

## The Plays of Peter Shaffer and the Mimetic Theory of René Girard

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Probably no better match of theory to creative dramatic work exists than that between the plays of Peter Shaffer and the critical theory of René Girard. It is, in fact, surprising that the parallels have not been examined before.<sup>1</sup> While critics of Shaffer's plays have identified the theme of rival brothers and a more general theme of rivalry in such well-known works as *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus*, and *Amadeus*,<sup>2</sup> Girard's theory of mimetic desire and envy provides a potentially more integrative explanation of the dynamics operative in not only these serious works but the comedies as well. Like all significant literary works, Shaffer's plays—especially in aggregate—invite a wide range of critical approaches, to which they yield increasingly fascinating insights. Even in an era of New Historicism and cultural criticism, however, Girard's unhistoricized focus on the mechanism of desire and violence offers a useful tool for investigating the particular literary manifestations of envy, rivalry and metaphysical quest found in Shaffer's plays.

Of course a brief essay that focuses on a number of plays from a single, Girardian perspective risks turning the plays into mere illustrations of the theory. This need not be the case, however, and nothing is further from my intentions. Hence, in my conclusion I shall also suggest how Girard's ideas might be used in a less apparently teleological way, or at least within a more open dialogue of critical perspectives. In that fashion, while emphasizing key features and continuities in the plays, I would hope to make space for other critical perspectives while assuring that the plays' various individual uniquenesses stand out. In what follows I shall show how some of Shaffer's best plays dramatize key features of Girard's theory of "mimetic desire." I shall trace these features, highlighting first some of the lesser known works from early in his career. For those less familiar with Shaffer's work, this will include brief summaries of the earlier plays. Then, after brief application to the three major works mentioned above, I shall conclude with a close look at Shaffer's controversial 1993 play, *The Gift of the Gorgon*.

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Critics hailed Shaffer's first play, *Five Finger Exercise* (1958), for its realistic portrayal<sup>3</sup> of youthful rebellion, family tensions, and fraternal rivalry. The Cambridge-educated son of an affluent English family, Clive Harrington is his mother's favorite. Rejecting his father's materialistic values, Clive admires instead the culture, sophistication, and self-possession of Walter Langer, an immigrant from Germany who tutors Clive's younger sister Pamela. Walter is like an older brother to Clive. When Clive discovers his mother flirting with Walter, Clive exaggerates the indiscretion to his father, Stanley. Clive's mother, Louise, learns of Clive's jealousy and goes to her husband. She tells him a story of Walter's turning their daughter's head. She insists that Stanley fire Walter. Innocent of both charges, Walter finds himself facing the loss of the job which is all that can keep him from having to return to Germany and a former life he loathes.<sup>4</sup> Haunted by a complex of thoughts and fears which a "confession" to Clive has evoked, Walter retreats to his room, puts on a favorite record, and tries to commit suicide.<sup>5</sup>

Girard's theory of mimetic desire provides a revealing perspective on this play. It is a perspective that lifts *Five Finger Exercise* out of the realm of mere realistic social commentary and in fact provides a foundation for understanding Shaffer's later development as a playwright intent on exploring the complex basis of human desire. Because Girard's work may be unfamiliar, I shall first summarize a few key parts of his theory before applying it to *Five Finger Exercise*.

Elaborated from his earliest mature literary critical work, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, "mimetic desire" IS the central concept in Girard's work.<sup>6</sup> By that term he means that all desire is learned by imitating the desire of another. To use a simple example: I want a Volvo automobile. Why? Among other possible reasons, because someone I admire owns a Volvo. Mimetic desire implies and then results in rivalry. My neighbor gets an SUV as well as the Volvo. I have to get an SUV. Such rivalry, Girard contends, may continue, even in the absence of the object desired.<sup>7</sup> Girard suggests that desire itself is definable solely in terms of rivalry.

Rivalry is not the result of a chance convergence of two desires toward the same object; the subject desires the object because its rival desires it. . . . The other has to show the subject what it should desire; confronted with the example of an apparently superior being that desires something, the subject must conclude that the object of this desire is something even more fulfilling. . . . Desire is essentially imitative.<sup>8</sup>

At this point we can also recognize another familiar phenomenon, envy. According to Girard:

Envy subordinates a desired *something* to the *someone* who enjoys a privileged relationship with it. Envy covets the superior *being* that neither the someone nor the something alone, but the conjunction of the two, seems to possess. Envy involuntarily testifies to a lack of *being* that puts the envious to shame.<sup>9</sup>

This is the fundamental paradigm. Imitation shapes desire. Mimetic desire breeds rivalry. Rivalry results in envy. Envy results from the “conjunction” of the desired object and the seemingly greater fullness of being in the model, and this results in a nearly irresistible force. In time Girard’s—often anthropologically based—insights elaborate a complex symbology which will be useful for understanding not only Shaffer’s work but that of many another writer as well.

By way of transition to *Five Finger Exercise*, one more term needs defining. Appropriating Sigmund Freud’s notion of “the double bind,” Girard calls it “a contradictory double imperative” to imitate and not to imitate.<sup>10</sup> For the double bind to operate, Girard says, the father must become an obstacle, and “the father can only become an obstacle when the diminution of his paternal authority has brought him into a direct confrontation with his son, obliging him to occupy the same sphere.”<sup>11</sup> This is, in fact, what happens in *Five Finger Exercise*.

The central theme of *Five Finger Exercise* is Clive’s rejection of his father’s values and his envy of the more cultured rival, Walter. But on the way to revealing that theme, the play first multiplies pairs of conflicting desires. Louise desires her son Clive, but she is also attracted to Walter. Pamela is attracted in an innocent way to Walter, and Clive, too, is fascinated by Walter. All seem to want something more than the already affluent life they enjoy. As his mother’s favorite, Clive sees Walter as a rival for his mother’s affection. Louise is the object; Walter—with his greater sophistication—is the model. Girard’s theory argues that, particularly if the rivalry has been sexual in nature (the subject’s desire for the same sexual object as the model), the rivalry can become doubly blurred, appearing as homosexual desire for the rival.<sup>12</sup>

When envy and rivalry obliterate distinctions between subject and model, a crisis results that can only be resolved through the eruption of destructive action. It becomes clear that violence and not the object is the real motive force after all. Rivalry mounts to a “mimetic crisis,” and the only way to restore relative stability is to “victimize” or turn someone or something into a scapegoat. Girard’s book, *The Scapegoat*, casts further light on the way mimetic desire and rivalry lead to the designation of a “scapegoat” toward whom the violence of an individual or a group is directed. The key point in Girard’s argument is that the scapegoat is really a random victim, whose relation to those who victimize him (or her) is both clear yet ambiguous, hence effecting the blurring of distinctions which precipitates the violence.

