he wrote the two one-act plays. Barry Pree of The Transatlantic Review conducted an interview with Shaffer in 1963 in which

> I asked him about the critical reception given to the double bill. Generally it was very good, although it was felt that Shaffer had not progressed; that the double bill was in fact, 'smooth, lightweight' commercial theatre . . . 'It all depends on the sequence of

---

[1]Peter Shaffer, The Private Ear and The Public Eye (New York, 1964), p. 9.

[2]Barry Pree, "Peter Shaffer," Transatlantic Review, Autumn, 1963, p. 63.

[3]Shaffer, The Private Ear, p. 9.

> writing. If the critics found no progression in the double bill it is because it was written after The Royal Hunt of the Sun. The double bill was relaxation . . . Besides I've always wanted to write a high comedy.'[5]

The Private Ear is a one-act play with the conventional structure of a beginning, a middle, and an end, and a single plot line. If one accepts the theory that a one-act play is comparable to a short story in analogy with a full-length play to a novel, then the analogy seems especially apt in the case of The Private Ear with its one abbreviated action and single-aspect characters. As for its classification as a comedy which its author declares it to be in the previously quoted remarks, it would seem to qualify under the theory of comedy advanced by Susanne K. Langer:

> The pure sense of life is the underlying feeling of comedy, developed in countless different ways . . . This human life-feeling is the essence of comedy. It is at once religious and ribald, knowing and defiant, social, and freakishly individual. The illusion of life which the comic poet creates is the oncoming future fraught with dangers and opportunities, that is, with physical or social events occurring by chance and building up the coincidences with which individuals cope according to their lights. This ineluctable future - ineluctable because its countless factors are beyond human knowledge and control-is Fortune. Destiny in the guise of Fortune is the fabric of comedy; it is developed by comic action, which is the upset and recovery of the protagonist's equilibrium, his contest with the world and his triumph by wit, luck, personal power, or even humorous, or ironical or philosophical acceptance of mischance. Whatever the theme . . . the immediate sense of life is the underlying feeling of comedy, and dictates its rhythmically structured unity, that is to say its organic form.[6]

Plot Resume

The three characters in The Private Ear are Bob, who is called

---

[5]Pree, p. 62.

[6]Susanne K. Langer, "The Comic Rhythm," Theories of Comedy, Paul Lauter, ed., (Garden City, N. Y., 1964), pp. 498, 502.

Tchaik because he is a music buff; Ted, his friend and co-worker; and Doreen, a girl Tchaik has met at a concert. They are young people, probably in their early twenties, though Tchaik may be only nineteen, all of whom work for a living in present-day London. The setting is Tchaik's apartment, which is apparently only a bed-sitting room with lavatory and kitchenette.

Tchaik is preparing to entertain his first date with a dinner which is being cooked and served by Ted, as a favor. Ted also provides advice on how to entertain young women, for women are a specialty of Ted's. His adeptness with the opposite sex in contrast to the awkwardness of Tchaik provides the major plot complication when it develops that Doreen had attended the concert where Tchaik met her out of uninformed boredom and accident, rather than love of music, so she has nothing in common with Tchaik after all. She would rather be flattered and teased by the sophistication of Ted.

After the dinner accompanied by trite conversation, indicated in the script by a speeded-up tape recording of inanities,[7] Ted contrives to make a date with Doreen for a future evening. Tchaik overhears the plans, upbraids Ted for his underhandedness, and asks him to leave. Ted obliges. Then Tchaik attempts to seduce Doreen in accordance with the instructions Ted has given him before her arrival. The action is played against a loud transmission of Madam Butterfly on "Behemoth," Tchaik's prized stereophonic gramophone, and is wordless. While the total failure of the encounter and Doreen's immediate departure is generally comic, the ironic overtones are distinct and the final effect rather pathetic.[8]

---

[7] Shaffer, The Private Ear, pp. 38-39.

[8] Ibid., pp. 13-59.

Thematic Analysis

Shaffer has been criticized for "condescend[ing] to the working class in The Private Ear"[9]:

> What is disagreeable about the whole play is a condescending attitude on Shaffer's part to the poor and the stupid. He is scoring off Doreen, we feel, and to some extent off Ted as well, in order to promote the values of sensitivity and unworldliness.[10]

Shaffer's defense was this: "They said I identified myself with Ted, who is a working class snob. If anything, I identify myself with Bob, the other boy."[11] Since all three characters are of apparently identical economic, education, and ability levels, the comment would seem inappropos with the possible exception of the phrase "values of sensitivity" for the sensitivity of Tchaik would seem to be the thematic concern of the play. One critic referred to it as "a story of gentle disillusionment."[12] Indeed, in contrast to Clive's attempt in Five Finger Exercise to extricate himself from a nonessential grouping, Tchaik's conflict would appear to be an attempt to place himself within a group, the group being tentatively identifiable as Mankind, his peer group. Therefore a broad summation of thematic similarity in the two plays could be the struggle of the individual for his place in society.

The character differences in Ted and Tchaik are emphasized immediately:

> TED. You get your shirt on . . . What are you wearing over that?

---

[9]Pree, p. 63.

[10]"The Private Ear and The Public Eye," Theatre Arts, January, 1964, p. 65.

[11]Pree, p. 63.

[12]"The Public Eye," America, CIX, 1963, p. 752.

BOB. I thought my blazer.
TED. It's a bit schooly, but she'll probably like that. Makes you look boyish. You'll bring out the protective in her. What tie?
BOB. (producing a tie). I thought this.
TED. Oh yes, gorgeous. What is it? The Sheffield Young Man's Prayer Club?
BOB. Don't be daft. What's wrong with it?
TED. You really don't know, do you? Look: that sort of striped tie, that's meant to suggest a club or an old school. Well, it marks you, see? 'I'm really a twelve pound a week office worker,' it says. 'Every day I say, Come on five thirty, and every week I say, Come on Friday night. That's me and I'm contented with my lot.' That's what that tie says to me.
BOB. Well you must have very good hearing, that's what I say.[13]

Ted insists that he wear instead a tie which can be termed "chic," a word Ted uses three times during the brief tie discussion and defines as being "French for With It."[14] Later Tchaik incorporates the word in his advance on Doreen, but when she asks him what he said he hasn't the nerve to say it again.[15] His rather touching revelation of the sincerity of his own personality are met with contrasting vacuity by Doreen. He becomes enthusiastic in the small talk before dinner on the subject of baby's blue eyes: "I bet if you looked really hard at six babies the first day they were born you'd see six different kinds of blue," he says, and elaborates at some length. Doreen can only stare at him when he finishes. He "looks at her unhappily" and says "It's a thought anyway." "Oh, yes," chirps Doreen.[16] To almost all of Tchaik's attempts at conversation, all of which seem to deal with things basically soft and

---

[13]Shaffer, The Private Ear, p. 15.

[14]Ibid., p. 16.

[15]Ibid., p. 25.

[16]Ibid., pp. 27-28.

gentle such as the babies, trees, music, poetry, the lines on human faces, Doreen replies with "What?" or "Pardon?" or "Oh, yes."

Conversely, she communicates spiritedly with Ted:

> TED. Some more vino, then?
> DOREEN. I don't mind if I do.
> TED. Well, what d'you know? There isn't any. Tchaik's taken it all!
> DOREEN. He hasn't. I thought he didn't drink.
> TED. Not on an empty stomach. You certainly make up for it on a full one. You want to watch it, mate. Alcohol isn't really a stimulant at all, you know. It's a depressant. It depresses you. That's something most people don't know.
> DOREEN. My dad says, 'Drink is the curse of the working classes.'
> TED. Does he?
> DOREEN. Yes. Mind you, he can't drink himself . . .[17]

They continue with animation as the discussion of drinking becomes a discussion of politics, with Tchaik silently present throughout. When he attempts to enter the conversation in mood and context with, "There's a notice in the pub next door that says, 'Work is the curse of the drinking classes,'" a pause ensues. Then Doreen says, "Pardon?"[18] As Henry Hewes of Saturday Review points out:

> The Private Ear is a concerto of awkwardnesses built around the frustration of Tchaik, a shy, sensitive young man who has for the first time got up nerve enough to invite a girl to his flat for supper and classical music on his stereo. The girl, Doreen, whom he imagines to be beautiful, is in reality only pretty and quite common. Because she is incapable of appreciating the finer things, every attempt at conversation fizzles.[19]

After the climax of humiliation for Tchaik when his staged attempt of seduction of Doreen fails, he makes a try at recovery by telling her

---

[17]Ibid., 40.

[18]Ibid., pp. 41-42.

[19]Henry Hewes, "Twice Over Lightly," Saturday Review, October 26, 1963, p. 32.

that he has brought her to his apartment under false pretenses; he already has a serious girl friend. The scene is reminiscent of Act II of The Glass Menagerie, perhaps an ironic parody of that scene with Tchaik taking on Laura's hurt in the guise of Jim's fumbling confidence, which, to complete the reversal, Tchaik is faking. The picture of a girl which he shows Doreen is Ted's girl and in his description of her he uses Ted's phrase, which Ted has meanwhile used to Doreen to describe herself. At the use of the identical phrase, Doreen registers recognition, but whether she recognizes only the repeated phrase or the mockery of the entire situation is now made clear.[20] Tchaik manages to retain his flagging control until she leaves. Then:

> He shuts the door. He turns and surveys the empty room. Then he walks almost aimlessly across it.
> He stops by the gramophone. He puts it on. We hear the first strains of Madam Butterfly. He stands by it as it plays. He looks down at the record turning. He kneels to it, stretching out his arms to enfold it.
> Suddenly he draws his hands back. He takes off the pick-up, and, with a vicious gesture, scratches the record twice, damaging it beyond repair.
> A pause. The boy replaces the pick-up. Again the Love Duet fills the shabby room, but now there is a deep scratch clicking through it, ruining it.
> The stage darkens.
> Bob stands rigid beside Behemoth.
> SLOW CURTAIN[21]

When the double bill of The Private Ear and The Public Eye opened in New York, Newsweek said that the themes of both "have to do with short circuits in human communication."[22] Significant thematic commentaries were few, however, probably because of the comic style of the play. Most

---

[20]Shaffer, The Private Ear, p. 58.

[21]Ibid., p. 59.

[22]"The Private Ear and The Public Eye," Newsweek, October 21, 1963, p. 104.

critics concerned themselves with the situations involved. Some questioned Shaffer about his change in style, to which he replied, "I hope my style will alter all my life like the cells of my body."[23] On comedy specifically, Shaffer said:

> Many people believe that comedy, even high comedy, is a lower form of art than the creation of sad psychological plays . . . this attitude is . . . strangely Puritanical. It's nineteenth century. It is an attitude which rated 'Cosi fan Tutte' inferior to 'Don Giovanni' because its natural element is pleasure . . . life-enhancing. Comedy must be that of it's nothing.[24]

In the absence of published critical confirmation, this writer shall attempt to place The Private Ear in the thematic categories delineated in Chapter I of this study, from the foregoing examination of the text. The play would appear to fall outside the category of Messianic Revolt, not being a rebellion against God, and being in no way conceived on a grand scale as a quest for faith by a superman hero, nor being couched in lofty language. The pattern of Social Revolt would appear more applicable:

II. A rebellion against the conventions of the social organism.

1. The play concentrates on man in society, in conflict with his community: the co-workers, the peer group.
2. The play is tight, compact, well-made.
3. The characters are contemporary; the hero is neither superior to other men nor to his environment.
4. The language is simple.

The pattern of the Human Image is also applicable in the case of

---

[23]Peter Shaffer, "Peter Shaffer's Personal 'Dialogue'," The New York Times, October 6, 1963, p. II, 1:2.

[24]Ibid.

