

PETER SHAFFER: DEFENDER OF THE BRITISH EGO?

Bearing in Mind. That talk about “the archetypes in theatre’ or art or films – whatever – is cheap – and usually erroneous. See also the file on the nature of archetypes.

Archetypes are not ‘things’ that exist, or can be seen, unveiled or made concrete. They are ‘forms without content, representing merely the possibility of certain feelings or actions’. They are human potential to respond to certain universal human situations. They can be invoked by certain story lines, or combinations of words and/or images; in which case (as Koestler said) we respond to their presence like tuning forks to a true note. Certainly, some works of art do have ‘archetypal content’. *Hamlet, Faust, Casablanca and Star Wars*, for example all, in their own ways, invoke emotional and thoughtful responses to the magic that they contain. Faint echoes of the Oedipus complex, the shadow, the anima/us and the hero respectively. And these works of art all have their followers (to whom the invoked archetypal response is important).

So this file is devoted to a study of a playwright whose major works all contain similar archetypal echoes.

On A Personal Note. My interest in Peter Shaffer began when I was taking a masters degree in theatre and, among other tasks as a director put on a moved reading of *Amadeus* at Adelaide University. I was also lucky enough to attend early performances of the first London runs of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Amadeus*. At these, especially the first, I had the unusual experience of standing, at the end of the play, among perfectly respectable Englishmen who were weeping and shouting Bravo. Emotion principally directed at Robert Stephens, who was playing Atahuelpa. Shaffer had touched a very big nerve in the English psyche. More of this later: let us try to examine what Shaffer had accomplished.

The Critics have said things of relevance about Shaffer.

‘One writer who manages to get right to the edge
of experience...He manages to evoke the gods”
(Colin Blakely)

‘Shaffer works out his tremendous, his colossal, theme
in language of great strength...an experience that
transcends even its considerable value as drama.’
(Bernard Levin)

‘*Amadeus* may be a play inspired by music and death,
but it fills the theatre with that mocking heavenly silence
that is the overwhelming terror of life’
(The New York Times)

SHAFFER'S CONTRIBUTION

1. Peter Shaffer's life circumstances gave his work certain characteristics.

He is the (non-identical) twin of Anthony Shaffer. Born in 1926, he is a Jewish lad from Liverpool sent to a very competitive and elitist Christian school in London (St Paul's – my own school, so I know its effects pretty well). His earliest images of god would have been Jaweh/Jehovah. He had great knowledge of classical and other music (for example at work for Boosey and Hawkes). He is very introverted, unaggressive and probably gay. And very middle-class.

These circumstances helped to produce the overt structures of and techniques used in his plays, but do not explain in any way the archetypal underpinnings of his great trilogy. Perhaps of more importance in this, though, is his wonderful skill as a wordsmith (he has a degree in arts from Cambridge University) and his arguably unsurpassed skill at theatrical artifice. He was also greatly assisted by the sympathetic skills of John Dexter and Peter Hall, who directed the first London productions of all his major works.

2. What did Jung say about works of art that stem from the collective unconscious?

Jung has written a good deal about this, especially in CW vol15. The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature. And in particular here in *On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry and Psychology and Literature*.

First, Jung points out that a work of art is not its creator. It is a **thing**, not a person, like a plant growing in the soil of some human's psyche: it is not the soil. Even when art and neurosis share the same soil, they are not the same plant.

This said, Jung goes on to suggest that there are two kinds of works of art – possibly a great underestimate. The first is where the material is subordinate to intention (the artist is aware of and intends its content): this he calls 'psychological' art, sentimental art, or introverted art. It will either reflect the artist's personality and/or have psychological content with which the artist has been familiar during his life. The other kind of art is forced on the artist: this Jung calls naïve or extraverted art. Faust Part I, for example, would be sentimental art, Part II would be 'forced' art. It is as if an alien will – that may be entirely unconscious – has captured the psyche of the poet. Jung gives examples from Schiller, James Joyce, Dante (Part I of the *Inferno* vs. Part 2)

Of course, the creative urge is an autonomous complex: Jung described it as growing in the artist like a tree. It creates works that transcend our understanding. They have a *strangeness of form and content* and are, apparently, immediately recognizable as the superior works. Artistic impulse and neurosis can both overwhelm ego-consciousness. They may both be

present (and often are connected) in the same individual, but they are separate phenomena.

Jung also makes the point that the inner meaning of a work of art may lie hidden for centuries. Only emerging when the spirit of the times is appropriate. In other words, it is most effective in the right sociopolitical environment.