Differing from some anthropological theorists, Girard maintains that “order, peace, and fecundity depend on cultural distinctions; it is not these distinctions but the loss of them that gives birth to fierce rivalries and sets members of the same family or social group at one another’s throats.”<sup>13</sup> One particularly volatile form that the loss of distinctions takes is the appearance of twins, or “doubles.” Girard observes: “It is only natural that twins should awaken fear, for they are harbingers of indiscriminate violence, the greatest menace to primitive societies.”<sup>14</sup> Girard argues further, with the help of apposite anthropological references, that “two brothers need not be twins for their resemblances to arouse anxiety.” From this he concludes that “it seems appropriate to juxtapose the basic mythic theme of *enemy brothers* with the phobia concerning twins and other fraternal resemblances.”<sup>15</sup> It will soon be clear that a similar dynamic—already noted but incompletely understood by critics—animates much of Shaffer’s work.<sup>16</sup>

Shaffer’s use of *paired* characters in *Five Finger Exercise*—specifically Clive and Walter behaving like brothers—reduces the differentiation of imitators and models in the way Girard describes.<sup>17</sup> The conflicted desires also occasion multiple betrayals. Clive betrays his mother’s love; he also betrays her secret infatuation for Walter, as well as his own attraction to the tutor. These betrayals yield verbal<sup>18</sup> and physical violence and result in the threat of expulsion, and near death for Walter. It takes little interpretive skill to see Clive’s “imitative desire” for Walter as the motive for his being willing to “sacrifice”—or scapegoat—Walter.

For those who might find a Girardian reading of *Five Finger Exercise* simplistic, one final observation. Girard emphasizes the invisibility of mimetic rivalry in everyday life: “We feel that we are at the point of attaining autonomy as we imitate our models of power and prestige. This autonomy, however, is really nothing but a reflection of the illusions projected by our admiration for them. The more this admiration mimetically intensifies, *the less aware it is* of its own mimetic nature.”<sup>19</sup> This “invisibility” is what allows rivalry to remain operative. In *Five Finger Exercise*, no less than *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and Shaffer’s later plays, it is for the audience—rather than the characters, or perhaps even the playwright—to see the transparency of the rivalry and the subsequent scapegoating. On one level, this makes Shaffer’s plays resemble “morality” plays. On another level it makes them more accurate “re-presentations” of the unconscious way in which the mechanism of envy, rivalry, and violence surrounds us and pervades our personal, social, and even political life.

Changes from the late 1950s to the early 1990s tempted Shaffer to explore increasingly volatile material.<sup>20</sup> The desire for an absolute answer to the enigma of desire, visible in *Five Finger Exercise* and finally explicit in *Equus*, pushes Shaffer to ever more intense and even excessive explorations of mimetic desire.<sup>21</sup>

In his next few plays Shaffer takes a comedic view of issues raised in *Five Finger Exercise*, but familial, fraternal, and sexual desire—and the attendant forms

of rivalry—remain prominent. In order to see the applicability of Girard's ideas to Shaffer's comedies, we need to look at another aspect of his theory. In a significant chapter of "*To Double Business Bound*," Girard extends his argument and his theory to cover comedy as well as tragedy.<sup>22</sup> Comedy, Girard says, threatens our autonomy and self-control in a non-threatening way and hence gives rise to laughter rather than the catharsis of pity and fear. But comedy, too, reduces individuality and subjects the characters to the operation of impersonal forces like mimetic desire and envy. Like the plots and characters of tragedy, the plots and characters of comedy create the patterns that Girard had argued underlie the mythic structures of tragedy.<sup>23</sup>

Though comedies like *The Public Eye* (1962), *The Private Ear* (1962), *White Liars* (1967), and (the much later and very popular) *Lettice and Loveage* (1990) might be used as illustration, *Black Comedy* (1965) is in some ways most representative. In this play the "unknown sculptor" Brindsley Miller and his fiancée Carol Melkett prepare a party to honor Georg Bamberger, an art connoisseur who is to buy some of Brin's sculptures. To impress both Bamberger and Carol's father, Colonel Melkett, Brin has borrowed furniture and art ("antiques") from the apartment of Harold Gorrington,<sup>24</sup> Brin's more sophisticated friend from across the hall. Harold is out of town and does not know of the borrowings.

Before Bamberger can arrive, there is an electrical outage, and both the Colonel and a Miss Furnivall, another tenant, arrive. In a clever theatrical reversal on which the title plays, all the actions of the drama which are supposed to happen in the light are played in the dark, while those which occur while the electric is off are played in the light. Hence, all of what had occurred before the outage was played in virtually total darkness. Now, with the lights on, the characters move about as if they cannot see for the darkness. Besides literalizing what will become a favorite Shaffer metaphor, that of blindness, the result is a kind of ongoing revelation for the audience, which also helps emphasize other themes that take on new significance when seen in a Girardian light.

As if to provide a theoretical explanation for the characters' being "in the dark," Girard notes, in *Things Hidden*, that "the New Testament contains what amounts to a genuine epistemology of love, the principle of which is clearly formulated in the first Epistle of John." Girard quotes the following from I John 2:10-11:

He who loves *his brother* abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling. But he who hates *his brother* is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.<sup>25</sup>

This passage explains love and hate in terms of seeing and blindness and hence makes sense of *Black Comedy's* play on "darkness," which becomes not only a stunning and clever theatrical trick but a metaphor pointing to the thematic center

of not only *Black Comedy*, but *Equus* and, with qualifications, Shaffer's most recent play, *The Gift of the Gorgon*, as well.

At this point in the action Harold returns unexpectedly from a trip to the continent. In the darkness caused by the outage, Brin placates the Colonel and—also “under the cover of darkness”—tries to return the furniture and art to Harold's apartment. Clea, Brin's former girlfriend, arrives and—discovering her rival Carol—disguises her voice and vengefully assumes the identity of the housekeeper. In time she reveals to everyone her four-year relationship with Brin. These relationships recall the complication of relationships that began with Clive, Walter, and Louise in *Five Finger Exercise*, and which continued in *The Public Eye*, *The Private Ear*, and *White Liars*. Schuppanzigh, an electrician, now arrives and goes through a trapdoor in the apartment floor in order to correct the problem that caused the power outage. After the multiple revelations of Brin's deceptions, the Colonel and Harold go after Brin with pokers, but Bamberger, the lights, and Schuppanzigh all appear at once and the play is over.