The Private Ear, and seems reinforced by Miss Langer's theories of human destiny within the framework of comedy as quoted earlier in this study.

III. The Human Image - authentic humanity as reflected by Shaffer.

1. The play presents an ordered vision of human nature.
2. The author reflects within the play his unique vision of destiny.

Summary

The Private Ear seems to be a conventionally structured one-act play, featuring contemporary setting and characters, with a hero who is a man like any man. The theme appears to be that a man outside the common mold must struggle for a place in society. The language of the play is simple. These qualities would seem to place it thematically in the categories of Social Revolt and reflected Human Image as defined by Robert Brustein and Francis Fergusson, respectively, and assimilated for this study. The play seems to fall outside the category of Messianic Revolt as it does not deal with rebellion against God and does not employ any symbols of Romantic quest or heroic machinations.

CHAPTER IV

STUDY OF THEME IN THE PUBLIC EYE

Introduction

The Public Eye was first produced at the Globe Theatre in London on May 10, 1962, in double bill with The Private Ear.[1] It was generally greeted by critics as the better of the two plays, and one critic acclaimed it as skillful enough "to challenge even the master of serious fantasy himself, Jean Giraudoux."[2]

> The presentation of this double bill brought acknowledgment from the majority of British critics that Shaffer had truly fulfilled his promise. As Eric Keown, the reviewer for Punch, put it: 'If there was ever any question of Five Finger Exercise being a flash in the pan, it is now dispelled. Mr. Shaffer is one of our major playwrights, of a kind we need badly.'[3]

When the pair of plays appeared in America, Henry Hewes referred to them as "Mr. Shaffer's skillful three-finger exercises."[4]

> The Public Eye creates one of the most colorful eccentric characters in the modern theatre. Private detective Julian Cristoforou is a 'wog' (disrespectful British slang for an untutored Near Eastern native) who dresses outrageously in a broad-striped suit and white shoes, and who is a compulsive eater of nuts, sweets, fruits, and yogurt, all of which

---

[1] Peter Shaffer, The Private Ear and The Public Eye (New York, 1964), p. 9.

[2] "Shaffer, Peter (Levin)," Current Biography Yearbook (New York, 1967), p. 385.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Henry Hewes, "Twice Over Lightly," Saturday Review, October 26, 1963, p. 32.

> he carries around with him. Behind this ludicrous façade, however, lies a superior intuition, a scornful and delicious wittiness, and a completely unBritish adventurousness.[5]

The significance of the title is revealed by this character when he tells his client's wife that

> Most of my life has been spent making three where two are company . . . I realized something shattering about myself. I wasn't made to bear the responsibility of a private life! . . . I was created to spend all my time in public! . . . You gave me a private life. For three weeks I walked through London, all alone except for you to point the way. And slowly, in the depths of that long silence, I began to hear a wonderful sound: the rustle of my own emotions growing. Incredible sensation: the tickle of original feeling. A detective was dying: a man starting to live. And you showed him that eyes weren't made just for spying through binoculars, and ears weren't created just for listening at keyholes. We are born living, and yet how ready we are to play possum and fake death.[6]

The Public Eye is a comedy in one-act with the conventional structure of a beginning, a middle, and an end. Certain of Plato's comments on the nature of comedy seem applicable to the script:

> SOCRATES: Then the argument shows that when we laugh at what is ridiculous in our friends, we mix pleasure with envy, that is, our pleasure with pain; for envy has been acknowledged by us to be mental pain, and laughter is pleasant, and we envy and laugh at the same instant.
> PROTARCHUS: True.
> SOCRATES: And the argument makes clear that this combination of pleasures and pains exists not only in laments, or in tragedy and comedy, but also off the stage in the entire tragi-comedy of human life on countless occasions.[7]

---

[5]Ibid.

[6]Shaffer, The Public Eye, pp. 104, 112.

[7]Plato, "Philebus," Theories of Comedy, ed. Paul Lauter, (Garden City, N. Y., 1964), p. 8. (The word "envy" within may also be translated as "malice". [Ibid., p. 7]).

Plot Resumé

The characters in The Public Eye are Julian Cristoforou, a detective; Charles Sidley, his middle-aged client; and Belinda, Sidley's very young wife. The action occurs on a Saturday morning in the outer offices of Sidley's accounting firm. Cristoforou has come to report his past three weeks of shadowing Belinda to her husband. After initial comic by-play in which Sidley thinks the detective is a prospective accounting client, the point is reached: Belinda is seeing someone, a handsome "diplomatic" type whom she meets every day. Chagrined, the husband explains his relationship with his wife to Cristoforou. He has married her for love and basked for two years in the sun of her youth and love ("sun worship. It's debasing and superstitious"[8]), teaching her how to dress and how to entertain and how to amuse herself according to his standards. Now she has turned away from him and he cannot understand it; she must be in love with someone else.

Before Cristoforou can make further explanation, if indeed he intended to do so, Belinda herself comes in, and Cristoforou hides himself. In the encounter which follows, Sidley confronts his wife with his suspicions and she admits to a strange affair in which she has shared London for three weeks with a peculiar man who has followed her day and night: Cristoforou. They have never spoken and she has no idea who he is; only Sidley can realize this from his previous conversation with the detective. When Cristoforou's hiding place is discovered, he must deal with husband and wife together. He sends Sidley out and explains to Belinda that in order to regain her husband's interest she must

[8]Shaffer, The Public Eye, p. 82.

re-establish mystery of personality and oneness of relationship by spending a month in the same kind of relationship with him which she has just experienced with the stranger Cristoforou. The end of the play is reached when Sidley returns and helplessly agrees to this arrangement, which the audience can tell will cement their marriage successfully. At the curtain, Cristoforou is preparing to take over the accounting firm in the absence of Sidley who will be busy following his own wife around London.[9]

> Ironically, Mr. Cristoforou has discovered Mrs. Sidley's capacity for such a relationship by enjoying it himself in three glorious weeks of silent adventure paid for by her husband. But this seriousness is allowed to take over only long enough to make the play convincing, and we soon return to the antics of Mr. Cristoforou, who at the play's end is eating a grapefruit as he audaciously carries on a telephone conversation with a new client who imagines him to be an expert in tax avoidance.[10]

Thematic Analysis

The obvious conclusion that the play would fit immediately into the category of Social Revolt because its theme deals with an individual's conflict with his family, in this case his marital partner, seems to be somewhat an oversimplification of Shaffer's apparent intent thematically. The play may be classifiable as Social Revolt because it concerns a man in conflict with society; or in this case, a woman, for Belinda would appear to be the heroine of The Public Eye in spite of the prominence of Cristoforou. However, the conflict would seem to be with conventions and mores rather than with family, for Belinda's conflict with her husband is a matter of plot complication and not a major portion of the

---

[9]Ibid., pp. 60-120.

[10]Hewes, p. 32.

theme, if one adheres to the definition of theme cited at the beginning of this study.[11] The purpose of The Public Eye would seem to reinforce the general thematic statement of Shaffer which appears to emerge from Five Finger Exercise and The Private Ear: the struggle of the individual for his place in society. Belinda seems to be striving for permission to be herself within the confines of being Mrs. Charles Sidley. Her struggle is emphasized by her position between the exaggerated conformist who is Sidley and the flagrant nonconformist who is Cristoforou in which the detective reads to his client the notes regarding his pursuit:

> JULIAN. 'Subject collects hat, which appears to be already ordered, and emerges, wearing it. Hat resembles a wilted lettuce.'
> CHARLES. Watch what you say, please. Everything my wife knows about hats, or clothes of any kind, she learned from me. When I first met her she wore nothing but sweaters and trousers. When you criticize her taste in hats, you are criticizing me . . .
> JULIAN. '11:30 subject in exquisite green hat walks up Brompton Road, enters the Michaelangelo Coffee Bar. Orders a Leaning Tower of Pisa.'
> CHARLES. What the hell's that?
> JULIAN. A phallic confection of tutti frutti, chocolate chips, nougat, stem ginger, toasted almonds and molasses - the whole cloud capped with cream . . . It goes on, and on . . . you wife is rather partial to it. So, as a matter of irrelevant fact, am I. Do you have a sweet tooth?
> CHARLES. Never mind about my teeth. What happened next?
> JULIAN. '12:17 subject rises and goes into Kensington Gardens. Walks to the statue of Peter Pan' Do you believe in fairies?
> CHARLES. What did she do?
> JULIAN. She looked at it and laughed. A curious reaction, I thought.
> CHARLES. Not at all. The first week we were married I showed her that statue and explained to her precisely why it was ridiculous. When you criticize her taste in statuary you criticize me.[12]

---

[11] William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature (New York, 1960), p. 486. The concept is discussed in Chapter I.

[12] Shaffer, The Public Eye, pp. 74-76.

Charles Sidley also emerges in the foregoing dialogue as the dominant personality in his marriage, with Cristoforou appearing, similarly, as a tongue-in-cheek eccentric. That Belinda's own tastes differ from those forced upon her by her husband is equally apparent. Presently, additional information about her tastes becomes available from the detective's report. She has led him on a round of horror movies, including "I Was a Teenage Necrophile"[13] and totaling eleven such features in the first week of their relationship.[14] When she enters and is engaged with her husband in a discussion of the intrigue she has been enjoying with Cristoforou, she reveals that the horror movie attendance was as much a teasing of her follower as a matter of actual taste, another glimpse of her real personality.[15] In the same scene she pinpoints a part of her irritation with Charles' own personality traits:

> BELINDA. You always say you want me to entertain your friends, and as soon as you can, you get out the port and send me out of the room. It's incredible anyway, that a man of your age should be pushing decanters of port clockwise round a dining table. It makes you look a hundred. When I tell my friends, they can't believe it.
> CHARLES. I'm sure they can't. But then one would hardly accept their notions of etiquette as final, would one?
> BELINDA. Oh, please!
> CHARLES. What?
> BELINDA. Not your iceberg voice. I can't bear it. 'One would hardly say.' 'I scarcely think.' 'One might hazard, my dear.' All that morning suit language. It's only hiding.[16]

Another contrast in the two characters is emphasized by the ways in

---

[13]Ibid., p. 78.

[14]Ibid., p. 98.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid., p. 90.

which each copes with the growing discontent in their marriage, a condition recognized by each of them and met separately by each. Charles has faced it by assuming Belinda is seeing someone else and by hiring the detective. Belinda has met it with a decision to see Charles alone because "I wanted to talk to you. No, not talk. I knew that wouldn't be any good. I want to - I don't know - give you something. These flowers."[17] Just as her solution of talking it out "wouldn't be any good" so is his solution of sleuthing her private life an unacceptable method of resolving their difficulties. She becomes almost hysterical when she learns the identity and purpose of Cristoforou.[18] Only he, Cristoforou, the outsider, is able to offer an amenable compromise which can suit the desires of both man and wife to reunite.

The keys to their difficulties and the corresponding thematic content seems to be exemplified most frequently in the speeches of Belinda:

> Living with you has taught me to respect my feelings - not alter them under pressure.[19]

> . . . I love my friends: how can I be faithful to you if I'm unfaithful to them? . . . you're not my only duty . . . and I'm not yours. You've got to be faithful to all sorts of people.[20]

> Oh, Charles, it's not a question of hats. I've had the most intimate relationship of my life with someone I've never spoken to . . . When I'm with him I live. And because there aren't any words, everything's easy and possible. I share all the time.[21]

Newsweek's reviewer of the New York performance of The Public Eye

---

[17]Ibid., p. 99.

[18]Ibid., p. 102.

[19]Ibid., p. 94.

[20]Ibid., p. 91.