Finally Jung makes the point that too much analysis tends to take away meaning from a work of art, and asks if art has to have any meaning anyway? Instead of a need for cognitive understanding, we may rather have simply '*an extraordinary sense of release*'. His example is the idea of a mother country that needs a language for description, yet cannot be described, where personal and collective identities become intertwined and an image is raised from the deepest unconscious, and related to conscious values (from the back alleys of life).

3. Peter Shaffer is an example of an artist (playwright) whose work exemplifies both processes. In my opinion.

His early and late works are conventional, although containing personal psychological contents. Nearer to Graham Greene or even Rattigan than to Osborne, Pinter or Stoppard: well structured, clearly written and full of theatrical skill and surprises, but, well, conventional. Then, in the middle of his life (when aged 38-53) he quite unexpectedly produced three very great plays (*The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus* and *Amadeus*). All appear to have the same archetypal underpinnings and 'colossal themes'. And, especially at first, Shaffer's command over his material was less than absolute. After *Amadeus* his attempts to repeat works of this sort were unsuccessful and he reverted, in part at least, to 'psychological' art. He came out from the spell. This is detailed in the readings with which you are provided. These are chosen to represent Shaffer rather than his protagonists: his progression from metaphysical angst with some hope, to more and more negative attitudes, despair and then anger and a wish for revenge. More of this shortly.

In a little more detail, Shaffer's early works are usually either witty one-acters (*Black Comedy*) or more serious works that contain themes of Oedipal competition (*Five Finger Exercise*) or rather pompous and jejune political statements (*The Battle of Shrivings*). As late as November 1978, the Sunday Times survey of British theatre still classified him as merely a 'traditionalist' playwright. (As against *The Top Of The Bill*, like Osborne, Stoppard, Pinter and Barnes, *The Individualists*, like Rudkin and Whitehead or *The Wild Bunch*, like Poliakoff, Brenton and Edgar).)Some of his later plays are in this mould: thus, *Letitice and Lovage* is a witty, if sympathetic one-acter about two elderly ladies creating a world they can survive in and *The Gift of the Gorgon* contains plenty of pomposity and jejune political statements.

4. All this changed with the production of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. The play stunned reviewers and audience alike. Overtly, it was the story of Pizarro's conquest of the Incas under the banner of the Spanish court and Catholic Christianity. But it had reverberations far beyond this scenario and was acclaimed by many critics and others as a return to 'Holy Theatre' (Brook) – theatre that makes the invisible visible. That recreates a sense of ritual and ceremony: and Brook put it, to tap the energy of the invisible currents that rule our lives. As Shaffer himself put it 'a play is making the word flesh'. *Royal Hunt* was followed by *Equus*, then by *Amadeus*. All three plays were enormous commercial successes and won numerous awards: Shaffer's reputation was established.

5. The three plays had important themes in common.

First, the style. The development of the story is narrated in simple language to the audience. They are great stories in the old-fashioned sense. From *Equus* on, the narrator is also the protagonist.

The protagonist is a male in middle to late-middle age (Pizarro the conquistador in *Royal Hunt*, the psychiatrist Dysart in *Equus* and Court Composer Salieri in *Amadeus*: always successful in worldly terms, but in despair. In mid-life, of course. A man who longs for religious experience – to be known by the vaster Unknown and ordered by an absolute as Yonadab and Salieri put it. But who is disillusioned by the monotheistic savage and patriarchal religions that are available (dressed up as Spanish Catholicism, a masochistic Christ, a merciless God that uses Mozart as a flute, Davidian Yaweh and others: he longs for an alternative that is both gentler and older (Incan, Babylonian or even the Greek pantheon) but finds that is it unobtainable. He is frozen of soul (Pizarro) or sexually impotent (Dysart and Salieri) – he cannot connect with the feminine in other words. And he is confronted by the need to meet another man who is his opposite and yet represents everything he cannot or is too afraid to be. Who challenges him most profoundly.

Pizarro, to begin, is a conquistador about to conquer Incan Peru. He is financed by the Spanish court and the Catholic church. But he dreams every night of the Incan god-king (quote) and hopes that in meeting him his life may be redeemed. (Quotation) There is the possibility of renewal. The Incas are conquered and Atahuelpa captured. Pizarro has a choice. To kill Atahuelpa as ordered by the church and state or to sacrifice his own army and be with Atahuelpa. He tries to do both (Atahuelpa believes that he will be resurrected when the sun touches his body). He fools himself from timidity. Atahuelpa is strangled and does not rise again. Pizarro is desolate and never really rises again. But he talks in existential terms about the marvel of living and creating what gods there are. The ending is sad, but not without hope (see also below).

