The Royal Hunt of the Sun

Peter Shaffer
Edited and with introduction and notes by Nicole Ridgway
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by Peter Stonor
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University of South Africa
Pretoria
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## THE TEXT OF THE ROYAL HUNT OF THE SUN

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You are about to embark on an exciting journey. Your voyage will take you into the distant past and unknown lands where you will encounter different ways of life and unusual beliefs. Travelling with the words of Peter Shaffer and your own imagination as your companions, you will, like all travellers to distant places, encounter much that is new; and, perhaps, much that feels strange. Keep an open mind on your journey, and the ideas you bring back to your own place and time may make you think about your world differently. As you follow Peter Shaffer into the world of The Royal Hunt of the Sun, ask yourself what the past and the play have to say to you today. Ask yourself what you can learn about the meeting of different cultures and about the confrontation between two ways of understanding the world.

**The Incas**

The Kingdom of the Incas was located in what is today the country of Peru in South America. The Spaniards used the word 'Inca' to name all the inhabitants of the Inca Empire. Strictly speaking, the word applies only to the royal family, especially to the king, or Sovereign Inca, who was believed by his people to be the Sun God. Modern usage tends to use the term 'Inca' in its wider sense to refer generally to the Peruvian Indians.

The Incas built their extensive empire in less than one hundred years. By means of a policy which combined restrictions on political independence with cultural tolerance, they succeeded in creating the largest power bloc in the Americas prior to the Spanish conquest.

The Royal Hunt of the Sun dramatizes the tale of the invasion of Peru by the Spanish under the leadership of Francisco Pizarro. The play shows how the Spanish conquistadores (a Spanish word meaning conquerors), in their quest for gold and Christian converts, bring about the ruin and destruction of a great civilization. Like Chinua Achebe’s novel Things
A society based on individualism is one in which the free action of individuals is favoured. Individuals within such a society work for the benefit of themselves. Individualism encourages the accumulation of wealth. A communistic society, on the other hand, is one in which all property belongs to the community. Each member in a communistic system works for the benefit of the community and receives money or goods according to his or her needs.

A chorus was a common feature of ancient Greek drama. The chorus was a group of actors who commented on the events in the play. The word now refers to any figure in a play who comments on what the other characters say, think or do.

Fall Apart (1958), The Royal Hunt of the Sun depicts the fatal consequences that result from the collision of European and non-European civilizations. Set between June 1529 and August 1533, the play portrays the collision by focusing on the encounter between the Spanish explorer Francisco Pizarro and Atahuallpa, the Sovereign Inca of Peru. This encounter is, as Peter Shaffer remarked, ‘the confrontation between two totally different ways of life: the Catholic individualism of the invaders, and the complete communistic society of the Incas’ (1964:22).

Although their cultures are very different, Pizarro and Atahuallpa are similar to each other in many ways, making them carefully balanced adversaries. To quote Shaffer again, ‘these two men, one of whom is the other’s prisoner: they are so different, and yet in many ways – they are both bastards, both usurpers, both unscrupulous men of action, both illiterate – they are mirror-images of each other’ (cited in Taylor, 1974:277). Despite their lack of learning, both men are surprisingly eloquent exponents of their culture’s secular and sacred ideologies. Pizarro is the representative of his King (secular aspect) and the leader of a Church-sanctioned mission to convert ‘the natives’ (sacred aspect) to Christianity. Atahuallpa is not only the head of the Peruvian State (secular aspect), but also the earthly incarnation of his culture’s Sun God (sacred aspect).

Against the backdrop of the collision of two civilizations and worldviews, the play focuses upon the strange attraction between the ageing, embittered, atheistic Spanish commander and the young, magnificent Inca king. Pizarro, the non-believer, is depicted falling under the Inca’s spell and undergoing a momentary conversion, hoping to recover his lost faith, innocence and the capacity for worship. However, he is forced eventually to agree to the killing of this king, who is seen by his subjects as a ‘god’, to secure the safety of his men.

Pizarro and Atahuallpa’s mutually destructive meeting is observed and aided by Pizarro’s young page, Martin. Martin, however, speaks directly to the audience as an old man and he recounts the story of his youth. His story is of ‘ruin and gold’, of how ‘one hundred and sixty-seven men conquered an empire of twenty-four million’. Old Martin, looking back at events in the past, provides the play with a retrospective frame. By commenting on the action that takes place on stage, he functions as the chorus to the unfolding tragedy.
The term ‘pre-Columbian’ refers to the peoples and cultures of North and South America prior to the arrival of Christopher Columbus. From a European perspective, Columbus discovered a previously unknown world. Columbus (1451-1506) was an Italian navigator who, with support from the Spanish King and Queen, sailed to the islands off the coast of South America and founded the first European settlement in the so-called ‘New World’.