*Black Comedy* is a reversal in more ways than one. But it is also a “variation on a theme,” both in terms of Shaffer's own work and the Girardian paradigm we have been examining. Like Clive and Walter, Brinsley and Harold are rivals.<sup>26</sup> Harold is the model, and the object of their rivalry is the sophistication Harold possesses and Brinsley seeks. The rivalry is further figured by the objects Brinsley “borrows” to put on the appearance of greater sophistication. As in some of the earlier plays, the suggestion of homo-erotic attraction is also present. The plot is as transparent as an Oscar Wilde farce and serves to highlight the “impersonal,” comedic patterns to which Girard refers in “*To Double Business Bound*.” Even more than in *Five Finger Exercise* lies and betrayals precipitate a climactic threat to the protagonist's life. The play ends—the action freezes—a moment before Harold and the colonel can wreak vengeance on Brinsley. The working toward but final suspension of violence supports Girard's theory. *Black Comedy* is a comic would-be dismemberment and—in that light—resembles *Equus* and other Shaffer plays which hinge upon violence threatened or done to one of the main characters. *Black Comedy* shows how mimetic desire and rivalry can equally animate the comic structure. When, near the end of the play, all the characters appear to turn on Brin, we also have something like a comedic version of the mimetic crisis, the “unanimity minus one” that Girard describes as preceding mimetic violence.<sup>27</sup> It is only Shaffer's sense of timing which prevents Brin becoming a victim, a true scapegoat for the other characters.

From *Five Finger Exercise* through *Black Comedy* Shaffer had pursued the theme of rivalry in its personal, familial, and fraternal forms. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964) is the first in which Shaffer broadens his canvas to include historical events and a theme only latent in his earliest work. Recent criticism, for instance, might readily focus on the “postcolonial” critique Shaffer's play levels at

a conqueror like Francisco Pizarro. Once again, however, Girard's theory provides one perspective from which to understand the characters' individual motives. The play's theme is multiple. First, young Martin, who desires to imitate Francisco Pizarro, undergoes a gradual disillusionment with his model. Second, Pizarro desires to conquer Peru by capturing King Atahualpa.

This play, too, abounds in features that recall Shaffer's earlier plays as they suggest and enhance the Girardian paradigm. There are multiple paired characters, including Atahualpa and his brother Huascar (whom Atahualpa has killed), and the two chaplains De Nizza and Valeverde. Pizarro envies Atahualpa; young Martin imitates Pizarro. Pizarro, who is sixty-three, sees in Atahualpa, who is a significant thirty-three years old, both a son and a rival. In time we learn that both Pizarro and Atahualpa are illegitimate—suggesting the archetypal hero of unknown parentage and further emphasizing the “brother-like” elements of each. Mimetic desire and rivalry also work in another direction. Pizarro is a rebel; one who scorns the “belonging birds” who are his followers and counselors. Yet, while he criticizes young Martin's idealism, he calls him a “young colt” and envies his “hope” and “belief” in chivalric virtues.<sup>28</sup> He marvels that for young Martin there are still “sacred objects” like the soldier's sword. Pizarro sees himself as “cold” and isolated; emptied of desire by his overpowering sense of his own mortality. He refers to his “frostbitten soul” and admits that “if I could find the place where it [the sun] sinks to rest for the night, I'd find the source of life, like the beginning of a river.”<sup>29</sup> As the “sun king,” Atahualpa comes to represent that goal, that promise. When he first appears, Atahualpa has that “dignity” and “natural grace” that inspires wonder, imitation, and envy. Pizarro says, “He was an answer for time.”<sup>30</sup>

In dramatizing the conquest of Peru, Shaffer directly confronts for the first time in his work the relation between desire and “the sacred.” Fairly early in his career, too, Girard had investigated the sacred. In a crucial passage, he observes

The sacred consists of all those forces whose dominance over man increases or seems to increase in proportion to man's effort to master them. Tempests, forest fires, and plagues, among other phenomena, may be classified as sacred. Far outranking these, however, though in a far less obvious manner, stands human violence—violence seen as something exterior to man and henceforth as a part of all the other outside forces that threaten mankind. Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred.<sup>31</sup>

A key insight here has to do with the exteriorization of violence. As Girard implies, not to see violence as part of human beings' nature is to begin the process of obfuscation which transforms both violence *and* the sacred.<sup>32</sup>

One thing that takes *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* beyond Shaffer's earlier studies of mimetic desire, rivalry, and envy are the terms and the framework within which these tensions exist. To see that even this development is not unanticipated in Shaffer's work, we can take a glance back. At a crucial point just before the climax of *Five Finger Exercise*, Walter tries to explain himself to Clive.

Clive [Walter says], listen to me. . . . The Kings of Egypt were gods. Everything they did was right, everything they said was true, and when they died, they grew faces of gold. You must try to forgive your parents for being average and wrong when you worshipped them once. Why are you so afraid? Is it—because you have no girl friend? Oh, you are so silly. Silly. Do you think sex will change you? Put you into a different world, where everything will mean more to you: I thought so, too, once.<sup>33</sup>

Walter's elliptical explanation of how parental authority affects children—and the relation of religion to sex—are striking because of their imagery. They are also incongruous in *Five Finger Exercise*. Yet, though confused, Walter's reference to gods, worship, and masked Egyptian kings shows Shaffer's—albeit perhaps dim—awareness that the family dynamics in *Five Finger Exercise* have a vitality and significance greater than the experience of one mid-twentieth century bourgeois family can manifest.

*The Royal Hunt of the Sun* explores the relation of worship and envy as it depicts Pizarro's desire to conquer Peru. For Pizarro the conquest is fueled by a desire to find in Fame a way to transcend time, one of the "forces" that Pizarro cannot "master." In the Inca king, Atahuallpa, he sees that possibility. As Atahuallpa becomes the model, where the desired object is the hope that the king can transcend death, the stage is set for a titanic rivalry and a climactic eruption of violence.

In the end, Pizarro—like Clive in *Five Finger Exercise*—betrays Atahuallpa, reneging on his promise to free the king, after the king has delivered a ransom. Atahuallpa becomes a scapegoat. When Pizarro's soldiers take the king away and strangle him—and the king does not rise at dawn the next day—Pizarro's final hope, and his will to live, are gone. Old Martin says, "to speak the truth, he sat down that morning [of Atahuallpa's death] and never really got up again."<sup>34</sup> Young Martin's faith in his model was also shattered. In lines that echo *Five Finger Exercise* and anticipate Shaffer's later plays, the narrator, old Martin, admits the loss of his admiration for Pizarro: "That was my first and last worship too. Devotion never came again."<sup>35</sup> With *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* Shaffer's work finds an abiding thematic center. Henceforth the strong model, be it father, father-figure, rival brother, or symbolic animal, becomes central, and the theme of a search that involves "the



Sacred”—a search for the absolute and the key to fuller life—comes to permeate his work.