[21]Ibid., p. 99.

concluded that "It is through silence, not words, that people understand each other."[22] What people hear in the silence, Cristoforou says, is "each other's heartbeats."[23]

John Russell Taylor in Anger and After seems to deny the existence of a concrete theme with this statement:

> The Public Eye is the sort of play which is taken as being both witty and wise; in this case the wisdom is rather phoney but wit is genuine enough, and that is a lot.[24]

However, a thematic line does seem discernible, perhaps the more valid because of its subtlety and the lack of didactic intrusion upon the comedy form. The theme of a human being's right and desire to retain his individuality would seem illustrative of Social Revolt and Human Image by placement within these canons:

II. A rebellion against the conventions of the social organism.

1. The play concentrates on man in society, in conflict with his community: total social mores.
2. The play is tight, compact, well-made.
3. The characters are contemporary; the hero(ine) is neither superior to other men nor to (her) environment.
4. The language is simple.

III. The Human Image - authentic humanity as reflected by Shaffer.

1. The play presents an ordered vision of human nature.
2. The author reflects within the play his unique vision of destiny.

22"The Private Ear and The Public Eye," Newsweek, October 21, 1963, p. 104.

23Shaffer, The Public Eye, p. 112.

24John Russell Taylor, Anger and After (Baltimore, Md., 1963), p. p. 252.

Summary

The Public Eye seems to be a conventionally structured one-act play, its single-action plot occurring in a contemporary setting with contemporary characters and a heroine who is a woman like any other. The theme appears to be that any human being has a right to retain his individuality. The language of the play is simple. These characteristics would seem to place the play thematically within the categories of Social Revolt and reflected Human Image as originally defined by Robert Brustein and Francis Fergusson and re-evaluated for the present study. The play does not seem to fall within the prescribed tenets of Messianic Revolt as set forth in Chapter I.

CHAPTER V

STUDY OF THEME IN THE ROYAL HUNT OF THE SUN

Introduction

The Royal Hunt of the Sun was chosen by Britain's National Theatre Company as the opening play of the 1964 Chichester Festival from which it proceeded to the Old Vic in London as part of the Company's regular season.[1] The play was brought to New York by the Theatre Guild in combination with Theodore Mann and Gerald Oestreicher in the fall of 1965.[2] Other notable productions of The Royal Hunt include its selection as the opening vehicle of Theatre Atlanta in its new Atlanta, Georgia, building in November, 1966.[3] According to one source:

> Most critics were frankly stunned by it, because nothing in Shaffer's previous work had prepared them for such a monumental enterprise. Five Finger Exercise had been exceedingly well made but small in scale. The Private Ear and The Public Eye had pleased with the very modesty of their comic conceits.[4]

Most reviewers incorporated Shaffer's "total theatre" phrase in their descriptions of the play, apparently taking the concept not only from the production itself but from Shaffer's statements regarding his

---

[1]"Shaffer, Peter (Levin)," Current Biography Yearbook (New York, 1967), p. 386.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Henry Hewes, "Conquest of Peachtree Street," Saturday Review, November 19, 1966, p. 72.

[4]Current Biography Yearbook, p. 386.

purpose in writing the play:

> Why did I write *The Royal Hunt*? To make colour? Yes. To make spectacle? Yes. To make magic? Yes - if the word isn't too debased to convey the kind of excitement I believed could still be created out of 'total' theatre.[5]

The play is written in two acts of twelve episodes each and is meant to be played with no interruption between episodes.[6] It incorporates mime, masks, dance, song, and instrumental music within the action and gives an overall effect of pageantry.[7] With regard to the text Shaffer has said:

> What about the words: What did I really want to write? Many things. Basically, perhaps, about an encounter between European hope and Indian hopelessness; between Indian faith and European faithlessness. I saw the active iron of Spain against the passive feathers of Peru: the conflict of two immense and joyless powers.[8]

Henry Popkin in reviewing the British opening of the play compared it to *Luther* and *A Man for All Seasons* calling it "episodic historical drama which shows the Renaissance to be a time when irrevocable decisions were made, affecting the lives of all of us."[9] Howard Taubman of *The New York Times* said, when the play arrived in New York, "*The Royal Hunt* declares that Mr. Shaffer refuses to be hemmed in by the narrow limitations of a realistic earth-bound theatre."[10] He said, "The salient

---

[5]Peter Shaffer, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (New York, 1964), p. vii.

[6]Ibid., p. xi.

[7]Barbara Gelb, "[About a Royal Hunt] and Its Author," *The New York Times*, November 14, 1965, p. II, 1:1.

[8]Shaffer, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, p. viii.

[9]Henry Popkin, "Theatre," *Vogue*, October 1, 1964, p. 112.

[10]Howard Taubman, "About a Royal Hunt [And Its Author]," *The New York Times*, October 27, 1965, p. 36:2.

characteristics of The Royal Hunt of the Sun are its high intelligence and its bold, imaginative reach."[11]

Plot Resumé

The play is the story of the conquest of the Incas in Peru by Spanish Conquistadors under Francisco Pizarro during the summer of 1529, continuing until August, 1533. A more personal element is initiated by a developing friendship between Pizarro and the Inca sun-god Emperor Atahuallpa. A narrator introduces the play to the audience using a flashback to the days when the narrator had accompanied the one-hundred-sixty-seven-man expedition into Peru. He had been a boy of fifteen years at the time of departure, and much awed by the supposed glamor of such an undertaking. Part of the thematic considerations concerns his disillusionment.

Act I is subtitled "The Hunt."[12] In the first episode, Pizarro and his second-in-command, Hernando DeSota, are recruiting volunteers for the voyage in a village square in Spain. They are accompanied by two priests with whom they represent Carlos V, King of Spain. In the second episode the company and its arms are consecrated in the name of Carlos and the Catholic Church. Immediate contrast of the two worlds which will be involved in the play is attained in the third episode, a brief flash of the Inca court in which Atahuallpa is established as the god of his people. The fourth episode concerns the first confrontation of the two worlds: the Spaniards have landed in Peru and their first act is to

---

[11]Taubman, "The Theatre: Pizarro, Gold and Ruin," The New York Times, October 27, 1965, p. 36: 2.

[12]Shaffer, The Royal Hunt of the Sun, p. 15.

capture a group of Incas and tell them "We've got a God worth a thousand of yours."[13] Atahuallpa's answer from afar is a message to Pizarro to meet him at Cajamarca, behind the Andes: "If he is a god he will find me. If he is no god, he will die."[14]

The journey to Cajamarca begins in the fifth episode during which the Spaniards traverse a jungle; in the sixth they see the scope of the Inca Empire for the first time, with its broad highways and terraced corn fields and channelled waterways. In the seventh episode the company of soldiers assembles for the ascent of the Andes. This is accomplished on stage by mime and is in fact subtitled in the text, "The Mime of the Great Ascent"; an accompaniment of "cold music" and blue light is suggested.[15]

In episodes nine and ten the company approaches the place of meeting with Atahuallpa and plans an assault of him and his men when they meet. In episode eleven they wait in a display of strength for Atahuallpa's group to advance to the meeting place. The twelfth episode of the first act ends with the sequence subtitled "The Mime of the Great Massacre": Atahuallpa and his men arrive at the rendezvous and are immediately attacked and the men murdered by the Spaniards, whom they greatly outnumber. Only Atahuallpa is spared to be held captive.[16]

Act II is subtitled "The Kill."[17] The first episode shows the disillusionment of Young Martin, the narrator as a boy, after the massacre.

---

[13]Ibid., p. 36.

[14]Ibid., p. 37.

[15]Ibid., p. 54.

[16]Ibid., pp. 74-75.

[17]Ibid., p. 79.

The second episode is the significant sequence in which Pizarro strikes the bargain with his hostage, Atahuallpa, saying that he will free him when he fills his prison room with gold. The company of Spaniards and the audience know he has no intention of doing so. Atahuallpa agrees and the next four episodes are marked by the mimes of the "Gold Processions,"[18] choreographed presentations to Pizarro through Atahuallpa of golden Inca artifacts brought from all over the Empire by followers of the sun-god emperor. During these episodes also is the friendship of Atahuallpa and Pizarro begun. By the seventh episode this relationship has become a genuine love and is undermining Pizarro's former thought of killing Atahuallpa when the gold is amassed. The episode ends with his, "Oh, lad, what am I going to do with you?"[19]

The eighth episode is the apportionment by shares of the accumulated roomful of gold to the company of Spaniards. In the ninth and tenth episodes the tension of these men and their desire for the death of Atahuallpa reaches a mutinous pitch. Pizarro refuses to yield up his prisoner, but in the eleventh episode Atahuallpa himself convinces Pizarro that he must let the Spaniards kill him and that it will be safe for them to do so, because he is a god. He is immortal. He will rise up with the sun, his father, the next morning. The climax of the personal story line of the play is reached in episode twelve, the final segment, when Pizarro who wants to believe in Atahuallpa's immortality, allows his men to kill the Inca and the Inca does not rise, is not a god, but only a dead man. "Cheat! You've cheated me!"[20] Pizarro roars over the

---

[18]Ibid., pp. 86, 103.

[19]Ibid., p. 115.

[20]Ibid., p. 137.

mute body of the Inca, and feels tears on his cheeks for the first time in his life. The narrator finishes the conquest story line:[21]

> So fell Peru. We gave her greed, hunger, and the Cross: three gifts for the civilized life. The family groups that sang on the terraces are gone. In their place slaves shuffle underground and they don't sing there. Peru is a silent country, frozen in avarice. So fell Spain, gorged with gold; distended; now dying.[22]

More space has been given to a plot resume of The Royal Hunt than has been assigned to the other plays in this study partly by reason of its excessive length and partly because an understanding of its structure will be necessary to its placement within the category of Messianic Revolt, which will be attempted within the thematic analysis.

Thematic Analysis

While many of the reviewers of productions of The Royal Hunt mentioned theme in their critiques, a lack of consistency in statements of what the theme is was notable. Probably the difficulty arises from the complexity of the play. One reviewer suggested that "The theme is big, possibly too big."[23] Some reviewers concerned themselves only with the spectacle and plot ramifications; one such review traced the idea of the play to an earlier French playwright:

> The idea for the play . . . was probably suggested to Mr. Shaffer by [Antonin] Artaud's first scenario for his projected Theatre of Cruelty, a tableau sequence called The Conquest of Mexico. In this unproduced spectacle, Artaud hoped to 'contrast Christianity with much older religions' and correct 'the false conceptions the occident has somehow formed concerning paganism and certain natural religions.'[24]

---

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., p. 138.

[23] "The Stage," Commonweal, November, 1965, p. 215.

[24] "Familiar Peru, Exotic Brooklyn," New Republic, November 27, 1965, p. 45.

Other ideas on the theme of The Royal Hunt ranged from the suggestion that people have always invested America with impossible dreams only to settle for cash[25] to a description of Pizarro as a "20th century existentialist in the body of a 16th century swineherd" who reflects Shaffer's theme of "God is dead and life lacks meaning."[26] There does seem to be a hint of the American dream in the Spaniards' voyage to Peru, and possibly something of the death of God in Pizarro's hunger for a faith; the loss of youthful illusion may be represented by the character of Young Martin and, as several reviewers noted, the "clash of two civilizations"[27] is certainly a consideration. Some critics have referred to what they term Shaffer's "feverish anti-Catholicism,"[28] but on the basis of statements of Shaffer this study will attempt to suggest that Shaffer's attack focuses upon Established Church, simply represented in the case of The Royal Hunt by the Catholic Church because it was the national religion of Spain at the time of the action. A danger in thematic study would seem to be succumbing to the temptation of assigning theme too specifically, disregarding a larger and more universal theme which might be exemplified within a given vehicle.

Barbara Gelb, who interviewed Shaffer while The Royal Hunt was playing in New York, wrote:

> He will enthusiastically enlarge on the theme of religious destructiveness and hypocrisy that forms the core of The Royal Hunt of the Sun. 'I resent deeply

---

[25]Commonweal, p. 215.