With *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Shaffer created a work that is epic in scope, highly stylized in production, rich in its spectacle and ambitious in its themes. ‘My hope,’ says Shaffer,

was to realize on stage a kind of ‘total’ theatre, involving not only words but rites, mimes, masks and magics ... [The play] is a director’s piece, a pantomimist’s piece, a musician’s piece, a designer’s piece, and of course an actor’s piece, almost as much as it is an author’s (1964:244).

Through the use of the theatrical elements to which Shaffer refers (for example, music, dance, costume, masks and dialogue), the makers of the original production set out to show ‘the fantastic apparition of the pre-Columbian’ world, and the terrible magnificence of the Conquistadors’ (cited in *New York Times*, 1965). Shaffer has said of the play that he wanted to create a ‘cold that burns’ (cited in Taylor, 1974: 273); a play, in other words, that combines feelings with intellectual debate. As a result, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* is both a thought-provoking play written in rather literary language, and a theatrical spectacle that is filled with emotion. It is a drama that most critics, at the time of its original production, called visually impressive, dramatically effective and intellectually provocative.

This introduction focuses on four main topics. First, we will look at the history of the conquest and the historical source that Shaffer uses to create his play. In this discussion we will encounter many of the themes and images that occur in the play. As you read this section try to decide for yourselves what it was about the conquest that made it such a rich source for a play. Ask yourself, too, what themes and questions this confrontation allows the playwright to explore.

Second, we will consider the dramatic devices that distinguish plays from other literary works, such as poems and novels. Through a discussion of some of the staging devices and effects of the original production of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, you should start to form a picture in your head of what the play may look like when it is performed on the stage.

Third, we will be introduced to the playwright and to his other plays, as well as to the context in which *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* was written. Shaffer’s plays reveal a number of recurrent themes and concerns,
which you should bear in mind when reading this particular play. Shaffer also works within a particular socio-political and theatrical context. It is important to have some sense of this context in order to understand his concerns and his choices about how the action of the play is presented. In this section you should ask yourself how Shaffer’s choices about the presentation of the conquest are influenced by his own views as well as what he wants the audience to feel and understand about the conquest.

In the fourth section, we will remind ourselves of what we should bear in mind when reading the play to focus our interpretation of some of its key concerns and dramatic elements.

1 THE HISTORY OF THE CONQUEST AND THE HISTORICAL SOURCE

Peter Shaffer and the Play’s Source

In an interview after the play was first staged, Shaffer discusses how he came to his source:

You see, I first came on the subject some years back when I had to while away the time reading some heavy Victorian book. The book I chose was Prescott’s *Conquest of Peru* and I was absolutely riveted by it. The whole drama of the confrontation of two totally different ways of life ... I started out with a *history play*; I hope that I have ended up with a *contemporary* story which uses history only as a groundwork in the expression of its themes. What is its theme? Briefly it is a play about two men, one of whom is an atheist, and the other is a god (Shaffer, 1964:22).

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**READING LIST**

For those who would like to read more about the conquest here are some suggestions:

W. H. Prescott’s *The Conquest of Peru*, first published in 1847, is considered a classic of history. It was the first detailed account in English of the civilization of the Incas. Prescott based his account on the original documents available to him at the time. These included the administrative records of the invaders and the manuscripts of people writing at the time or shortly after the conquest. He also used private and official letters of the period, which he drew mainly from the archives of the Royal Academy of History at Madrid.

Since Prescott’s time, vast stores of material have come to light. This material has formed the basis for more modern accounts and, although his work is highly regarded, it has in many respects been superseded. Recent work has included information about the conquest from the Incas’ point of view. Although Prescott drew extensively on the work of Garcilaso de la Vega (1539–1619), son of an Inca princess, he largely based his writings on the now discredited Jesuit priest Blas Valera. Valera wrote his history as a justification of the Spanish and the Roman Catholic Church. Valera’s history is, therefore, particularly biased.