In *Equus* (1973) mimetic desire and rivalry assume the same double structure they had in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. The first subject of mimetic desire is a young man. Distantly resembling Clive in *Five Finger Exercise*, Alan Strang is a classic case of the subject “scandalized” by a model. The model has at least three forms. We learn that, as a child, Alan was awed by seeing a young man on horseback on the beach. This fascination, fed by his mother’s reading Bible stories full of horses, finds its next “model” in a picture of Jesus before the crucifixion. Angered by all the superheated religiosity that his wife has been feeding to their son, Alan’s father tears down the picture of Jesus and replaces it with an almost hieratic, face-front picture of a horse. Alan desires a fullness of being beyond that offered by his parents’ conflicting values; hers exaggeratedly evangelical Protestantism and his a fanatical atheistic Marxism. So, to satisfy his desire, Alan, conflicted, envious, and fearful, elaborates an esoteric sado-masochistic ritual of worship compounded of the various models that have scandalized him. But as Girard suggests, the desire always outstrips Alan’s ability to satisfy it, and the model remains aloof, judgmental, and intimidating. As Girard puts it:

Once he has entered upon this vicious circle, the subject rapidly begins to credit himself with a radical inadequacy that the model has brought to light, which justifies the model’s attitude toward him. The model, being closely identified with the object he jealously keeps for himself, possesses—so it would seem—a self-sufficiency and omniscience that the subject can only dream of acquiring.<sup>36</sup>

Even when Alan is able to “overcome” resentment of his father, he remains in thrall to the image of Equus. When Alan meets a girl who gives him an opportunity to work in a stable, the chance to work next to her and to the horses he loves, it seems he may be able to satisfy some of his desire. But in the stable he discovers that the image of Equus—the superior rival—will always prevent his achieving satisfaction. As Girard might explain it, Alan turns the real horses in the stable into scapegoats for the unattainable desire, the indomitable rival.<sup>37</sup> His blinding six horses is a conflation of Oedipus’ blinding and the ritual slaughter of animals which Girard argues is the primitive mind’s way of avoiding human bloodshed.<sup>38</sup>

The second subject of mimetic desire in the play is the psychologist, Martin Dysart, who is called in after Alan has blinded the horses. In trying to treat the boy, Dysart begins to see Alan’s “illness” as a form of religious passion and worship. In time Dysart comes to envy Alan, and this envy is a reduplication of Alan’s worship

of *Equus*. Like Pizarro, Dysart finds only skepticism and self-doubt in his career. Dysart desires the fullness of life that passionate worship seems to promise.

In a way that recalls the Egyptian mask quotation from *Five Finger Exercise*, Dysart dreams of masks in ancient Greece. Then, when he has unraveled the twists in Alan's life, he reluctantly determines to "sacrifice" Alan and his "worship" to the gods of the "Normal."<sup>39</sup> In doing so, he mimics the way that Alan had scapegoated the horses. But though Dysart promises to deliver Alan from his mental illness, it appears that Dysart himself is now in thrall to the image. His final monologue plays variants on the darkness/blindness motif that stretches back to *Black Comedy*.

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.<sup>40</sup>

Invoking Girard's categories, we can see that, like *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus* explores the almost infinitely unattainable desire that drives Strang and Dysart. Dysart's final monologue expresses his desire for a fullness of being beyond his ability to imagine.

A number of critics applauded *Equus* for pushing beyond *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* to explore the immemorial human need for "worship." They see Shaffer's next step coming in *Amadeus*. Familiar to many in its film version, or its recent (1999) revival, *Amadeus* (1979) is an even more chilling anatomy of rivalry and the self-destructive effects of mimetic desire than *Equus*. Begun and framed in the same flashback style as *Equus* and *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, the play is Antonio Salieri's confession of his envy for the younger Mozart and his musical gifts. But rather early in the play it becomes clear that Salieri's envy is based on a limitless, an infinite desire. Listening to the "Adagio from the Serenade for Thirteen Wind Instruments,"<sup>41</sup> Salieri begins to experience pain:

What is this *pain*? What is this *need* in the sound? Forever unfulfillable yet fulfilling him who hears it, utterly! Is it *Your* need? . . . *Can it be Yours?* . . . I was suddenly frightened. It seemed to me I had heard a voice of God—and that it issued from a creature whose own voice I had also heard—and it was the voice of an obscene child.<sup>42</sup>

The rivalry and envy which motivate Salieri take on an absolute quality which relates this play to both *Equus* and *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. The basis of the

rivalry here is a familiar Romantic one: the artist's perceived rivalry with God the Creator.

The play unfolds as Salieri explains how he did everything possible to undermine and destroy not only Mozart's livelihood and reputation, but his very life. Even at Mozart's death, Salieri is hounding his rival, but the terms in which he derides him are the same that cause him fear.

God does not love you, Amadeus. God does not love! He can only *use*! . . . He cares nothing for who He uses: nothing for who He denies! . . . You are no use to Him any more. You're too weak, too sick! He has finished with you! All you can do now is *die*! He'll find another instrument! He won't even remember you! . . . Die, Amadeus! Die, I beg you, die! . . . Leave me alone, *ti imploro!* Leave me alone at last! Leave me alone!<sup>43</sup>

But it is only after Mozart's death that we come to realize the heights—or the depths—of Salieri's desire, his fears, his sense of inadequacy, and his guilt.

Describing his subsequent years, Salieri refers to guilt and punishment in terms that also recall Pizarro's quest for lasting fame.

Slowly I understood the nature of God's punishment. [*Directly, to the audience.*] What had I asked for in that church as a boy? Was it not Fame? Well, now I had it! . . . I was to be bricked up in Fame! Buried in Fame! Embalmed in Fame! But for work I knew to be absolutely worthless!<sup>44</sup>

Because "Mozart's music would sound everywhere—and mine in no place on the earth," Salieri starts the rumor that he was responsible for Mozart's death; that he, Salieri, had hastened that death with poison. "I did this deliberately!" Salieri claims. "Now my name is on every tongue! Vienna, City of Scandals, has a scandal worthy of it at last."<sup>45</sup> Understood in the technical sense which Girard adopts, Salieri's calling himself a scandal reveals the nature of his envy. Like Nietzsche as Girard describes him,<sup>46</sup> Salieri has gone mad and become self-destructive because he cannot measure up to either Mozart or God. What might be called Salieri's final words reveal his fate and his despair in terms that cut ever closer to the greatest source of envy and scandal.

I was born a pair of ears, and nothing else. It is only through hearing music that I know God exists. Only through writing music that I could worship. . . . All around me men hunger for general rights. I hungered only for particular notes. They seek liberty

for mankind. I sought only slavery for myself. To be owned—ordered—exhausted by an Absolute. This was denied me, and with it all meaning. Now I go to become a Ghost myself.<sup>47</sup>

Salieri's paradoxes point not only to the artist's desire to "sacrifice" himself to his art. They also suggest the paradox of artistic freedom. Salieri's despair of finding any meaning in his life, and his fear of anonymity, further specify the issues that haunt *Equus* and *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. Like Pizarro and Dysart, Salieri is a searcher, a striver for the absolute. His only superiority to Dysart is his ability to name the God with whom—like Jacob—he struggles.