[26]"Tiny Alice in Inca Land," Time Magazine, November 5, 1965, p. 77.

[27]"Hunting Heavan," Newsweek, November 8, 1965, p. 96.

[28]Ibid.

> all churches,' he said, 'I despise them. No church or shrine or synagogue has ever failed to misuse its power.'[29]

In the mouth of Pizarro in The Royal Hunt, Shaffer has put the words:

> Men cannot just stand as men in this 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. They're useful against loneliness, Martin, but they're not true. They're not real, Martin. Do you see?[30]

In the introduction to The Royal Hunt, much of which was also published in The New York Times,[31] Shaffer said:

> I suppose what is most distressing for me in reading history is the way man constantly trivialises the immensity of his experience: the way, for example, he canalises the greatness of his spiritual awareness into the second-rate formula of a Church - any Church: how he settles for a church, or Shrine or Synagogue, how he demands a voice, a law, an oracle, and over and over again puts into the hands of other men the reins of repression and the whip of Sole Interpretation.
>
> To me, the greatest tragic factor in history is man's apparent need to mark the intensity of his reaction to life by joining a band; for a band, to give itself definition, must find a rival, or an enemy.[32]

This philosophy also appears as Pizarro's in The Royal Hunt:

> PIZARRO. Pizarro's boys, is that it?
> DIEGO. Yes, sir. Pizarro's boys.
> PIZARRO. Ah, the old band. The dear old regiment. Fool! Look, you were born a man. Not a Blue man, or a Green man, A MAN. You are able to feel a thousand separate loves unordered by fear or solitude. Are you going to trade them all in for Gang-love? Flag-love?

---

[29]Gelb, p. II, 2:1-3:1.

[30]Shaffer, The Royal Hunt of the Sun, p. 30.

[31]______, "To See The Soul of a Man . . .'," The New York Times, (October 24, 1965), II, 3:1.

[32]______, The Royal Hunt of the Sun, p. viii.

> Carlos-the-Fifth love? Jesus-the-Christ-love? All that has been tied on you: it is only this that makes you bay for death.[33]

The key words in this speech of Pizarro would seem to point up what appears to be the strongest theme in The Royal Hunt of the Sun and the underlying statement of Shaffer throughout his work. The key lines of the speech thematically apparently are "you were born a man [with]. . . a thousand separate loves unordered by fear . . . [it is the labels] tied on you . . . that make(s) you bay for death." The cry here seems to be for individuality, unfettered. The cry against Church would seem to be because such a tie is binding, is a label, is an artificial imprisonment within an ordained grouping. It would seem to be the same general theme running through Five Finger Exercise with its chastisement of family grouping, through The Private Ear with its attack upon conventional morés demanded for peer group acceptance, through The Public Eye with its plea for permission to retain personal identity within the framework of marriage. Shaffer seems to be asserting a demand for freedom of the individual whatever his mission or station in life.

If this is a true assessment of Shaffer's purpose, it seems to be exemplified by each of the synchronized theme lines apparent in The Royal Hunt. Young Martin's disillusionment happens because he had been awed by the image of Francisco Pizarro and his band of soldiers: "He was my altar, my bright image of salvation."[34] Even when Pizarro tries to warn him, in a scene immediately following Pizarro's speech to Martin about the shelters which men build for themselves, the boy cannot

---

[33]Ibid., p. 127.

[34]Ibid., p. 17.

believe Pizarro and his band are not all they seem:

> PIZARRO. . . . What's Army Tradition? Nothing but years of Us against Them. Christ-men against Paganmen. Men against men. I've had a life of it boy, and let me tell you it's nothing but a nightmare game, played by brutes to give themselves a reason.
> YOUNG MARTIN. But sir, a noble reason can make a fight glorious.
> PIZARRO. Give me a reason that stays noble once you start hacking off limbs in its name . . . Look at you - hope, lovely hope, it's on you like dew.[35]

Later Pizarro tries again to dissuade the boy's hero worship:

> I am nothing you could ever want to be . . . you belong to hope. To faith. To priests and pretenses. To dipping flags and ducking heads; to laying hands and licking rings; to powers and parchments; and the whole vast stupid congregation of crowners and cross-kissers. You're a worshipper, Martin. A groveller. You were born with feet but you prefer your knees. It's you who make Bishops - Kings - Generals. You trust me, I'll hurt you past believing.[36]

When the massacre of the Incas is accomplished, young Martin finally believes. He stumbles across the stage which represents the battleground and whimpers to DeSoto that the Incas were unarmed, that surely slaughter was not necessary in the name of Christ, while DeSoto assures him that it was indeed necessary that they kill the pagans as soldiers of Christianity. All that Martin's hero says to him upon discovery of the boy's heartbreak is, "Stand up when the Second addresses you. What are you, a defiled girl?"[37]

Pizarro seems to have asked the boy Martin to be a man strong enough to stand alone and seems to suggest that had Martin been able to be such an individual he would not have been saddened by the destruction

[35] Ibid., p. 31.

[36] Ibid., p. 41.

[37] Ibid., p. 81.

of idols he should never have had.

The "Christ-men against Paganmen" theme is brought out in the foregoing speeches also. It recurs with major emphasis throughout the play. It would seem hasty to suggest that the point of it is a battle of Catholicism versus sun-god worship. It would seem more accurate to suppose that this conflict represents a battle of two opposing beliefs which might just as well in another context appear as Judaism versus Mohammedism, or any other categorized religious body. For what topples in the end is not Catholicism or sun-god worship, but both, leaving the impression that any organized canons for worship are impermanent. Pizarro seems to have no compunction about mocking the whole idea. When he learns that Atahuallpa thinks he and his soldiers are gods on earth as Atahuallpa himself is, Pizarro instructs his men:

> Two can play this immortality game, my lads. He must see Gods walk on earth . . . Forget your village magic: fingers in crosses, saints under your shirts. You can grant prayers now - no need to answer them . . . Get up you God-boys - March![38]

The challenge of two leaders, Pizarro of the Spaniards, and Atahuallpa of the Incas, appears to be skillfully handled on three levels by Shaffer. He presents them as representatives of their two religions in conflict, as representatives of their two forms of civilization in conflict, and as two men in conflict. In each case a theme is interwoven, usually spoken, as an attempt has been made to illustrate, by Pizarro. Atahuallpa would seem to be the stable factor of the play. He seeks nothing, not even freedom from captivity, for he believes in his own immortality as a god: "I will swallow death and spit it out of me,"

---

[38]Ibid., p. 51.

he tells Pizarro: "Believe . . . Take my word."[39]

Pizarro's personal quest would appear to be Messianic. He cannot accept a Christian God as known to him through the Catholic faith of Spain and he cannot accept what life has dealt him: non-acceptance in society because he is a bastard,[40] constant pain from an old wound acquired in the service of his king,[41] no son because no woman he could love would accept him with his stigma of birth.[42] He is searching for a faith and when he sees what Atahuallpa has because he is a god, Pizarro seems to want to be one, too. Then when he knows that he loves Atahuallpa, his search for faith becomes a desperate hope that Atahuallpa really is a god and cannot die. An analogy to Christ is drawn in the character of Atahuallpa, even to his age which is thirty-three.[43]

Pizarro goes to the new world in search of gold,[44] but he also goes in search of personal recognition, the first hint of his hope of finding faith within himself Messianically:

> The world said 'no.' Said 'No.' and said 'No.' Well, now it's going to know me. If I live this year I'm going to get me a name that won't ever be forgotten. A name to be sung here for centuries . . .[45]

When the Spaniards start across the Andes, Pizarro cries to the

---

[39]Ibid., p. 133.

[40]Ibid., p. 25.

[41]Ibid., p. 29.

[42]Ibid., p. 63.

[43]Ibid., p. 84.

[44]Ibid., p. 21.

[45]Ibid., p. 25.

distant symbol of Atahuallpa:

> Show me the lid of the world - I'll stand tiptoe on it and pull you right out of the sky. I'll grab you by the legs, you Son of the Sun, and smash your flaming crown on the rocks. Bless them, Church![46]

And at the height of his Messianicism, he cries, "I am a God!"[47]

When Pizarro is fighting for the life of "his Inca," the only human being he has ever loved, he tells the priests in his company:

> All your days you play at being God. You only hate my Inca because he does it better . . . Dungballs to all churches that are or ever could be! How I hate you. 'Kill who I bid you kill and I will pardon it' . . . Tell me soft Father, if Christ was here now, do you think he would kill my Inca?[48]

In a culmination of the analogy of Atahuallpa as Christ, and of Pizarro's fight for the Inca's life, and the climax of Pizarro's quest for faith, he tries to convince himself of Atahuallpa's actuality as a god by attempting to persuade Young Martin of it:

> PIZARRO. Let's hear your creed, boy. 'I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried' . . . and what?
> YOUNG MARTIN. Sir?
> PIZARRO. What?
> YOUNG MARTIN. 'He descended into Hell and on the third day He rose again from the dead . . .'
> PIZARRO. You don't believe it!
> YOUNG MARTIN. I do! On my soul! I believe with perfect faith!
> PIZARRO. But Christ's to be the only one, is that it? What if it's possible, here in a land beyond all maps and scholars . . . there were true Gods on earth . . . To blast out of time and live forever, <u>us</u>, in our own persons. This is the law: die in despair or be a God yourself! What if it is really true, Martin. That I've gone God-hunting and caught one?[49]

---

[46]Ibid., p. 53.

[47]Ibid., p. 55.

[48]Ibid., p. 125.

[49]Ibid., p. 131.

It would seem categorically Messianic for Pizarro to claim as the law an axiom which states, "Die in despair or be a God yourself." It would also seem a bright flame of Shaffer's torch for the free individual.

Tom Prideaux suggests in Life after having seen The Royal Hunt that all of Shaffer's plays have displayed a similar theme and he called that theme "the need for compassion between people." In The Royal Hunt, he said it was specified by a "basic religious theme of love-thy-neighbor, especially if the neighbor represents a foreign or alien culture."[50] The New Yorker entitled its review of The Royal Hunt "Gods Against God."[51]

Henry Hewes of Saturday Review appears to be more familiar with The Royal Hunt than most, by virtue of having been present at and written reviews of the British production, the New York production, and the Atlanta production. He points out the failure of both forms of religion illustrated in the play to meet the needs of man, seemingly adding weight to the contention of this study that Shaffer fights established religion in The Royal Hunt rather than specifically Catholicism:

> Pizarro captures the complexity of a man who is larger than his materialistic drive for gold and who is torn apart by his realization that Europe's cruel but not ineffectual perversion of Christianity is just as superstitious as is the Inca religion, and that the common people of Peru lived happier lives under Atahuallpa than the masses of Europe did under the Pope.[52]

Hewes made the previous statement after his visit to England to see

---

[50]Tom Prideaux, "Blood for the Incas' Gold," Life, December 10, 1965, p. 138.

[51]John McCarten, "Gods Against God," The New Yorker, November 6, 1965, p. 115.

[52]Hewes, "Unsentimental Journeys," Saturday Review, May 29, 1965, p. 31.