In *Equus*, the protagonist, Dysart, is an everyday psychiatrist who specialises in children. He is impotent and a timid 'worshipper' of the Greek pantheon,

who wishes he could create gods from his everyday life. He is presented with Alan, a teenager who has blinded six horses with a metal spike. Alan is clearly shown to be 'mad', but he has done something Dysart can't. He has created his own God and worships it. The God is *Equus*, in horse form but a derivative of an earlier masochistic image of Christ that he possessed as a boy. Alan sees this God in a horse called Nugget, which he rides at night to orgasm and then embraces. When he tries to make love to a (human) girl in the stable where he works he believes that he is being watched by his (jealous and all-seeing) God and stops this by blinding all the horses in the stable. Dysart envies Alan his worship, but his task is to 'cure' him. He can do this, but believes that, in the process, Alan will lose his ability to worship and become, really, a ghost. (quotation) He sets about the task, but also undertakes to understand what *Equus* means. Again, the play's ending is sad, but not without hope. There was never the hopefulness in the meeting of Dysart and Alan, though, that was in the meeting of Pizarro and Atahuelpa. Shaffer is older, of course, and no nearer to a resolution.

Finally, in *Amadeus*, the protagonist is Salieri, a much-esteemed court composer in Vienna, whose music is sterile (the music of a man who can't get it up, says Mozart). He has sold his soul long ago to the God of Bargains for fame and wealth, although he appears to have forgotten this. He has become successful and virtuous. His confrontation is with Amadeus Mozart, prodigy and rival. He quickly discovers that Mozart is crude, even animal-like and 'immoral' and therefore no threat to his position. Almost immediately, though, he hears Mozart's music and realises that it is both the voice of God and the music that he should have written. He is broken-hearted and despairs.

But there is a change here. Salieri does not just despair. He resolves to take action against this heartless God who has not rewarded him (it's a moot point whether this God is related to his old God of Bargains). He swears that he will be God's enemy and block Him on earth by destroying Mozart, his creature. This he does (although he does vacillate – in the stage version – between reconciliation with Mozart and his destruction). And he turns into a somewhat sleazy and evil old man. Note that in the film version of the play (also authored by Shaffer) this aspect of Salieri is more clearly and more emphatically present from the beginning. The ending of *Amadeus* is one of cynicism, bereft of hope. Or so – maybe – Shaffer intended? Certainly there was a change in him between the production of *Amadeus* as a play and the writing of the film script.

6. Psychological analysis of these plays is complex.

The non-Jungians, have had a lot to say, although these analyses are mostly concerned with the 'neuroses' of Shaffer and his characters, and include a few 'diagnoses' which we won't go into here. What Jung might have said were analyses of the 'psychological' content of the plays.

To give a few examples, the Freudians have had a great deal to say, Berman, for example, in the *Psychoanalytic Review (PR)*, 'explains' *Equus* using *Totem and Taboo* as his text, in terms of regression from an Oedipus complex to infantile sexuality, castration fear and transference. Glenn takes a similar viewpoint in *The International Journal of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy (IJPT)* and talks of the importance in *Equus* of twinship (in *American Imago*): Hamilton (in *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*) makes a similar analysis of Amadeus. Burland, in *IJPT*, talks of infantile omnipotence, the tricking of the audience into participation in scopophilia and analyses of the Strang family. Slutsky (*IJPT*) talks in terms of object relations and counter-transference, while Corello (*PR*) explains *Equus* in relationship to the ritual sacrifice of the male child. Amadeus is analysed by several authors as essentially a play about father-son relationships. Perhaps more interesting are Loundsbury in *Modern Drama*, who describes *Royal Hunt* as a chaos of god-hunting, with a multiplicity of gods, Christian semiology and an inherent choice to be a god or die in despair and Mustazza (*Papers on Language and Literature*, and also in *Spring*) who talks in terms of the presence of both Dionysian impulses for ecstasy and the Apollonian need for order in *Equus*.

Some of this is very interesting but, overall, it is perhaps rather like trying to understand *Faust* by looking at the furniture in his study. It doesn't take us to the heart of Shaffer's creation: a partly-unconscious manifestation of inner needs seeking expression, nourished on archetypal roots and expressed using every technique and psychological understanding that the author possesses.

Moving on, the most obvious Jungian analysis is to simply look at the plays as examples of ego-shadow conflict (appropriate for a man of Shaffer's age?). Pizarro and Atahuelpa, Dysart and Alan, Salieri and Mozart. As von Franz and others said so often, confrontation with the shadow is very often the first challenge and task in analysis, especially in middle age. If this confrontation is not successfully achieved then there may be an inability to reach the contrasexual side, or another helpful configuration on the path towards the self and some kind of spiritual experience.