Girard's most recent work, on Jesus in the Gospels, is more concerned with how those texts uncover the origin and nature of violence than they are with the search for transcendence. The same is true of Shaffer's most recent play, *The Gift of the Gorgon* (1992). Here mimetic desire, rivalry, and revenge take a new and more hideous turn. In order to understand these changes in Shaffer's work, it will be helpful to begin by rehearsing some reasons for the negative reactions to *The Gift of the Gorgon*. The play's production history resembles that of another of Shaffer's early plays, *Shrivings*<sup>48</sup> (1970; revised 1974) in that neither play had a long run. Nor were critics any more sympathetic to the latter.<sup>49</sup> Significant for our discussion of Girard, both involve an opposition of characters, one of whom defends non-violence and the other violence as a way to "purification." At the heart of the play is the struggle between a playwright, Edward Damson, and his wife Helen. Like *Five Finger Exercise* and *Equus*, the play also involves multiple family rivalries. Like Clive in *Five Finger Exercise*, Edward has a father whom he does not respect, and who cannot understand his son. And Damson, in turn, has a son, Phillip, to whom he is a scandalous model and rival.

One reason that the play received such mixed reviews: even when they are put in the mouth of Edward Damson, the play's criticisms of British and American academics as small, parasitic, and without balls, and British theater as moribund, would be unlikely to endear critics to it.<sup>50</sup> Another reason *The Gift of the Gorgon* may have come in for harsh criticism is the way it seems to "recycle" character types, situations, and themes from earlier plays. In this latter regard, it is probably more helpful to say that in *The Gift of the Gorgon* Shaffer parodies and caricatures his own works, attitudes, and characters.<sup>51</sup> The "hero," the playwright Edward Damson, is an exaggerated character, all passion, rage, and arrogance. In his love of Greece he resembles Martin Dysart. In his harsh judgmental attitude he also resembles the self-punishing Alan Strang and Salieri.

Yet another way to explain why *The Gift of the Gorgon* received such negative critical response is to say that Shaffer has sought to include even more of what Girard would call the primitive symbology of the mimetic crisis. Shaffer appears to work for the same kind of uncovering that Girard says classic tragedy

attempted.<sup>52</sup> To understand *The Gift of the Gorgon*, then, we need to consider yet another aspect of Girard's theory, namely its concern with how mimetic desire is implicated with the use and significance of blood. In *Violence and the Sacred* Girard asserts: "The universal attribution of impurity to spilt blood springs directly from the definition we have . . . proposed: wherever violence threatens, ritual impurity is present." Describing the ritual acts of "sacred monarchies" in Africa, Girard notes the prevalence of blood. "In some instances, he [the king] is literally bathed in blood."<sup>53</sup> *The Gift of the Gorgon*, as the title might imply, is steeped in blood. It starts with allusions to the blood of Agamemnon, shed by Clytemnestra. At one point Edward says, "that's what bloodshed can do . . . clean things."<sup>54</sup> Later, it is the explicit blood of the Gorgon. When the goddess Athena appears in a ritual enactment in Act II, she reminds Edward that "from the Gorgon's veins two bloods will flow. That from the left kills. That from the right cures."<sup>55</sup>

The play is told in retrospect, following the opening scene, which shows Damson's coffin, at his Greek island home. A taped commentary memorializes Edward. Philip Damson, a young academic—and Edward's unacknowledged son by another woman—comes to the island in order to interview Damson's wife. She thinks he is coming to "redress [the] injustice" of Edward's having left him nothing. Philip strikes the Girardian note, "Forgive me, but I think it may not be so good to live in Greece too long. I've always imagined people who live here have revenge on the brain." As he explains what drives *him*, Philip sounds like the rivalrous characters in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus*, and *Amadeus*. "Everything I am, everything I do, is because of him. His worship. That's my disease, if you like: worship of theatre."<sup>56</sup> Philip is the subject wanting to be like the rival father. And what we learn later of Edward's rejection of academics and commentators becomes the model's spurning of the imitator.

Reluctantly, and in slow stages, Helen details her husband's life and death. She only does so in return for Philip's promise to tell Edward's life as she reveals it to him. Her motive is obviously also a form of revenge. The highly educated daughter of a don whose field is classics, Helen fell for the rebellious Edward, who hated Helen's father because of his dry-as-dust approach to classic drama. Edward, for instance, interpreted Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* as Clytemnestra's triumphant revenge on her husband. He even makes up a dance, the Clytemnestra stomp, which he does to show how he would portray her revenge; what he calls her justice. Edward dreams of writing dramas "clear and clean. Pure revenge, which becomes pure justice."<sup>57</sup>

Arguing with Helen, Edward says: "I told you: sometimes you have to clean yourself with blood." Her answer: "I don't know what that means. If you show violence to a violent man . . ." Edward interrupts impatiently: "You turn into him yourself. Yes, yes, I've heard. That's your father talking."<sup>58</sup> Helen, like her father,

Professor Jarvis (Edward calls him “Parvus Jarvis”), is a pacifist who scorns Edward’s extremism.

Nevertheless, Helen is fascinated by Edward and—in another Shafferian rejection—goes to live with Edward, becoming his Muse. He calls her “Learned,” acknowledging her background in the classics, and she supports him by her work as a travel agent, a job clearly beneath her. Until she arrives, Edward has had a writing block. He can only write single scenes. She challenges him, and that inspires him. He “enacts” that inspiration by transforming her into Athena and writes a scene in which Athena and Perseus appear on Edward’s gigantic writing desk, a “stage upon a stage” (which is a key feature of Shaffer’s dramaturgy in this play). Athena helps Perseus/Edward slay the Gorgon and write his plays.

Soon Edward acquires a mat-knife, special paper, and a pen and red ink, with which he begins to write the first of several plays. It is titled *Icons* and is about the iconoclasts of the Byzantine Empire. It is to be “written in blood,” he says, alluding to the pen and red ink. Helen admits that this first play “welled up out of his deepest obsessions,” “Beauty and violence.” Edward wants to show Irene, Empress of Constantinople, having her son’s eyes burned out because he destroyed ten thousand icons. Helen says, “You can’t show that. . . . Measure is everything . . . [The Greeks] never showed violence on stage.” Edward’s counter is: “But Shakespeare did, and he’s the final guide.”<sup>59</sup> Obviously, the theme of blinding (allied as it is here to “imaging God”) relates to *Equus* and would be an interesting topic to pursue.

It is Helen’s view that wins the day, however, and—with the final scene re-written—*Icons* becomes an instant hit. Success goes to Edward’s head, and he becomes both more egotistical and unfaithful. And his inspiration becomes more bloody. For his second play, *Prerogatives*—about the Cromwellian era—he wants the actors to parade around the stage carrying Cromwell’s exhumed and severed head. “At the end [the actors] tear the head to pieces and throw them exultantly to the applauding audience.” Of course, Helen will not have it, saying it is childish. Edward’s defense: “Yes—and profound. Both. The wonder of theatre.”<sup>60</sup> In this description some might see Shaffer caricaturing his own flair for theatricality in plays like *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Equus*.