The Royal Hunt. When he saw the New York production, he commented that

> Paradoxically, all of this emerges as most modern and provocative in a world faced with the problem of co-existence and with the negative force of meaninglessness . . . judged as a literary work, the play itself might benefit from more of the kind of eloquence and man-against-man drama it achieves mostly near the end.[53]

What seemed to strike Hewes with the most force when he saw the play in Atlanta was the performance of the man playing Atahuallpa:

> Even more rewarding is Frederick Congdon, who as Atahuallpa, proved to be far superior to his Broadway predecessor . . . his kinship with his reluctant murderer and betrayer seems to surpass all other considerations. It is not a Christian kind of love, as Shaffer defines it, but in the highest sense of the word a sharing of understanding, a break-through that is possible, perhaps, only between two illiterates.[54]

Apparently Hewes felt that the "man-to-man drama" he originally had admired in the second half of the play had been reinforced by the type of understanding given to this sequence by Congdon. It seemed advisable to this writer to take advantage of the proximity of Congdon, who is at the time of this writing, employed as the director of the Tulsa Little Theatre, Tulsa, Oklahoma, to discuss with him certain thematic considerations which might be pertinent to this study. Congdon seemed to concur with Hewes' idea that a strong point of the play is its illustration of the love bond between two men, each of whom is in his own context unapproachable: the lonely Pizarro and the god Atahuallpa, who seems to be inevitably drawn to one another. He suggested that the play is about the destruction of this love by people who cannot comprehend it, but sense it, and fear it.

---

[53] Hewes, "Inca Doings," Saturday Review, November 13, 1965, p. 71.

[54] Hewes, "The Conquest of Peachtree Street," p. 72.

"That's what makes the play universal," he said. "If you project this as a concept it becomes a very shattering experience. The church and the state destroyed these two men, like mirrors of their component parts." He added that one of the critics present at the Atlanta opening suggested that one thing which made the relationship of the two men possible was their inability to speak to one another, the fact that therefore what they shared were primal things. He also mentioned that the Atlanta troupe had felt the play was devoid of homosexuality in the men's love and had carefully stayed away from any suggestion of physical relationship between them as being demeaning of the higher love indicated by the play. When asked his opinion of Shaffer's general significance as a playwright, Congden said,

"I think he is the most important man we have right now."[55]

The theory of the Atlanta critic that these two men can relate strongly to one another because they cannot speak to one another (Atahuallpa has no Spanish, and Pizarro speaks no Inca) would link this aspect of the thematic considerations to those of The Public Eye in which a possible theme was that silence is communication and understanding.

While the complexity of the text and interdelineation of theme make it difficult to assign a single thematic statement to The Royal Hunt of Sun, the foregoing examination has attempted to suggest that the major general theme of the play is a plea for freedom of the individual with ramifications of this idea including freedom from the confines of organized religion and freedom from the swaddling of institutions of state as personified by armies, kings, courts. Further illustrations of this thematic line would include the freedom of a human being to relate to

---

[55]Frederick Congdon, Interview, Tulsa, Oklahoma, May 25, 1968.

another human being, however externally different the other human creature might be.

If this is an accurate representation of the thematic content of The Royal Hunt of the Sun, it would seem to fall within the confines of Messianic Revolt:

I. Messianic Revolt - a rebellion against God

1. The play is a dramatization of the Romantic quest for faith.
2. The drama is conceived on a grand scale, falling into the category of myth or romance, very long, and accoutred with difficult staging.
3. The hero is a superman who wishes to replace the old God and change the life of man. But he never quite reaches divinity.
4. The language of the drama is lofty and elevated.

The third subdivision would seem to be applicable whether an interpreter of the play chooses to consider Pizarro or Atahuallpa as protagonist, a decision which is open to dispute, for although the major portion of the text concerns the adventures and desires of Pizarro, the turning point is effected by Atahuallpa.

The play would not appear to belong to the classification of Social Revolt except under the first tenet of illustrating a conflict between man and church, and man and government. The play is not tight and compact and does not fit the definition of a well-made play. The characters are not contemporary or middle class and the hero, whether he is considered to be Pizarro or Atahuallpa, is distinctly different from other men. The language is not simple.

The Royal Hunt of the Sun would seem to be properly a human image:

III. The Human Image - authentic humanity as reflected by Shaffer.

1. The play presents an ordered vision of human nature.

2. The author reflects within the play his unique vision of destiny.

A broader vision of human destiny as Shaffer sees it seems more apparent in The Royal Hunt than in the other plays of Shaffer, which deal with human destiny on a more intimate level than this work in which the author seems to consider global destiny.

Summary

The Royal Hunt of the Sun seems to treat several themes in accordance with its length and scope, in comparison to the single theme lines of the more intimate plays. However, a general thematic statement consistent with Shaffer's earlier plays seems to emerge. It can be abbreviated as the plea for individual freedom. The play seems to conform to the tenets of Messianic Revolt and to Human Image as originally set forth by Robert Brustein and Francis Fergusson and assimilated for this study. While it does show a man in conflict with society in that the strife seems to focus against organized religion, it does not otherwise appear to be classifiable as Social Revolt since it is a drama of larger scale and loftier language than that classification usually permits.

CHAPTER VI

STUDY OF THEME IN BLACK COMEDY

Introduction

The first public presentation of Black Comedy was by the British National Theatre at the Chichester Festival in July, 1965. The one-act play was paired with a revival of August Strindberg's Miss Julie.[1] The program moved to London the following March. When Black Comedy was presented in New York in February, 1967, it was accompanied by another one-act play written by Shaffer specifically for the Broadway opening, White Lies.[2] Black Comedy, which was apparently inspired by the Chinese theatre, is yet another stylistic experimentation of Shaffer. John McCarten of The New Yorker said:

> Peter Shaffer, the highly versatile English playwright whose recent offerings in this country have included Five Finger Exercise, The Private Ear and The Public Eye, and The Royal Hunt of the Sun - certainly a mixed bag - has now come up with Black Comedy, at the Ethel Barrymore, which bears no resemblance to anything he has attempted before. He has been inspired this time, according to his own deposition, by a scene in the classical Chinese theatre in which a couple of swordsmen have at each other in what is supposed to be darkness, though as they parry and thrust blindly, the stage is fully lighted so that the audience can keep track of their stumbling efforts to eviscerate each other . . .

---

[1] "Shaffer, Peter (Levin)," Current Biography Yearbook (New York, 1967), p. 386.

[2] Ibid.

> Mr. Shaffer [gives us]. . . a bout of the wildest slap-stick that has been around here in a long long time and it is welcome.[3]

Anthony West commented similarly in Vogue about Black Comedy:

> Its charm and its immense comic power lie in the simplicity of the basic idea, a notion taken from the traditional Chinese theatre, whose audiences have for centuries delighted in the broad comic effects that can be achieved if they go along with the pretense that characters plainly visible to them on a fully lighted stage are enveloped in total darkness. It has been Mr. Shaffer's happy thought to marry this simple gimmick to a farce in the manner of Feydeau.[4]

Plot Resume

Brindsley Miller and his fiancee, Carol Melkett, are in his London apartment awaiting the arrival of her father, Colonel Melkett, and a millionaire art collector named Georg Bamberger whom they hope will buy some of Brindsley's metal sculpture, thus making his reputation and fortune in the art world. This is revealed in the expository opening dialogue, along with the fact that the furnishings of the apartment are not Brindsley's, but are the expensive possessions of Harold Gorringe, the antique dealer who lives across the hall. Brindsley and Carol have traded the actual furnishings of the apartment for these art objects without their absent owner's knowledge in order to impress the colonel and Bamberger with Brindsley's supposed taste.

All of the foregoing exposition occurs in total darkness and is accompanied by sounds of the characters' facile movements about the apartment, as if it were fully lit. The action takes less than five

---

[3]John McCarten, "Chinese Kookie," The New Yorker, February 25, 1967, p. 91.

[4]Anthony West, "Black Comedy: 'enormously funny'," Vogue, March 15, 1967, p. 54.

minutes, when suddenly a fuse seems to blow and the stage explodes into brilliant light as the record player emphasizes the new condition by quickly running down as if its electrical supply had ceased. The rest of the play until the final page happens in bright light which is to be accepted by the audience as total darkness. The players' movements are gauged accordingly: they grope, stumble, mistake each other's identity and become increasingly distressed.

Colonel Melket arrives, a lady neighbor named Miss Furnival arrives, and Harold Gorringe, the owner of the furniture arrives unexpectedly. Considerable comic effect is achieved after Harold's entrance by the attempts of Brindsley and Carol to exchange his furniture for the decrepit furnishings of Brindsley which are stashed in Harold's apartment across the hall. Other comic effect is achieved by the gin-imbibing Miss Furnival, a Baptist minister's daughter who thinks she's drinking bitter lemon in the dark. The principal complication, however, is the arrival of Brindsley's former mistress, Clea, and Brindsley's subsequent attempts to prevent Carol and her father from becoming aware of Clea's presence.

By the time the electrician, who has meanwhile been mistaken for the art collector, replaces the fuse, Harold has discovered the trick of the furniture and loudly cast off Brindsley's friendship, and Carol has discovered the presence of Clea and thrown her engagement ring at Brindsley who is glad to be rid of her. The lights blaze up, signified by total black-out, as the real art collector arrives and falls into the open trap-door from whence the electrician has just emerged.[5]

---

[5]Peter Shaffer, Black Comedy and White Lies (New York, 1967), pp. 43-123.

Thematic Analysis

Many critics seemed to share the view of Harold Clurman that "Black Comedy is altogether void of intellectual significance."[6] Perhaps this line of thinking results from the form of the play as comedy, since similar critical reaction ensued after the initial productions of The Private Ear and The Public Eye (see Chapters III and IV). It would seem fair to say that Black Comedy's farcical quality would indeed be the main reason for its existence, but upon closer examination of the text, a theme typical of Shaffer does seem to emerge. The trick of the lights seems to underline a thematic current which apparently indicates that a man can be honest in the dark. Perhaps a parallel could be drawn here between the honesty achievable when no one can see and the honesty achievable when nothing is heard that seems to be a part of the theme of The Public Eye with its connotation that in silence is communication. In contrast to The Public Eye, however, there would seem to be no truly serious moments in Black Comedy.

If one accepts the lighting gimmick as a means of emphasis for the general thematic content of the play, then the first indication of theme is when the stage bursts into light to signify darkness.[7] The double-life of Brindsley with regard to his relationship with Clea in view of his present engagement to Carol is possibly the second indication, when the telephone rings in the now-dark room and the caller is Clea.[8] It is with this telephone call signifying Clea's return to

---

[6]Harold Clurman, "Theatre," The Nation, CCIV, 1967, p. 286.

[7]Shaffer, Black Comedy, p. 53.

[8]Ibid., p. 54.

London and announcing her intention of coming to Brindsley's apartment at once that the charade of hiding her existence from Carol begins. It is while trying to keep Carol from realizing the identity of the caller that Brindsley first snaps at her,[9] the beginning of the illumination of his real feelings for her, which may have been unknown to his own conscious mind as well as to hers.

Shaffer provides a clue to the transformation of personality in darkness as opposed to light in a stage direction when the lighting change occurs:

> The BOY's look is equally cool: narrow, contained, and sexy. Throughout the evening, as things slide into disaster for him, his crisp, detached shape degenerates progressively into sweat and rumple - just as the elegance of his room gives way relentlessly to its usual near-slum appearance. For the place, as for its owner, the evening is a progress through disintegration.[10]

Each character who spends the evening in the dark, as all do with the exception of Bamberger, the art collector, is apparently exposed by the darkness as a person different from the person he presented himself to be to his associates. The exception to this consistency is Clea, who is indicated as having been always what she appears to be in the dark.[11] Miss Furnival's transformation takes place as she drinks the gin instead of the bitter lemon, which is in itself a revelation of character, since she asks to be served something non-intoxicating,[12] but in the darkness she gropes her way to the drink table and purposefully pours the gin

---

[9]Ibid., p. 55.

[10]Ibid., p. 53.

[11]Ibid., pp. 114-115.