And the shadow has, of course, both dark and light (or evil and golden) aspects that can only be separated (if at all) with great difficulty. Shaffer is very clearly expressing the Dantean sense that 'In the middle of my life I found myself in a dark forest'. He senses the power, life and ecstasy of the shadow and longs for it. Shaffer's shadow characters are young, they are alive and energetic, they can sing, and/or compose music, they are sexually potent, they can either worship or believe themselves actually to be gods. But.

But they are **socially unacceptable**. To be reconciled with them is to give up fame, fortune and – maybe especially – **respectability**. Atahuelpa is a pagan who demands that Pizarro gives up everything to be with him. That is the strongest demand made of a Shaffer protagonist. Alan, then, can exemplify ecstasy, but Dysart is, from the beginning, incapable of such an experience and elects to 'cure' Alan, and make him socially acceptable. He

states that he intends to search for the meaning in *Equus*, but this seems more like self-justification than any real intention. Mozart is simply a giggling child who horrifies Salieri – cemented into social advancement and bottom-kissing as he is. And this is the point of the question that is the title of this paper. Shaffer's 'shadow' figures are very British. They do not contain much evil (compare them to Mephistopheles, for example): they do not threaten really the collective consciousness of a nation, race or empire: perhaps not even an ego. They are powerless against betrayal. What do they do? They laugh at established religion. They ride horses to orgasm in the dark. They fart and shit-talk. They are rude to their superiors. They make social gaffes of all kinds. Alan Strang is mentally disturbed. Really, they would not much frighten Dante or Dr Faustus: but they would horrify Surbiton. When you look at these figures like this, the excuses Shaffer makes for his protagonists begin to look rather thin.

7. **The way in which Shaffer writes**, and the writing of his trilogy in particular, reveals a man with an intuitive approach that is, in part at least, unconscious. In his latest play (*The Gift of the Gorgon*) for example, which is importantly concerned with the nature of writing for the stage. At one point his protagonist states that he will soon write a new play as follows: '*It's been in my head for weeks now – getting clearer all the time. I have the plot – above all, a central idea! And it's all astounding! I can see it! I can actually see it emerging!*'

Shaffer is a reluctant interviewee and rarely reveals much of his inner creativity, but he did give an informative series of interviews to Tom Buckley of the New York Times in 1975. Talking about *Equus*, (**after** the New York production he says 'I had always wanted to do, **I realise now**, something dealing with the numinous, if that's the word – the things that throw shadows longer than themselves – but in terms of what is on the surface a rather doubting, provincial situation' (to) 'conjure the same dark forces as in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*.')

Equus itself had its origins in a story Shaffer heard from an old friend while driving in the country. All he knew was that, somewhere in the north of England, a boy was supposed to have blinded 26 horses (rather too many for a stage). The boy was said to have been seduced by a girl and to have very religious parents. Shaffer never heard any more, but within a month he had put aside other writing and was occupied with *Equus* for two years. He said 'One is not finally aware of why one idea insisted and the others dropped away. The playwright hopes that one will say "write me, write me". That's what happened with *Equus*.

Overall a clear image of a playwright possessed by rather than possessing his material. Whether things would have been different if Shaffer himself had listened to his own warnings is an interesting debate!

8. **The effectiveness of the plays** is also a matter of the combination of a number of elements. The key word, though, is simplicity. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, for example, was performed on a bare stage, with the exception that at the back stood a great, gold-covered mandala in which stood Atahuelpa. When the Incas are massacred, the Spaniards draw a great bloody cloth from the mandala, then strip it of all its gold. It is not destroyed, though and is still in place at the end of the play. The ascent of the Andes is simply mimed by about a dozen actors across bare boards: they have to (and do) convey that they are conquistadors climbing the Andes while exhausted, but not showing it because they wish to appear as gods.

Equus is also performed on a stage with just a few props and some benches. A square of wood set in a circle of wood. All the cast are on stage all the time. Some of the audience are onstage (up stage). The actors playing horses wear track suits and 'horse head' masks. They never crouch or suggest a literal horse in any way. They stamp and they hum and they are simply *Equus*.

Even in *Amadeus*, things are very simple. Old Salieri generally sits on a bare stage upstage left: young Salieri usually strolls downstage left. The court is at right stage and uses a bit of gold cloth and some pretty costumes. Precise locations are depicted by word and action.

So: bare stages, wonderful story-telling and a minimum of symbols that cannot be put into words. A gold mandala, *Equus* and the music of Mozart (*Amadeus*).