Helen sees Cromwell as a hero, a man of principle. Edward reminds her of the Irish in the thousands whom Cromwell slaughtered. “We’re dealing with three centuries of ache for that revenge! Three hundred and fifty years for it to become diseased.” Again the Girardian theme of revenge, but, as with *Icons*, Edward revises and gives Cromwell “a wonderful speech of defeated idealism.” Everyone loves it except Edward himself. Rather than having successfully achieved the depiction of “pure” revenge, he says, “Avoidance, that’s all. *Again*. Endless bloody avoidance.”<sup>61</sup>

When “a bomb at a War Memorial in the town of Enniskillen, Northern Ireland” goes off and several people, including a twenty-one year old nurse, are killed, news reports quote the nurse’s father as saying, “I bear them no ill will.” Helen thinks this “glorious, possibly the most moving thing I ever heard.” Edward, of course, thinks it’s terrible. Ironically, after wanting to depict revenge against Cromwell for killing the Irish, he now wants to write a play excoriating the I.R.A. bombing. Edward sketches the plot:

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 killers escape to Ireland. The M.P. knows they will never be punished. So she becomes herself the instrument of their rebuke. She resigns her job and dedicates her life to tracking down the ringleader in Belfast, luring him to a hired room, and making him her captive.”<sup>62</sup>

The revenge theme again becomes clear as Edward describes the final scene: “She achieves justice. For the man and herself.” Helen asks, “How?” Edward says: “Executing him—ritually—before the eyes of the audience. Not sadistically, but in the sanative way of gaining peace. The hallowed, health-giving peace of Clytemnestra, slaughtering her husband in that bath.” Once again, Helen argues against the play, and particularly against the hideous conclusion: the woman is to appear calmly, with bleeding hands, to appeal to the audience. Invoking the very term, “passion,” which had been so powerful in *Equus*, Helen says, “You go on about passion, Edward, but have you never realized there are many, many kinds?—Including a passion to kill our own passion when it’s wrong? I’m not just being clever. The truest, hardest, most adult passion isn’t stamping and geeing ourselves up [Note the equine imagery] It’s refusing to be led by rage when we most want to be.”<sup>63</sup>

At the start of Act II, as the play approaches a climax, Helen shows Philip a letter from Edward containing a scene between Perseus and Athena. Athena encourages Perseus to look directly at the Gorgon and not kill it. She says: “Understand. All life is sacred. Take none! That is my word.” When Edward refuses, Athena herself removes a mask and becomes—as Perseus states: “Athena—jealous woman! Jealous of me!”<sup>64</sup> Edward rejects Helen’s importunities, writing the end of the play the way he wants. Helen describes how when the play, *I.R.E.* is performed, “It was not cleansing or cathartic, or any of the restorative things he wanted Theatre to be.

... In the next five minutes his mental world disintegrated before his eyes,” and Edward sat in the theatre “as if he were being executed.”<sup>65</sup>

Edward and Helen flee to Greece where Edward goes into a five-year decline. Philip’s existence is made known. But when—on a lecture tour to the United States—Edward refuses to achieve a reconciliation with the son he had rejected (never daring even to meet him), Helen, on Edward’s return, writes him a letter in the talismanic red ink by which Edward had communicated his Perseus/Athena visions. She denounces Edward for having abandoned his writing, Philip, and herself. When Edward reads the letter, he asks forgiveness. He pleads for her to “Make it right . . . Bring it [his inspiration] back. Help me atone.” He asks her to “Make a ritual. Brave and learned lady: create one. Wash your husband. Wipe away his wrongs to you. Forgive him on his body! . . . Help me atone.”<sup>66</sup>

But when Helen agrees to wash him, in the shower, in the dark, he has an awful surprise for her. Hidden in the soap he uses, Edward has put the razor from the mat-knife. In scrubbing him—“harder!” he urges her—she lacerates his back and chest. His blood flows out and mixes with the shower’s water, soaking and staining her. When she sees and runs out, he follows her, in a large bloodstained white towel, and shows her the reverse side of the paper on which she had written the Perseus “scene.” On it are the following words: “Justice. Justice clear and clean. See it, Learned: a terrible thing to look on. And a right one. Justice for us both. . . . This is the blood that cures . . . I beg you, my injured lady, maimed and learned love, accept this maiming in return. So I give up the Gorgon.”<sup>67</sup> A short time later Edward’s body is found on the rocks along the shore below their island home. Did he fall or did he jump? The issue is never resolved.

For Girard, the Gorgon’s blood, as the sign of violence, shows the ambiguity of all such violence. As he says, “The two-in-one nature of blood—that is, of violence—is strikingly illustrated in Euripides’ *Ion*. The Athenian queen, Creusa, plots to do away with the hero by means of an exotic talisman: two drops of blood from the deadly Gorgon. One drop is a deadly poison, the other a miraculous healing agent.”<sup>68</sup> Girard’s conclusion: “Nothing could seem more alike than two drops of blood, yet in this case nothing could be more different. It is only too easy to blend them together and produce a substance that would efface all distinction between the pure and the impure. . . . As long as purity and impurity remain distinct, even the worst pollution can be washed away; but once they are allowed to mingle, purification is no longer possible.”<sup>69</sup> Some would argue that Shaffer’s *Gorgon* merely confirms our contemporary sense that all distinction between purity and impurity; between genuine good and genuine evil has become so blurred, so indistinguishable, that (to paraphrase W. B. Yeats at his most apocalyptic) violence is loosed upon the land.

As the play closes, Helen again enjoins Philip to tell the whole truth about Edward Damson. Philip is shocked and afraid of the effect this will have on his



father's reputation. Predicting a fate like that which befell Salieri, Philip says: "He'll be erased!" Helen responds, "Exactly. . . . That'll be our gift to him. . . . This has to be avenged, Philip." But Philip reminds Helen of her principles and says, "The truth is, you must forgive him or die."<sup>70</sup> In a final dream scene Edward appears on the desk/stage, to urge her to do the Clytemnestra stomp on him, and his reputation. But in response to his ever more insistent challenge, she tears up her final scene (and Edward's response). In the quiet of the final moments, she asks a question and provides a provisional response: "Is it to go on for ever? Does it go on for ever? . . . Always? Everywhere?" Her final words are: "I forgive you! . . . I forgive you! . . . I will! . . . I will . . ."<sup>71</sup>

In this final scene Helen is not unlike Dysart at the end of *Equus*. It is clear that her struggle—to forgive—will continue. But if her repeated determination ("I Will! . . . I will") represents Shaffer's answer to Edward's need for revenge—even against himself—then the play, with all its weaknesses, marks a step forward in Shaffer's agonized and agonizing search for greater clarity about what drives us all.<sup>72</sup> What Girard had said of the great novelists in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* applies to Helen, and Shaffer as well: "This victory over self-centeredness which is other-centered [that is, mimetic, envious, and vengeful], this renunciation of fascination and hatred, is the crowning movement of . . . [artistic] creation."<sup>73</sup>