[12]Ibid., p. 60.

into her glass.[13]

Carol's transformation occurs as gradually as Brindsley's, that is, over the course of the entire play, while she reveals that she doesn't really want to be married to a poor artist but wishes to retain a debutante image:

> CAROL. Cheer up, darling, in a few minutes everything will be all right. Mr. Bamberger will arrive in the light - he'll adore your work and give you twenty thousand pounds for your whole collection.
> BRINDSLEY. (sarcastic) Oh, yes!
> CAROL. Then we can buy a super Georgian house and live what's laughingly known as happily ever after. I want to leave this place just as soon as we're married . . . I don't want to live in a slum for our first couple of years - like other newlyweds.[14]

The transformation of the Colonel, Carol's father is on a more surface level as he simply drops his attempt to be polite to his daughter's boyfriend and openly assaults him with a prong he has extracted from one of Brindsley's sculptured pieces.[15] Carol's final revelation of her true opinion of Brindsley becomes equally animalistic in this scene as she shrieks, "Get him! Get him! Get him!"[16] Harold Gorringe's revelation seems as specifically a peeling-off of social restraints as does the Colonel's, for Harold, it becomes increasingly obvious, is a homosexual but he has observed the amenity of hiding this fact until he is under pressure. Apparently a recent object of his affection has been Brindsley, for he is infuriated when he learns that Brindsley plans to marry:

---

[13]Ibid., p. 86.

[14]Ibid., p. 105.

[15]Ibid., p. 120.

[16]Ibid.

> Well, it's your business . . . I've always assumed there was more than a geographical closeness between us, but I was obviously mistaken . . . (shrill) There's no need to say anything! It'll just teach me in the future not to bank too much on friendship. It's silly me again! Silly, stupid, trusting me![17]

When Brindsley is attempting to get Clea out of the room and says to her, "Go up to the bedroom. Wait for me there," Harold, who thinks he is being addressed, replies, "Now? Do you think this is quite the moment?"[18]

The electrician, who is mistaken for the art collector Bamberger, undergoes this mistaken identity because without his exterior placement as an electrician he would seem to qualify as an art connoisseur. The others simply assume he must be Bamberger when they hear him at the door and when he is shown Brindsley's sculpture, he speaks knowledgably:

> Standing here in the dark, one can feel the vital thrust of the argument! The essential anguish! The stress and torment of our times . . . Of how many modern works can one say that, good people? . . . *Vous etes tres gentil!* . . . You want my opinion, this boy is a genius.[19]

The major character discovery is within Brindsley and is revealed by Clea after she has effected the departure of the other characters through her actions in the dark:

> BRINDSLEY. You said you never wanted to see me again.
> CLEA. I never saw you at all - how could you be walked out on? You should live in the dark, Brindsley. It's your natural element.
> BRINDSLEY. Whatever that means.
> CLEA. It means you don't really want to be seen. Why is that, Brindsley? Do you think if someone really saw you, they would never love you?[20]

---

[17]Ibid., p. 85.

[18]Ibid., pp. 91-92.

[19]Ibid., pp. 101-102.

[20]Ibid., p. 114.

That Clea already realizes Brindsley's personality is a veneer has been foreshadowed earlier when she greets an outburst of his with, "At last! One real word of protest! Have you finished lying, then?"[21]

Veneer encased in veneer is present in Black Comedy when Clea impersonates the cleaning woman whom Brindsley is frantically pretending she is[22] in an attempt to conceal her from his other guests, primarily the fiancee and her father. In other context than comedy, the play might be said to have some of the "ceremonious masquerade quality" attributed to Jean Genet.[23]

Newsweek seemed to think Black Comedy contained an element of theme as well as farce:

> What do people do when the lights are out? In Peter Shaffer's Black Comedy, they walk into walls, stub their toes, crash into tables, squirt seltzer on the floor, elbow one another, . . . and, Shaffer would add, they tell the truth.[24]

Henry Hewes clarified and elaborated on this idea in the Saturday Review:

> Is there an implied criticism of social hypocrisy in all this, a suggestion that truer behavior ensued when we are relieved of the burden of appearances? Perhaps. But it is certainly not essential to the popular enjoyment of this season's most risible romp.[25]

The foregoing examination of the text and these substantiations of certain critics would seem to indicate that, while Black Comedy is

---

[21]Ibid., p. 111.

[22]Ibid., p. 107.

[23]Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt (Boston, 1964), p. 387.

[24]Newsweek, February 20, 1967, p. 102.

[25]Henry Hewes, "When You're Having More Than One," Saturday Review, February 25, 1967, p. 59.

primarily an amusement piece, it does contain a theme and that theme would seem to be that human beings are confined by morés and convention and are only able to strip to their souls when unencumbered by social restriction. This thematic line would seem illustrated by revelation of character in the play as the pressure of a difficult evening increases and would appear to be underscored by the technical device and plot gimmick of the lighting.

If these observations are accepted as valid, then the play would seem classifiable as symptomatic of Social Revolt under the tenets set forth earlier in this study:

II. Social Revolt - a rebellion against the conventions, morals and values of the social organism.

1. The play concentrates on man in society, in conflict with community.
2. The play is tight, compact, well-made.
3. The characters are contemporary and middle-class; the hero is neither superior to other men nor to his environment.
4. The language is simple.

Issue could be taken in the case of Black Comedy with the word "concentrates" in subhead number one, because as a farce the play seems actually "concentrated" on plot ramifications rather than on the statement of theme. However, the theme would not seem to be adumbrated entirely by these plot considerations, though it may be more readily discernible in a reading of the text than it would be upon seeing the play with the visual distractions provided by the stage business.

The play would seem also classifiable as Human Image under the canons set forth in Chapter I of this study, distilled from the theories of Francis Fergusson. It would seem to fit this category in its context

as an image of a young man in contemporary society confronted with the problems of making his way in the world and with choosing the right mate, though in the comic form of the play these images are necessarily exaggerated:

III: The Human Image - authentic humanity as reflected by Shaffer.

1. The play presents an ordered vision of human nature.
2. The author reflects within the play his unique vision of destiny.

Shaffer's idea of destiny would seem rather specifically apparent in Black Comedy since the hero was headed for disaster in the guise of his social personality and was retrieved from disaster by the stripping of his false exterior and headed immediately into a more satisfactory resolution of his conflicts when he became his "real" self. This application of the tenets of Human Image to the outcome of the play would seem to add validity to the interpretation of thematic content offered above.

The tenets of Messianic Revolt do not seem applicable to Black Comedy which does not seem to deal with man in conflict with God.

Summary

The one-act play Black Comedy, written by Peter Shaffer in 1965, would appear to be primarily a farce, but to contain thematic considerations also. The theme of Black Comedy would seem to be that man's true self is frequently encumbered by social restraints. In addition, the outcome of the play seems to illustrate Shaffer's apparent belief that man succeeds best in his true personality. This would link Black Comedy thematically with the other works of Shaffer in which he seems to propose a credo of individual freedom for mankind.

Under the criteria evinced in this study, Black Comedy can be classified as Social Revolt and as Human Image, but it appears to lie outside the tenets cited as those of Messianic Revolt.

CHAPTER VII

STUDY OF THEME IN WHITE LIES

Introduction

White Lies was first presented at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York City on February 12, 1967, as a curtain raiser for Black Comedy, replacing Strindberg's Miss Julie with which London and Chichester audiences had seen Black Comedy.[1] It is a play in one-act, written in a serious vein, and concerned with only three characters, a fortune teller, and two young men.[2]

White Lies was not greeted with the critical acclaim accorded several of Shaffer's other plays. The reviews of the play seemed to deal mostly with the performance of Miss Geraldine Page in the leading role who, some of the reviewers seemed to feel, was "betrayed by the collapse of the play in platitude."[3] Other critics simply ignored White Lies in their published reviews, choosing to concentrate on Black Comedy, the featured and longer of the two plays.[4] Several reviewers remarked that the play was "too slow-going,"[5] "very slight and . . .

---

[1]"Shaffer, Peter (Levin)," Current Biography Yearbook (New York, 1967), p. 386.

[2]Peter Shaffer, Black Comedy and White Lies (New York, 1967), pp. 5-42.

[3]Harold Clurman, "Theatre," The Nation, CCIV, 1967, p. 286.

[4]Notably Anthony West of Vogue; and Newsweek; see Chapter VI.

[5]Henry Hewes, "When You're Having More Than One," Saturday Review, February 25, 1967, p. 59.

much too long,"[6] or that "fortunately, the evening is redeemed by Black Comedy."[7]

The play seems to be primarily a character sketch of the fortune teller, though it does unfold something of a story and features a "fascinating switch"[8] or twist. Thus it continues Shaffer's apparent pattern of style-change. He has said:

> As a playwright, I'm 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. At any rate, if I knew how to formulate it, I would like to propound an Artistic Theory of Indeterminacy. But it would probably sound like a heartless prescription for the Insincere Way.[9]

Plot Resume

The setting of White Lies is the parlor of the fortune teller Sophie, the Baroness Lemberg, on the promenade of a run-down seaside resort on the south coast of England. She lives alone with her parakeet and a photograph of a former lover, with both of whom she frequently converses. She has had no business for some days and is behind in her rent when the curtain raises. Shortly a very smooth individual, identified as Frank, enters and strives to make a bargain with her to tell falsely the fortune of an acquaintance of his whom he is having wait outside for his turn with the fortune teller. The other young man, Tom,

---

[6] John McCarten, "The Theatre," New Yorker, February 25, 1967, p. 91.

[7] "Dancing in the Dark," Time Magazine, February 17, 1967, p. 70.

[8] Hewes, p. 59.

[9] Peter Shaffer, "Labels Aren't for Playwrights," Theatre Arts, Vol. 44, February, 1960, p. 20.

is a guitarist in the rock-and-roll bank named The White Lies which Frank manages, and he has fallen in love with the girl singer whom Frank is keeping. Sophie pleads integrity when he first makes his proposal and is honestly shocked by what he wants her to tell the young man: that in her crystal ball she sees him burning alive with the girl if he does not forsake her. But soon the idea of enough money to pay the rent causes Sophie to accept Frank's offer.

Tom is ushered in and she begins the act Frank has outlined for her only to have Tom burst out that he sees through it because the facts of his background that she claims to see in the crystal ball are actually lies he has told Frank and Frank alone. This is the switch referred to earlier: that of a lie built upon a lie which was a lie. In the scene which follows this revealment, Tom and Sophie tell one another a great many things about their lives and she confesses not only that she is not a Baroness but also how degrading her relationship with the photographed lover has been. He had been a boarder in her home, much younger than she, and irrevocably betrothed to Irina, a girl of his own age and class, an arrangement which Sophie has pretended to encourage and condone while inwardly writhing with humiliation at her position and agonizing because she must lose the young man. She urges Tom to tell his girlfriend all facts about himself and to run away with her at once. When Frank returns for a report of the session with Tom, she tells him the truth. He takes back the money he has paid her, and in a fit of furious retribution for her traitorousness, opens the parakeet's cage and flings the bird out the window to freedom.[10]

It is interesting to speculate upon the possible influence of Miss

---

[10]Shaffer, White Lies.

Julie, the original companion piece of Black Comedy upon Shaffer's writing as a new companion piece, a play dealing with a strong woman who has a young lover and whose defeat is symbolized by disaster to her pet bird.

Thematic Analysis

White Lies would seem to be more obvious thematically than any of the other plays of Shaffer and would also appear to be the only play of his which hinges almost entirely upon its theme with little plot camouflage. The title very nearly tells it all, and it is even reinforced by having Frank and Tom name their musical group The White Lies. The phrase is used in the dialogue as well when Tom tells Sophie that he is actually an educated young man of good family rather than the poor boy he has pretended, for reasons of his guitarist profession, to be. He says, "I regard the whole thing as sort of . . ." and she says instantly, "white lie?" "Yes, very good," he replies, "A white lie!"[11] The thesis of it all appears to be that a white lie becomes blacker day by day as an individual is forced to live by it and defend it. It would seem to be a theme of the same tone as the theme of Black Comedy, in which Shaffer seemed to urge truth of personality versus projected image. With the entanglements of the individual lives of Tom and Sophie caused by their initial small lies growing larger with additional enactment, Shaffer seems to be pointing out the lashes that life deals out to liars. When he was interviewed about Five Finger Exercise, he said:

[11]Ibid., p. 31.