When we move from play to film, much of the impact and the 'archetypal' strangeness is lost: for several reasons. First, until *Amadeus*, Shaffer seems to have had a rather weak control over his material and allowed the films of his plays to be very different from the stage versions. And far more literal. There were, for example, (what seemed like) hours of film of a cast of hundreds really crossing the Andes (sadly without the dignity of gods) and set battle scenes in *Royal Hunt*. *Equus* included the apparent blinding of real horses, street scenes and all manner of distractions (and an OTT performance by Richard Burton as Dysart). *Amadeus* was better (Shaffer wrote the screenplay), but still included countless castles, parties and street scenes, apart from the change in Shaffer's perception of Salieri that had taken place between stage and filmed performances. As we would expect of this medium, symbolism is sacrificed for direction.

9. **After Amadeus, the magic is lost.** We have already seen that there is a movement away from hopefulness as we go from *Royal Hunt* to *Amadeus*. In fact, in my opinion, the change from hopefulness to despair and then anger can be located in a crucial speech by Salieri right in the middle of *Amadeus* (see quotations below). A speech which, when I first saw the play, I did not quite believe, despite all Paul Schofield's efforts.

To believe this speech one has to be persuaded that Salieri has entered the struggle with his 'shadow' sincerely and made a genuine attempt at reconciliation. But, like Pizarro and Dysart, he has coveted the religious and other abilities of the shadow without embracing them: without giving up the benefits of his comfortable and rewarding life to date and accepting both positive and negative shadow attributes. He has failed his mid-life crisis (and failed the Job test) and refused (the pain of) change. Despite all Shaffer's efforts, I found that I resisted feeling sorry for Salieri – and Shaffer goes to a great deal of trouble to excuse his protagonists, make their challenges look oh so impossible and make us feel sorry for them. So what, then, are we left with.

We are left with *Yonadab*. Overtly the story of King David's much-despised relative and counsellor (briefly mentioned in 2 Samuel ch 13). Shown to be a man who rejects the savage monotheism of Israel and longs for a world (ancient Babylon, more or less) ruled over by the love of brother and sister gods. To this end, he induced David's not-favoured son Amnon to mate with his sister Tamar, in the hope of creating such a divinity. It didn't work (it's more complicated than this but never mind): and Yonadab never really thought that it would.

The play is rather tedious, long-winded and unconvincing. So far as one can tell, Shaffer believes this play to be from the same stable as his great trilogy. But it is not. There is no hope of a meeting with a golden shadow. Yonadab himself is extremely unpleasant – a mixture of old Salieri and a camp chiker. In some mysterious way he is not in the action of the play. In his trilogy, Shaffer was able to make us empathise with his protagonist as he took us god-hunting. Here, it is as though we were listening to Shaffer describing how he tried to write a play. As indeed we are. In my opinion, Shaffer is no longer in the power of a creative force.

The final play that needs to be briefly mentioned is *The Gift of the Gorgon*. This is about Edward Damson, a dead playwright, whose mission in life, we are asked to believe, is to write plays of revenge (see quotations). He advocates violent revenge as a way of purifying the soul, specifically the killing of all IRA terrorists. These killings to be accompanied by an unintentionally hilarious foot-stamping Greek dance of celebration. (Clytemnestra, the bath-house chopper). The theme is again anger, despair and revenge, with strong Oedipal overtones when the playwright and his wife are interpreted as Perseus and Athene. Very like his earlier play *Shrivings* and – despite a lot of loud noise – very conventional – could almost be classified as a thriller. There is a certain sadness in concluding that, so far as we can tell from his works, Shaffer himself (like his protagonists) has failed to individuate as one might have wished for him.

QUOTES FROM SHAFFER

Royal Hunt Of The Sun

Caught in Time

I had a girl once, on a rock by the Southern Ocean. I lay with her one afternoon, wrapped up in her against the cold, and the sea-fowl screaming, and it was the best hour of my life. I felt then that sea-water, and bird droppings and the little pits in human flesh were all linked together for some great end out of the net of words to catch. Not just my words, but anyone's. Then I lost it. Time came back. For always.....

.....I'm going to die! And the thought of that dark has for years rotted everything for me, all simple joy in life.....That prison the Priest calls Sin original, I know as Time. And seen in time everything is trivial. Pain. Good. God is trivial in that seeing. Trapped in this cage we cry out ' There's a gaoler; there must be. At the last, last, last of lasts he will let us out. He will! He will!' .. But, oh my boy, no one will come for all our crying.