*The Gift of the Gorgon* remains a troubling and imperfect play. It desires more than perhaps any play can hope to attain. Tempted yet again by the metaphysical lure of the absolute,<sup>74</sup> Shaffer gives to his protagonist, Edward Damson, a desire so excessive that, in his need to create theater that can achieve an absolute revelation of meaning—about desire, violence and revenge—Damson experiences failure, and death. Damson's is not unlike the desire that inspired Shaffer himself and transformed Shaffer's greatest plays and, in the process, helped change modern British drama.<sup>75</sup>

Despite their often realistic premises, Shaffer's plays can be seen to manifest features of Girard's theory of mimetic desire. And little wonder. Girard appears to unmask "the sacred," but his work no more abolishes the power of the sacred than does Shaffer's use of religious themes, ritual gestures, masks and the like to heighten the effect of contemporary actions brought on stage. The religious origin of drama and culture occupies a prominent place in both Girard's and Shaffer's work. For each, the sacred remains the lifeblood of drama's perennial power. Furthermore, from the time of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Shaffer's work seems drawn to the theatrical potential of ritual. In this he may be responding to the early insights of performance theory<sup>76</sup> or to the influence of Artaud.<sup>77</sup> These are, in fact, productive directions in which future studies of Shaffer might proceed. Scholars can also profitably explore the obvious postcolonial dimensions of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, the "artist parable" in *Amadeus* or even *The Gift of the Gorgon*, not to mention gender conflicts in any number of Shaffer's plays from the 1950s to the

1990s. Girard's theory of mimetic desire, however, may provide an integrative perspective, and one which has the particular advantage of helping early twenty-first century readers of Shaffer to see the perennial drama of desire and violence that pervades his work.

With the help of a Girardian perspective, then, Shaffer's work takes on a greater coherence, and a sense of development which should be both illuminating and provocative of other approaches that, perhaps, employ more historicizing tools. Seen as explorations of mimetic desire, his plays provide a more pointed critique of various forms of desire and violence in twentieth-century life than they have sometimes been given credit for.<sup>78</sup> Beginning with a complex analysis of mid-century family relationships, Shaffer has, over time, investigated not only the nature of human desire, but the psychology of violence, and the complex relationship of non-violence and politics; and, finally, even the desire that motivates the metaphysical quest for meaning and transcendence.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A search of major databases turns up no Girardian treatment of Shaffer's work. Girard's project is far larger than this application can suggest. As one commentator notes: "Girard's main campaign is to supersede and demolish psychoanalysis; his aim to overcome the structuralism of Levi-Strauss, the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic, Heidegger and rationalist ethnology (Frazer) is only secondary" (Hans Ur Balthasar, *Theo-Drama II* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988] 299).

<sup>2</sup> For early as well as more recent treatments of these themes, see John Dean, "Peter Shaffer's Recurrent Character Type," *Modern Drama* 21 (1978): 297-305; Jules Glenn, "Anthony and Peter Shaffer's Plays: The Influence of Twinship on Creativity," *American Imago* 31 (1974): 270-92; C. J. Giankaris, ed., *Peter Shaffer: A Casebook* (New York: Garland, 1991); Dennis Klein, "Amadeus: The Third Part of Peter Shaffer's Dramatic Trilogy," *Modern Language Studies* 13:1 (1983): 31-38, and "Game Playing in Four Plays by Peter Shaffer: *Shrivings, Equus, Lettice and Lovage*, and *Yonadab*," *Peter Shaffer: A Casebook*, 133-50; Barbara Lounsbury, "The Cosmic Embrace: Peter Shaffer's Metaphysics," *Peter Shaffer: A Casebook*; M. K. MacMurrough-Kavanagh, *Peter Shaffer: Theatre and Drama* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998); and Gene A. Plunka, *Peter Shaffer: Roles, Rites and Rituals in the Theater* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> The 1962 film version, starring Rosalind Russell, Jack Hawkins, and Maxmillian Schell (and transferring the action to the United States) further emphasizes the realistic dimension of the story.

<sup>4</sup> Walter's references to post-War Germany and a species of guilt represent one of Shaffer's earliest—albeit half-hearted—attempts to suggest a political dimension in his plays.

<sup>5</sup> Violence accompanied by music receives a variant presentation at the end of *The Private Ear*, and one might even see in *Amadeus* a late harkening back to the association of music and violence with a sensitive character portrayed in his drama.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Gans, *Originary Thinking: Elements of Generative Anthropology* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993) 82-96.

<sup>7</sup> “There must be a mimetic element in the intraspecific fighting of many animals, since the absence of an object—the flight of the disputed female, for instance—does not always put an immediate end to the fighting.” (René Girard, *To Double Business Bound*: *Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978] 201.)

<sup>8</sup> René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) 204-205.

<sup>9</sup> 4; emphasis Girard’s.

<sup>10</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977) 147 and 177.

<sup>11</sup> 188.

<sup>12</sup> Girard examines this phenomenon in Dostoevsky’s *Eternal Husband* (see *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976] 45-48; and *Double Business Bound* 65-68).

<sup>13</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 49.

<sup>14</sup> 57. Girard does not refer to the fact, but “brother killing brother” is one of the plots that Aristotle references shortly after enunciating his definition of tragedy in *The Poetics* (see also Adams 57).

<sup>15</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 60-61.

<sup>16</sup> Though they are certainly not twins, Walter and Clive are sufficiently like brothers to make Girard’s observations applicable. Some critics in the past (Glenn, MacMurraugh-Kavanagh) have pointed to the fact that Shaffer does, indeed, have a twin brother, with whom he collaborated in their college years, but that fact need not prevent our seeing his use of rival brothers, near brothers, or doubles as manifestations of Girard’s theory. See also Dean and Giankaris.

<sup>17</sup> René Girard, *The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroad, 1996) 42.

<sup>18</sup> Girard has argued that “stichomythia,” the rapid-fire exchanges in classical drama, are a form of verbal violence (see *Violence and the Sacred* 44 and 150-151). Shaffer is not the only (post)modern playwright to re-vitalize this mode of utterance.

<sup>19</sup> René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (New York, Orbis Books, 2001) 15; emphasis added. See also *Violence and the Sacred* 147.

<sup>20</sup> We find the same evolution, for instance, in the work of contemporaries like Caryl Churchill and David Hare.

<sup>21</sup> One could argue that, merely on the basis of his breadth of interest and sensitivity to historically relevant issues in each of a number of major plays—family in the fifties (*Five Finger Exercise*), cultural—or colonial—oppression in the sixties (*Royal Hunt of the Sun*), the psychological consequences of social oppression (*Equus*), anxiety of artistic influence (*Amadeus*), war and pacifism (*Shrivings*), terrorism, art and pacifism (*The Gift of the Gorgon*), Shaffer’s work deserves renewed consideration.