> It seems to me it's concerned with various levels of dishonesty. The crude lie is the most obvious of these levels . . . another level is the motiveless lie, or what appears, even to the liar, as a motiveless lie.[12]

Shaffer made this statement seven years before White Lies appeared publicly and he did not seem to make the concept extremely clear in Five Finger Exercise, but one might assume from Shaffer's statement that the thematic content of White Lies had been fermenting in his mind for some time. In this play the theme seems to be so integrally incorporated in the total content that it is difficult to cite short passages which are properly illustrative of it. However, the scene is set for Sophie's confession by her initial conversation with the photograph of her lover, to whom she says:

> Well, let me remind you whom I am. A Lemberg. The Baroness Lemberg . . . My family was great under Maria Theresa . . . I'm sorry, Vassi: my tongue runs off with me sometimes. I know how dreary it is for you in the house. Go out and see Irina. I tell you what: why don't you invite her here tomorrow for tea? . . . You are charming together - I like to see you with her . . .[13]

During their confession scene, she says to Tom:

> I served them tea . . . into their room with my little tray. 'Hello Irina: How are you? How well you look! How's your good father?' And underneath, the hate! I, who had never felt hate in my life before, wasted its first flood on her . . . Oh, mister, what pain comes when you start protecting white lies![14]

She continues her story to Tom, telling him that the parakeet had been a gift from her lover who had called him a "bird of truth - no one

---

[12]Joseph Loftus, "Playwright's Moral Exercise," New York Times, November 29, 1959, p. II, 3.

[13]Shaffer, White Lies, pp. 11-12.

[14]Ibid., pp. 36-37.

must ever lie in his presence"[15] and then she said that Vassi proceeded to tell her he'd heard that she was not really a Baroness but a Jewish girl named Harburg who'd been a barmaid in a pub. Tom wants to know if the lover had made that up. "No, he didn't," Sophie says. "No."[16] She then tells Tom that her decision at that moment of unmasking by her lover has been to hurry him into immediate marriage with his betrothed because

> It was in his face - don't you see? - I saw it! . . . Love! . . . Not despising! Not anger with me! Just love, for me! - smiling in those black eyes. Now we were equal! . . . Now he could know me! (pause) Intolerable.[17]

Tom admits he understands this reaction. He has already told her that every morning he cooks breakfast for himself and the girl and Frank, as the latter two lie in the same bed waiting to be called to the table. He has said he cannot tell the girl who he really is:

> Why should I? The real me, as they say, isn't a wow with women. Look! Truth's the last thing she wants. She's 'in love' - that's what she calls it! She's in love with a working class boy - even though he doesn't exist. And I'm in love with feelings I see in her eyes - and I know they don't exist. They're only what I read into them. I tell you that's what it's all about - images making noises at images: love! - love! -[18]

When Sophie urges Tom to go to the girl and run away with her, she says, "Dare to be known. Dare to love yourself . . . so much."[19] He leaves, giving the impression that he is indeed going to follow Sophie's

---

[15]Ibid., p. 37.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid., p. 38.

[18]Ibid., p. 33.

[19]Ibid., p. 38.

instructions which in turn seems to convey the idea that only through truth lies happiness: Sophie has not dared to relinquish her lies, but she knows it, and she counsels another course for Tom.

Onstage, on the visible window of Sophie's fortune-telling parlor is the slogan, "Lemberg Never Lies,"[20] and after she has told the conspirator Frank what she has done with Tom, she reads as cards the money he has given her:

> Five of pounds: card of cruelty. Five of pounds: card of vanity. Five of pounds: card of stupidity. Five of pounds: card of fantasy. Five of pounds: -card of a loveless life. It's all in the cards, mister.
> (He stares at her. Then with a swift gesture, sweeps up the notes and leaves the parlor, shutting the door hard behind him. Left alone, Sophie sits a moment, then reaches out for the photograph lying on the table. To Vassili.) Harburg never lies.
> (She drops the photograph gently on the floor, discarding it.)
> Never.[21]

While it would seem possible to force the framework of White Lies into a classification as Social Revolt because the characters are in revolt against a society which necessitates their living a lie rather than being themselves, this would appear to be something of a warping of the thematic context, since each is in revolt only against himself. Neither Sophie nor Tom lives his lie in order to accommodate conceptions of his beloved. Each lives a lie to protect his own raw soul from exposure. Therefore, it would seem more appropriate to assess the play purely as Human Image:

III: The Human Image - authentic humanity as reflected by Shaffer.

1. The play presents an ordered vision of human nature.

---

[20]Ibid., p. 13.

[21]Ibid., p. 42.

2. The author reflects within the play his unique vision of destiny.

As seemed to be the case with Black Comedy, a peculiarly specific picture of what appears to be Shaffer's theory of human destiny is mirrored in White Lies with its delineations of happiness via truth, with loneliness and lack of fulfillment at the end of the road of deception. An introverted quality of human nature seems rather clearly delineated in this play, too, with its reflection of the form of humanity which must so debase itself as to deny its true existence and live upon a self-created and preferred image.

Messianic Revolt seems absent in White Lies where the name of God or any god appears only as an expletive.

The layers of truth and fiction revealed in the play seem so numerous as to invite comparison once again with the work of Genet as cited in Chapter VI and as referred to by modern drama critic Martin Esslin as "a hall of mirrors."[22] The initial surface would appear to be Sophie's role as a fortune teller, an impossible occupation in the minds of most truth seekers to begin with, and this layer would seem to reveal beneath it the false one of Sophie, the Baroness Lemberg, under which exists Sophie Harburg, the impoverished Jewess, in whose soul would seem to be a woman so encumbered with inhibition that she cannot accept honest love.

Interwoven with the fabric of Sophie's lies are the lies of Tom, who has presented himself to Frank as poor and uneducated, while he is actually the son of middle-class people. Tom's facade is further complicated by the image of him which Frank presents to Sophie and which Tom

---

[22] Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Garden City, N. Y., 1961), p. 140.

and Sophie must work through before they reach the second layer of Tom's own lies beneath which exists Tom's true outer self under which is, again, a person so encumbered with inhibition that he cannot accept honest love. In the character of Frank himself appears a brittleness even more impenetrable than the false fronts of either Tom or Sophie. At any rate, Frank's veneer does not crack during the action of the play. Emphasizing this total picture of mirrored images within the characters is Shaffer's usage of The White Lies as the name of the musical group, his setting the play in a resort which belies its label by doing no business, and his title for the play itself.

Summary

White Lies was written by Peter Shaffer as a replacement for the original companion piece of Black Comedy, Strindberg's Miss Julie, which did not accompany the former play to New York. It seems to be the play of Shaffer in which theme and plot are most intricately married and in which theme emerges with the greatest degree of obviousness and inseparability.

The theme of White Lies appears to be that man cannot build his life on a lie, of any degree, for a life built on deception simply increases the need for further deception and can only end in misery. If this is a correct analysis of the theme of White Lies, it would seem to link it with previous thematic considerations of Shaffer through his plea for individual freedom, and to link it most closely with the thematic content of Black Comedy which would also seem to be an expose of the fate of humanity when it denies its primal soul. White Lies, Shaffer's last published play at the time of this writing, also seems to be a thematic descendant of Five Finger Exercise, in which Shaffer says

he wishes to show several layers of dishonesty.

While the play could possibly be said to be a form of Social Revolt because its heroine is in conflict with certain of society's amenities, a truer evaluation would seem to place it within only one of the classifications of examination cited in Chapter I of this study, that of Human Image:

III. The Human Image - authentic humanity as reflected by Shaffer.

1. The play presents an ordered vision of human nature.
2. The author reflects within the play his unique vision of destiny.

The tenets of Messianic Revolt would seem to be inappropriate to *White Lies*.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It has been the purpose of this study to make an analytical examination of theme in the six published stage plays of the contemporary British author Peter Shaffer in an effort to establish a similarity and consistency of thematic content which might link the plays distinctively to each other and to their author. The reason that such a study was undertaken was that this writer was curious about the surface differences in the plays of Peter Shaffer, each of which seems to be couched in a different stylistic framework.

Continued examination of the plays and research regarding them revealed that this stylistic change has been a curiosity to critics of Shaffer since the appearance of his second play, which was apparently a complete departure in style from his first play. This discovery convinced this writer, after consideration and further research, of the validity of a thorough study of the matter. It was at this point in the preliminary work that a consistency of theme seemed to emerge from the plays and the decision to concentrate upon thematic content in the study was made.

Two earlier thematic studies of playwrights seemed to provide a basis upon which to analyze the themes in Shaffer's plays: _The Theatre of Revolt_ by Robert Brustein[1] and _The Human Image in Dramatic Literature_

---

[1]Robert Brustein, _The Theatre of Revolt_ (Boston, 1964).

by Francis Fergusson.[2] From these two works a set of criteria for examination was formed:

I. Messianic Revolt - a rebellion against God.

1. The play is a dramatization of the Romantic quest for faith.
2. The drama is conceived on a grand scale, falling into the category of myth or romance, almost always very long, and sometimes almost unstageable.
3. The hero, often autobiographical, is a superman who thinks himself destined to replace the old God and change the life of man. But he never quite reaches divinity.
4. The language of the drama is lofty and elevated.

II. Social Revolt - a rebellion against the conventions, morals and values of the social organism.

1. The play concentrates on man in society, in conflict with community, government, academy, church, or family.
2. The play is tight, compact, well-made.
3. The characters are usually contemporary and middle-class; the hero is neither superior to other men nor to his environment.
4. The language is simple.

III. The Human Image - authentic humanity as reflected by the play wright.

1. The play presents an ordered vision of human nature.
2. The author reflects within the play his unique vision of destiny.

It was not presumed that each play or all the plays would

---

[2]Francis Fergusson, The Human Image in Dramatic Literature (Garden City, N. Y., 1957).

necessarily fit neatly into any or all of these tenets. The idea was to regard each play in the light of these criteria and examine them in detail, hoping to illuminate the plays and their themes for better understanding by so doing.

The plays of Peter Shaffer which were studied within this paper were the six which he has published for the stage to date: Five Finger Exercise (1958); The Private Ear and The Public Eye (1963); The Royal Hunt of the Sun (1964); and Black Comedy (1966) and White Lies (1967).[3] His plays for radio and television, his two novels, written with his brother, and an adaptation of the Cinderella legend which he wrote in 1963,[4] were not considered here.

Certain difficulties were encountered in the analyses because of the lack of precedent studies of Shaffer's work. No previous academic papers were revealed by research and very little critical analysis at all, save the abbreviated kind to be found within reviews of productions. These findings have been cited wherever possible.

Biographical data pertaining to Shaffer was also rather sparce; it was necessary to rely almost entirely upon his listing in Current Biography Yearbook, in which he was described as being a rather typically middle-class Britisher whose Cambridge education focused upon literature and music, his major interest.

In view of the scarcity of information and of previous analyses dealing with Shaffer, the present examination has been founded almost totally upon the criteria set down for this purpose. It has revealed

---

[3]"Shaffer, Peter (Levin)," Current Biography Yearbook (New York, 1967), pp. 384-386.

[4]Ibid., p. 386: The Merry Roosters' Panto.

a general thematic statement of Shaffer, which appears with consistency in each of his variously styled plays. This recurring theme seems to be a plea for freedom of the individual.