Pizarro's Vision

When I was young, I used to sit on the slope outside the village and watch the sun go down, and I used to think: if only I could find the place where it sinks to rest for the night, I'd find the source of life, like the beginning of a river..... What a fantastic wonder that anyone on earth should dare to say: 'That's my father. My father; the sun'since first I heard of him, I've dreamed of him every night. A black king with glowing eyes, sporting the sun for a crown. I felt no enemy...Only that of all meetings I have made in my life, this with him is the one I have to make. Maybe it's my death. Or maybe new life. I feel just this: all my days have been a path to this one morning.

Existential Resolution at the end

You have no eyes for me now, Atahuelpa: they are dusty balls of amber I can tap on. You have no peace for me Atahuelpa: the birds still scream in your forest. You have no joy for me, Atahuelpa my boy: the only joy is in death. I lived between two hates: I die between two darks: blind eyes and a blind sky. And yet you saw once. The sky sees nothing, but you saw. Is there comfort there? The sky knows no feeling, but we know them, that's sure. Martin's hope, and de Soto's honour, and your trust – your trust which hunted me: we alone make these. That's some marvel, yes some marvel. To sit in a great cold silence and sing out sweet with just our own warm breath: that's some marvel, surely. To make water in a sand world: surely, surely. God's just a name....and naming begins cries and cruelties. But to live without hope of after, and make whatever God there is, of that's some immortal business surely....

Yonadab

What Shaffer Can't Do

I tried with all my being to imagine myself David – a Priest King influencing the universe. What must it be like to launch a massive appeal to the Unknown? To send out to It what also must be unknown to me – I mean my very *Self*: The Self of Myself without reservation? To let that be known by the vaster Unknown, and then returned to me with such tremendous force that I *can* know it – in the storming of my blood. Unknowable God confirmed as surely as the existence of myself? Oh, the wonder of that! To be It's entire resounding instrument! Not myself – yet never more myself!

Violence or Peace

David – sent by Yaweh – the One God – to rule his Chosen Race....Banish from your minds all images of cowed men cringing in ghettos, or kind men creating cultural centres. We were not cringers then – or kind! We were smiters!.....It was like that every day in Jerusalem. The air stank of blood....And beyond in the desert for miles, the blood of our chopped enemies soaking the sand.....

.....I had yearned to escape from the world of perpetual anger which was Jerusalem....As a boy someone had told me the Legend of the Kingdom of Perpetual Peace which had once been in the distant past – ruled over by a King and Queen, young and deep in love. A place where flutes filled the air...A place where walls showed pictures of undying pleasure, not simply letters of proscription, *Thou Shalt Not!*

The Final Choice

To watch for ever unmoved. To see the *gestures* of faith in others, but no more. The consonants of credulity, but never the vowels which might give it feeling.....Hateful to me are they who stink of faith, and murder in its name. But hateful to me as fully are those who....stink of nothing. Who have no sustenance beyond themselves. What choice, then, is this? You tell me, my dears. The fanatic in her blazing simplicity – the skeptic in his chill complexity? Creed and the ruin that makes all over the earth. Or No Creed and the rape that makes. What choice, I ask you, is this – between Belief and None, where each is lethal?

Equus

Introducing Dysart

We didn't go in for them (children). Instead, she sits beside our salmon-pink glazed brick fireplace, and knits things for orphans...And I sit opposite, turning the pages of art books on ancient Greece.....Mentally, she's always in some drizzly kirk of her own inheriting: and I'm in some Doric temple.....I wish there was one person in my life I could show. One instinctive, absolutely unbrisk person I could take to Greece, and stand in front of certain shrines and sacred streams and say 'Look! Life is only comprehensible through a thousand local Gods...And not just Greece but modern England! Spirits of certain trees, certain curves of brick wall, certain chip shops, if you like....Worship as many as you can see – and more will appear!'

Equus (Confrontation with the Unconscious)

With one particular horse, called Nugget, he embraces. He showed me how he stands with it afterwards in the night, one hand on its chest, one on its neck, like a frozen tango dancer, inhaling its cold sweet breath.....Now he's gone off to rest, leaving me alone with Equus. I can hear the creature's voice. It's calling me out of the black cave of the psyche. I shove in my dim little torch, and there he stands – says (Mocking) 'Why?...Why Me...Why – ultimately – me? Do you really imagine you can account for me? Totally, infallibly, inevitably account for me?...Poor Doctor Dysart' Of course I've stared at such images before. Or been stared at by them, whichever way you look at it. And weirdly often now with me the feeling is that *they* are staring at *us* – that in some quite palpable way they precede us. Meaningless but unsettling.

On Societally Approved Healing (and Dark Nights)

Sleep now. Have a good long sleep....I'm going to make you well. (A pause) I'm lying to you, Alan. He won't really go that easily....Oh no! When Equus leaves – if he leaves at all – it will be with your intestines in his teeth. And I don't stock replacements. If you knew anything, you'd get up this minute and run from me as fast as you could...