<sup>22</sup> Girard, *Double Business Bound* 121-35.

<sup>23</sup> *Violence and the Sacred* 70-73.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Shaffer, *The Collected Plays of Peter Shaffer* (New York: Harmony, 1982) 187. It would be interesting to see whether the presence of two “German-sounding” characters (Gorringer and Bamberger) have any relation to the “valence” that Walter, the tutor from Germany, had carried in *Five Finger Exercise*.

<sup>25</sup> Qtd. in Girard, *Theatre of Envy* 277; emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup> Shaffer’s having a brother might make him particularly sensitive to the “volatility” of the Cain/Abel brothers’ rivalry.

<sup>27</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 259.

<sup>28</sup> Shaffer, *Collected Plays* 260.

<sup>29</sup> 270-72.

<sup>30</sup> 279 and 282.

<sup>31</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 31.

<sup>32</sup> Hannah Arendt's *On Violence* presents some interesting parallels to Girard's thinking, particularly with regard to violence as a social or political problem. In thus highlighting the place of violence in human activity, Girard aligns himself with some of Arendt's most provocative thinking. Arendt analyzes and distinguishes the relationship of power, authority, and violence in ways which anticipate and may even surpass in usefulness the insights of a Michel Foucault. These insights provide a useful background for Girard's assertions and Shaffer's dramatizations of the place that violence has in the family, in social relationships, and in the wider culture.

<sup>33</sup> Shaffer, *Collected Plays* 64.

<sup>34</sup> 310.

<sup>35</sup> 296.

<sup>36</sup> Girard, *Theatre of Envy* 296.

<sup>37</sup> The significance of the horse in Western (not to mention British) culture gives the image added resonance. Shaffer's tangential exploration of that significance in *Royal Hunt of the Sun* only adds to the ways in which the earlier play prepares for, and the later play carries forward the reflection on some similar issues.

<sup>38</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 97-99.

<sup>39</sup> Shaffer, *Collected Plays* 440.

<sup>40</sup> 476.

<sup>41</sup> Mozart, Köchel Listing 361.

<sup>42</sup> Shaffer, *Collected Plays* 497.

<sup>43</sup> 552.

<sup>44</sup> 556.

<sup>45</sup> 556-57.

<sup>46</sup> Girard, *Double Business Bound*, chapter four, especially 61-66.

<sup>47</sup> Shaffer, *Collected Plays* 557. It is significant that Shaffer's 1999 revision of this play (published in 2001) did not include changes in the passages quoted.

<sup>48</sup> A third might be the uncollected, unprinted *Yonadab*. See Dennis Klein, "Yonadab: Peter Shaffer's Earlier Dramas Revisited in the Court of King David," *Comparative Drama* 22 (Spring 1988): 68-78.

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, Oliver Reynolds, review of Peter Shaffer's *The Gift of the Gorgon*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, London, December 25, 1992: 17, and Sam Abel, review of Peter Shaffer's *The Gift of the Gorgon*, *Theatre Journal* 45.4 (1993): 549. Shaffer proceeded to revise what became *Shrivings*, including an author's commentary. In similar fashion, he published *The Gift of the Gorgon* along with an explanation—not unlike that he had provided for *Equus*. One might be tempted to call *The Gift of the Gorgon* a rewrite, a sequel, or a "theme with variations" on *Shrivings*.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Shaffer, *The Gift of the Gorgon* (New York: Viking, 1993) 32.

<sup>51</sup> In *Grammars of Creation* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001). Steiner states: Whenever a painter, composer, writer quotes his or her earlier work (the example of Mozart's *Figaro*-citation towards the close of *Don Giovanni* is canonic), the new context qualifies or expands or ironizes or corrects the source (101).

<sup>52</sup> Shaffer, I think, escapes Girard's jibe against modern dramatists who merely play with ritual. There are places, however, where Shaffer does seem to exaggerate the violence for the shock effect, as in the Clytemnestra Stomp and Prince Constantine VI's near blinding.

<sup>53</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 34 and 104.

<sup>54</sup> Shaffer, *Gorgon* 15.

<sup>55</sup> 40.

<sup>56</sup> 6-7.

<sup>57</sup> 15.

<sup>58</sup> 15.

<sup>59</sup> 42 and 44. It is somewhat surprising that no critic has suggested Shaffer's possibly alluding to Shakespeare's immediate successors, those specialists in bloody revenge tragedy, Webster and Ford.

<sup>60</sup> 52.

<sup>61</sup> 52-53.

<sup>62</sup> 55.

<sup>63</sup> 56-57.

<sup>64</sup> 62.

<sup>65</sup> 64.

<sup>66</sup> 81.

<sup>67</sup> 83.

<sup>68</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 37-38.

<sup>69</sup> 38. In *Equus*, Dysart also speaks of *two* aspects of the god of the Normal (Shaffer, *Collected Plays* 440).

<sup>70</sup> Shaffer, *Gorgon* 84 and 86.

<sup>71</sup> 88.

<sup>72</sup> *The Gift of the Gorgon* is also a significant departure in that it makes a woman, Helen Damson, a central character. Edward may be the obsessed and titanic subject of mimetic desire, but Helen's role combines the reflective character of Old Martin in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and the haunted aspirant to worship that is part of Martin Dysart in *Equus*.

<sup>73</sup> Girard, *Deceit, Desire* 299.

<sup>74</sup> Perhaps scandalized by the model of Artaud, Shaffer pushes too far. Girard's mimetic theory even explains the Artaudian double, over which Artaud—and Derrida with him—struggle. See "The Theater of Cruelty," *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976).

<sup>75</sup> See Simon Shepherd and Peter Womack, *English Drama: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) and their diminishment of Shaffer's role (324-26).

<sup>76</sup> We see this in the developing work of anthropologists like Clifford Geertz or Victor Turner, whose early works began appearing about the time Shaffer was moving toward a more ritualistic dramaturgy. These publications continued appearing into the early 1980s. Turner's work includes *The*

*Forest of Symbols* (1967), *Drums of Affliction* (1968), *The Ritual Process* (1969), and *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982).

<sup>77</sup> Particularly as exemplified in Jacques Derrida's interpretations of him. See "The Theater of Cruelty" and "La Parole Soufflée," *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976) 169-95. On Artaud and Shaffer, see also Peter Podol, "Contradictions and Dualities in Artaud and Artaudian Theater: *The Conquest of Mexico* and *The Conquest of Peru*," *Modern Drama* 26.4 (1983): 518-27.

<sup>78</sup> MacMurrough-Kavanagh refers to the reputation as a "Tory playwright" that Shaffer found it hard to live down (7). In many ways *The Gift of the Gorgon*—not to mention some of his other, more popular plays—give the lie to such arguments.