Five Finger Exercise, a traditionally formed play in two-acts, with an English parlor setting, appears to voice this theme in the context of an individual's revolt against the confines of family. The theme appears to be that the family as a social unit is a sham in today's world. The protagonist seems to be fighting for liberation from the necessity of being a part of a family and living his life according to the rules intrinsic in such an arrangement. The play appears to lie within the canons of Social Revolt and Human Image.

The Private Ear, also a traditionally structured play, but formed in one-act and written as a comedy without the almost tragic overtones of its predecessor, seems to reinforce the general theme of Five Finger Exercise. Again, Shaffer pleads for individual freedom, but this time the protagonist seems to struggle for acceptance within a given social structure, rather than for his release. Specifically, the theme of The Private Ear appears to be that a man outside the common mold must fight for a place in society. Its form and language seem to show that this play possesses characteristics of Social Revolt and Human Image.

The Public Eye, a one-act comedy written as a companion piece to The Private Ear, is also a traditionally structured work featuring contemporary characters and a realistic setting. Shaffer's cry for freedom of the individual seems particularly clear in this play with its specific theme of a human being's right to retain his individuality within the framework of marriage. The protagonist in this case is a woman, however, in contrast to Shaffer's earlier male protagonists. Like his two previous plays The Public Eye reveals thematic content through

the tenets of Social Revolt and Human Image.

The most complex of Shaffer's plays is The Royal Hunt of the Sun, a mammoth undertaking which left critics in New York and London groping for phrases to describe its pageant-like structure and its thematic complications. This play departs thoroughly in style from Shaffer's other plays. It is set in Spain and Peru in the sixteenth century and employs an episodic structure, enacted by upwards of fifty characters who represent the Spanish conquistadors and the Inca tribesmen. While its theme is illustrated on several levels, in keeping with its over-all scope, the general thematic conclusion which emerges is plainly a reiteration of what by this time the writer of this study has come to recognize as Shaffer's eternal message: the individual must be free. In this case, the freedom is from the restraints of organized religion and freedom from the smothering of state and tradition as represented by armies, kings, courts. Again, as in his implied statements about family membership in Five Finger Exercise, Shaffer seems to suggest that it is not strictly wrong to be an enthusiast for organized religion nor strictly right to oppose it, but that it is wrong to force organization and tradition upon an unwilling individual. That he allows the Spaniard Pizarro to fight tradition on the one hand and then insists upon his men's allegiance to their band on the other[5] would seem illustrative of this phase of Shaffer's message. The Royal Hunt seems to represent Messianic Revolt and Human Image.

Black Comedy is a one-act play featuring yet another Shaffer display of versatility: this play hinges on a convention, which he seems to have

---

[5]Peter Shaffer, The Royal Hunt of the Sun (New York, 1964), p. 81.

borrowed from traditional Chinese theatre, that of asking the audience to believe in total darkness on stage while in fact the characters are stumbling around in brilliant light. Critics of the production seem to concur that the device works with admirable farcity. Further, it gives Shaffer another opportunity to declare his position in favor of individual freedom. These characters who move physically in darkness reveal that they have lived in the real world of light behind a veil of illusion until the "dark" illuminated their individual honesties. The theme seems to be that human beings are confined by more and convention and are only able to strip to their souls when unencumbered by social restriction, which, in this play, is removed by "darkness." The tight construction of the play and its contemporary language and characters, as well as its thematic content, seem to place it in Social Revolt and Human Image categories.

White Lies is a serious one-act play which was written to accompany *Black Comedy* at the New York opening. While this play has been somewhat unfavorably regarded by reviewers, it seems to be the most obvious statement of Shaffer's general theme in his works to date. In its very title and in its integration of theme and plot content, *White Lies* begs for man's freedom to be honest. Specifically, the theme seems to be that man cannot build his life on a lie, for a life built on deception simply increases the need for further deception and can only end in misery. What has strangled truth in the protagonist of *White Lies* has been the restraint of society. However, since each character is in revolt only against himself, the play would not seem to exemplify clearly the canons of Social Revolt. It was thought best to classify its theme only within the category of Human Image.

The analysis of *White Lies* completes this study and brings the

thematic classification of Shaffer's plays to this total: four are examples of Social Revolt, one is an example of Messianic Revolt, and all are examples of the Human Image. With these criteria as tools to discover thematic content the plays emerge with clarity as a unified statement of Shaffer's message: human will should be free; human individuals should be afforded open choice in life's struggles; human beings should cast off the bonds of society which prevent their even being honest with themselves.

As might be presumed, other similarities in Shaffer's work rise to the surface upon a close examination of the texts. In the event that Peter Shaffer remains a force to be reckoned with in twentieth-century drama, future studies of his work may concern themselves with an examination of the influence upon his plays of his depth readings in Tennessee Williams;[6] with certain patterns of dialogue observable within the plays; with distinct character similarities in the young heroes and in the women of the plays; with the structure of social order in his work which sometimes seems at cursory glance to be disorder. Future studies will no doubt deal with additional plays, if Shaffer's plans come to fruition, for at forty-two he has spoken of two more possible already: _Oms_[7] and _The Coronation Mass_.[8]

[6] Joseph Loftus, "Playwright's Moral Exercise," _The New York Times_, November 29, 1959, p. II, 3.

[7] Barry Pree, "Peter Shaffer," _Transatlantic Review_, Autumn, 1963, p. 65.

[8] Barbara Gelb, "[About a Royal Hunt] and Its Author," _The New York Times_, November 14, 1965, p. II, 3.

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

"A Playwright's Twisty Road Toward Success," Life, XLVIII (March 21, 1960), p. 97.

Brockett, Oscar G. The Theatre an introduction. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.

Brunstein, Robert. The Theatre of Revolt. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964.

Clark, Barrett H. European Theories of the Drama, rev. ed. Henry Popkin. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1965.

Clurman, Harold. "Theatre," The Nation, CLXXXIX (December 19, 1959), pp. 475-476.

______. "Theatre," The Nation, CCIV (February 27, 1967), pp. 285-286.

Congden, Frederick. Interview, Tulsa, Oklahoma, May 25, 1968.

"Dancing in the Dark," Time Magazine, LXXXIX (February 17, 1967), p. 70.

Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961.

"Familiar Peru, Exotic Brooklyn," New Republic, CLIII (November 27, 1965), p. 45.

Fergusson, Francis. The Human Image in Dramatic Literature. Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, 1957.

"Five Finger Exercise," The Christian Century, LXXVII (January 6, 1960), p. 16.

"Five Finger Exercise," The Nation, CLXXXVIII (May 16, 1959), p. 462.

Hayes, Richard. "The Stage," Commonweal, LXXI (January 1, 1960), p. 395.

Hewes, Henry. "Inca Doings," Saturday Review, XLVIII (November 13, 1965), p. 71.

______. "Oedipus Wrecks," Saturday Review, XLII (December 19, 1959), p. 24.

______. "The Conquest of Peachtree Street," Saturday Review, XLIX (November 19, 1966), p. 72.

_______. "Twice Over Lightly," Saturday Review, XLVI (October 26, 1963), p. 32.

_______. "Unsentimental Journeys," Saturday Review, XLVIII (May 29, 1965), p. 31.

_______. "When You're Having More Than One," Saturday Review, L (February 25, 1967), p. 59.

"Hunting Heaven," Newsweek, LXVI (November 8, 1965), p. 96.

Lauter, Paul, ed. Theories of Comedy. Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964.

Lewis, Theophilus. "Theatre," America, CII (January 9, 1960), p. 428.

Loftus, Joseph A. "Playwright's Moral Exercise," The New York Times. November 29, 1959. II, 1:2.

McCarten, John. "Gods Against God," The New Yorker, XLI (November 6, 1965), pp. 115-116.

_______. "Chinese Kookie," The New Yorker, XLIII (February 25, 1967), p. 91.

"New Plays on Broadway," Time Magazine, LXXIV (December 14, 1959), p. 77.

"One Family Split Four Ways," Life, XLVIII (March 21, 1960), pp. 93-94.

Panter-Downes, Molly. "The Theatre," The New Yorker, XXXIV (September 6, 1958), p. 121.

Popkin, Henry. "Theatre," Vogue, CXLIV (October 1, 1964), p. 112.

Pree, Barry. "Peter Shaffer," Transatlantic Review, No. 14 (Autumn, 1963), pp. 62-66.

Prideaux, Tom. "Blood for the Incas' Gold," Life, LIX (December 10, 1964), pp. 134-138.

Richardson, Jack. "Theatre," Commentary, XLIII (June, 1967), pp. 74-75.

"Shaffer, Peter (Levin)," Current Biography Yearbook, ed., Charles Moritz. New York: The H. W. Wilson Co., 1967, pp. 384-386.

Shaffer, Peter. Five Finger Exercise. London: Samuel French, Ltd., 1958.

_______. "Labels Aren't for Playwrights," Theatre Arts, XLIV (February, 1960), pp. 20-21.

_______. "Peter Shaffer's Personal 'Dialogue,'" The New York Times. October 6, 1963. II, 1:2.

______. "The Cannibal Theatre," Atlantic Monthly, CCVI (October, 1960), pp. 48-50.

______. The Private Ear and The Public Eye. New York: Stein and Day, 1964.

______. The Royal Hunt of the Sun. New York: Ballantine Books, 1964.

______. "'To See the Soul of a Man . . .'" The New York Times, October 24, 1965. II, 3:1.

______. White Lies and Black Comedy. New York: Stein and Day, 1967.

"Shedding No Light," Newsweek, LXIX (February 20, 1967), pp. 102-103.

Steiner, George. The Death of Tragedy. New York: Hill and Wang, 1961.

Taubman, Howard, and Gelb, Barbara. "About a 'Royal Hunt' . . . And Its Author," The New York Times. November 14, 1965. II, 1:1.

Taubman, Howard. "The Theatre: Pizarro, Gold and Ruin." The New York Times. October 27, 1965. p. 36:2.

Taylor, John Russell. Anger and After. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963.

"The Openings," Theatre Arts, XLIV (February, 1960), pp. 14-15.

"The Stage," Commonweal, LXXXIII (November, 1965), p. 215.

Thrall, William Flint, and Hibbard, Addison. A Handbook to Literature, rev. ed. C. Hugh Holman. New York: The Oddyssey Press, 1960.

"Tiny Alice in Inca Land," Time Magazine, LXXXVI (November 5, 1965), p. 77.

Tynan, Kenneth. "The Theatre," The New Yorker, XXXV (December 12, 1959), pp. 100-102.

Vidal, Gore. "Strangers at Breakfast," The Reporter, XXII (January 7, 1960), pp. 36-37.

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary. Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., Publishers, 1961.

West, Anthony. "Black Comedy: 'enormously funny,'" Vogue, CXLIX (March 15, 1967), p. 54.

VITA

Jo Ann Muchmore

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THEME IN THE PLAYS OF PETER SHAFFER

Major Field: Speech and Theatre

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Tucson, Arizona, January 5, 1937, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Leslie McBride.

Education: Graduated from high school at the Stephens Academy of Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri, in May, 1954; continued at Stephens College until May, 1955, receiving the Associate in Arts degree from the Department of Theatre; received the Bachelor of Science degree in Education, with major in speech, from the Oklahoma State University in May, 1957; attended Albertus Magnus College in New Haven, Connecticut, the Univer- of Texas in Austin, Texas, and the University of Oklahoma at Norman, Oklahoma, in summer terms the years of 1954, 1955, and 1961, respectively.

Professional Experience: teacher of English and journalism in the Ponca City High School, Ponca City, Oklahoma, 1957-58; news-paper feature writer 1958-60; volunteer director in the com-munity theatre, Ponca City, Oklahoma, 1960 to the present; graduate assistant in the Department of Speech, Oklahoma State University, 1967