You won't gallop any more, Alan. Horses will be quite safe....You will, however, be without pain. More or less completely without pain.

And now for me it never stops: that voice of Equus out of the cave. 'Why Me?...Why Me?...Account for Me! All right – I surrender! I say it! In an ultimate sense I cannot know what I do....

I need – more desperately than my children need me – a way of seeing in the dark. What way is this?...What dark is this?...I cannot call it ordained of God: I can't get that far. I will however pay it so much homage. There is now, in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out. (Dysart sits staring)

Amadeus

The God of Bargains

Every Sunday I saw Him in church, painted on the flaking wall. I don't mean Christ. The Christs of Lombardy are simpering sillies with lambkins on their sleeves. No: I mean an old candle-smokes God in a mulberry robe staring at the world with dealer's eyes...Those eyes made bargains, real and irreversible...
..Signore, let me be a composer? Grant me sufficient fame to enjoy it. In return I will live with virtue (continues).....As I said Amen, I saw his eyes flare. *Bene*. Go forth Antonio.

Mozart's Music

It started simply enough: just a pulse in the lower registers – like a rusty squeezebox. It would have been comic except for the slowness...And then suddenly, high above it, sounded a single note on the oboe.

It hung there unwavering – piercing me through – till breath could hold it no longer, and a clarinet withdrew it out of me, and sweetened it into a phrase of such delight it had me trembling....Ah, the pain! Pain as I had never known it...

...*What? What is this? Tell me, Signore!* What is this *pain*? What is this *need* in the sound. Forever unfulfillable, yet fulfilling him who hears it, utterly. Is it *Your* need? Can it be Yours?

It seemed to me I had heard a voice of God – and that it issued from a creature whose voice I had also heard - and it was the voice of an obscene child!

Salieri Turns Against God: the almost unbelievable speech (not in the film version)

Capisco! I know my fate. Now for the first time I feel my emptiness as Adam felt his nakedness....Tonight at an inn somewhere in this city stands a giggling child who can put on paper, without actually setting down his billiard cue, casual notes which turn my most considered ones into lifeless scratches. *Grazie*, Signore! You gave me the desire to serve you – which most men do not have – then saw to it that the service was shameful in the ears of the server. *Grazie!* You gave me the desire to praise you – which most men do not feel – then made me mute. *Grazie tante!* You put into me perception of the Incomparable – which most men never know! – then ensured that I would know myself forever mediocre. *Why?,,,What is my fault?*
...Until this day I have pursued virtue with rigour...You know how hard I have worked and worked the talent you allowed me. You know how hard I've worked! -solely that in the end...I might hear Your Voice! And now I do hear it – and it says only one name: Mozart! Spiteful, sniggering, conceited, infantine Mozart – who has never worked one minute to help another man! – shit-talking Mozart with his botchy-smacking wife! – *him* you have chosen to be your sole conduct! And *my* only reward – my sublime privilege – is to be the sole man in this time who shall clearly recognize your Incarnation! (savagely) So be it! From this time we are enemies,

You and I! I'll not accept it from You – *Do you hear?* They say God is not mocked. I tell you. *Man* is not mocked! *I* am not mocked! They say the spirit bloweth where it listeth: I tell you NO! It must list to virtue or not blow at all! (Yelling) *Dio Ingiusto!* – You are the enemy. I name Thee now *Nemico Eterno!* And this I swear. To my last breath I shall *block* you on earth, as far as I am able! (He glares up at God: to audience) What us, after all, is man, if not to teach God his lessons?

Final Despair

All around me men seek liberty for Mankind. I sought only slavery for myself. To be owned – ordered – exhausted by an *Absolute*. This was denied me, and with it all meaning. (he opens the razor) Now I go to become a ghost myself...
...Mediocrities everywhere – now and to come – I salute you all!

The Gift of the Gorgon

Revenge (about the IRA)

(Helen: all revenge is diseased)

No – only when it's kept unfulfilled. Then it festers. Then it ranges through modern streets looking for **anyone** to answer it. It murders babies in department stores...helpless men and women queuing for reduced tickets in railway stations! That's centuries of denied blood – ravaging! And the only thing we can do to prevent it infecting *us*, the English, and turning us into monsters all over again, is to revenge ourselves **now**, while our feeling is just! Kill every terrorist we capture, instantly, in proper rage! *Proper, proper rage!* That way we can stay clean.

Revenge Again

I am going to write a new play. I see it with absolute clarity: clear and clean. An I.R.A. bomb explosion in the toy department of a large London store. Mothers and children blown to pieces: dolls and teddy bears spattered with blood and brains. Among the victims the little daughter of a lady Member of Parliament – hitherto passionately against the death penalty. The M.P. knows they will never be punished. So she becomes herself the instrument of their rebuke. She resigns her job and dedicated her life to tracking down the ringleader in Belfast, luring him to a hired room and making him her captive. (and?)
Executing him – ritually – before the eyes of the audience. Not sadistically, but in the sanitive way of gaining peace. The hallowed, health-giving peace of Clytemnestra, slaughtering her husband in that bath...(then that woman) will dance before him, in release....Then she will go out into the theatre (continues)....

PETER SHAFFER: SOME WORKS

Title	Type of work	Year (Shaffers age)	First production(s)	Stage director
The Woman in the Wardrobe	Thriller	1951 (age 25)		
The Salt Land	TV Play	1955		
Balance of Terror	TV Play	1957		
Five Finger Exercise	Stage Play	1958 (age 32)	London 1955: New York 1959. Evening Standard Drama Award.	
Music Critic <i>Time and Tide</i>		1962		
The Royal Hunt of the Sun	Stage Play: Film	1964 (age 38)	Play at RSC 1964. New York 1965. Film 1969.	John Dexter
The White Liars	1 act Stage Play		Various versions before 1967	John Dexter
Private Ear	1 act Stage Play	1962	Staged 1962, with Public Eye	
Public Eye	1 act Stage Play: Film	1962	Film 1972 (as <i>Follow Me</i>)	
Black Comedy	1 act Stage Play	1965	1967 (with White Liars)	John Dexter
Equus	Stage Play: Film	1973 (age 47)	Play in London 1973: over 1000 performances. New York 1974. Film 1977.	John Dexter
Shrivings	Stage Play	1974	Early version 1970. Later version never staged.	
Amadeus	Stage Play: Film	1979 (age 53)	Heaps of awards. Over 1000 performances in London. Film 1984.	Peter Hall
Yonadab	Stage Play	1985 (age 61)	National theatre, 1985. Sank without trace.	Peter Hall
Lettice and Lovage	1 act Stage Play	1987	London, 1988. New York, 1990.	(Michael Blakemore)
The Gift of the Gorgon	Stage Play	1992 (Age 68)	London premiere 1993.	Peter Hall

Some Preliminary References

Lounsberry, B. "God Hunting": the chaos of worship in Peter Shaffer's *Equus* and *Royal Hunt of the Sun*.

Berman, J. (1987) The search for the father in *Amadeus*. **Psychoanalytic review**, **74**, 561-578.

Buckley, T. (1975) 'Write me,' said the play to Peter Shaffer. **New York Times Magazine**, 13.4.75.

Burland, J.A. (1976) Discussion of papers on *Equus*. **International Journal of Psychoanalytic Therapy**, **5**, 501-505.

Corello, A.V. (1986) *Equus*: the ritual sacrifice of the male child. **Psychoanalytic review**, **73**, 191-211.

Ellis, S. (2003) The Royal Hunt of the Sun, London, December 1964. **The Guardian**, **August 27**, 3pp.

Glenn, J. (1974) Anthony and Peter Shaffer's plays: the influence of twinship on creativity. **American Imago**. **31**, 270-292.

Glenn, J. (1976) Alan Strang as an adolescent. **International Journal of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy**, **5**, 473-86.

Hamilton, J.W. (1995) Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* as a further expression of twinship conflict. **American Journal of Psychoanalysis**, **55**, 269-277.

Jules, G. (1974) Anthony and Peter Shaffer's plays: the influence of twinship on creativity. **American Imago**, **31**, 270-292.

Jules, G. (1974) Twins in disguise: a psychoanalytic essay on *Sleuth* and *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. **Psychoanalytic Quarterly**, **43**, 288-302.

Mustazza, L. (1992) A jealous god: ritual and judgement in Shaffer's *Equus*. **Spring**, **28**, 174-185.

Slutsky, J.E. (1976) *Equus*: An analysis in terms of object relations and counter transference. **International Journal of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy**, **5**, 490-507.

Sullivan, W.J. (1988) Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*: the making and un-making of the fathers. **American Imago**, **45**, 45-60.

Final Notes

Shaffer has failed the 'Job Test'.

The gods that are sought.

(Clytemnestra)

The Inca sun god

The Greek pantheon

The God of bargains

The Babylonian sibling divinity

The Greek pantheon (esp Perseus and Athene)

'gentler' pre-Christian monotheism.

The gods that rule

(Clytemnestra)

Spanish Catholicism

Masochistic all-seeing horse-god.

The monotheistic, unfeeling god

Yaweh

Athene