But Shaffer’s concern is not to create a complete or purely factual history play. Rather, he uses the bare bones of the historical event in order to explore the confrontation of two totally different ways of life and to pose questions about the nature of belief and worship in ways that are relevant to contemporary society. So what are the bare bones that Shaffer is inspired by? And, when he does depart from his source or use his imagination in the representation of this history, what is the dramatic effect he wants?

**The Conquest of Peru**

*In Search of Gold*

Let us begin with Francisco Pizarro, one of the chief protagonists (an actor or agent central to the action or drama) in the actual historical conquest and in the play.
Francisco Pizarro (1478–1541) was a Spanish explorer and conqueror. His conquest of northern Peru opened the way for Spain’s colonization of most of South America.

Pizarro was born in Trujillo in Spain. His father was a captain in the royal infantry. His parents never married each other and he was raised by poor relations of his mother’s. Pizarro was given no schooling and he never learned to read. In 1502 Pizarro joined the army and left home for the West Indies. He then lived for a while in Hispaniola, the main Spanish base in what was known by the Spanish as the New World. In 1509 Pizarro left Hispaniola to take part in an expedition to the Caribbean coast of northern and central South America. He served as Nuno Vasco de Balboa’s chief lieutenant when Balboa led an expedition which marched across Panama to reach the Pacific Ocean in 1513. Six years later the Spanish founded a colony in Panama and Pizarro was one of its most adventurous and influential citizens.

The colonists in Panama became interested in reports of a rich Indian empire somewhere to the south. This was the empire of the Incas. In 1524 Pizarro began the first of several expeditions to search for this empire. With the assistance of Diego de Almagro, Pizarro found the funds and the men to lead expeditions down the Pacific coast. At first, bad weather and attacks by Indians prevented the explorers from finding the empire. Pizarro finally reached the outer regions of the empire in late 1527 or early 1528. There he found evidence of the empire’s vast gold resources as well as other riches.

Peru is rich in gold and for thousands of years goldsmiths had worked this gold into ornaments, vessels and religious shrines. All of this belonged
to the Inca rulers, but it was not valued as currency or wealth. Gold was, rather, valued for its beauty and for the way in which it symbolized the light of the sun. According to legend, the Sun was the parent of mankind and, in compassion, he sent two of his children, Manco Capac and Mama Oello Huaco, to save the people from barbarism and teach them the arts of civilized life. The Sovereign Inca was seen by his people as a god who was descended from the Sun’s children. The Sovereign Inca embodied on earth the power of the supreme Sun God. Elaborate death rituals were undertaken on the death of the Inca and his body was carefully preserved through embalming. This was as a result of the popular belief that the soul of the departed monarch would return after a time to re-animate his body on earth.

After his discovery of the vast wealth of Peru, Pizarro returned to Spain with his tales of unimaginable treasures and persuaded the Spanish king, Charles the Fifth, to appoint him governor of Peru. This appointment gave him the rights to conquer and rule Peru in the name of the king and Spain. It also gave him the right to plunder the wealth of Peru as long as the royal family received a large share of that wealth. Of course, the Spanish view did not take into account the rights of the people of Peru.

THE PLAY’S TITLE
While we are reading the story of the conquest of Peru, we should stop for a moment to consider the title of the play. From what we have learnt, it is clear that the ‘Royal’ of the title indicates that the ‘Hunt’ for the ‘Sun’ is undertaken in the service of the king. Thus, what is caught in the hunt belongs, in part, to the king and the royal household who rule Spain. Perhaps Shaffer is implying that the consequences of the hunt belong to the rulers of Spain. Another connotation of ‘Royal’ is ‘on a grand scale’. We could read this as a reference to both the conquest of the New World and to the staging of the play. This doubling of meanings can also be seen in the connotations of the two other key terms in the title: ‘Hunt’ and ‘Sun’. For the conquistadores the Sun is the Inca and the gold that his capture can bring. But, as we will discover, it also refers to Pizarro’s search for meaning and his growing belief that the Inca may have the answer to his question about time (death and immortality). If a hunt is a search for food as nourishment or a pursuit of wild animals for sport, then the hunt of the title not only refers to the pursuit of gold and converts, but also, questions the actions and attitudes of the conquistadores and of Pizarro. Remember that gold is not nourishment and the Incas are not animals. Shaffer’s choice of the word ‘hunt’ in his title should alert us, then, to his critical attitude to the conquest.
In 1531 Pizarro sailed from Panama with about 180 men. They landed in what is now southern Ecuador. In 1532 they founded San Miguel (now Piura) as a settlement and base in northern Peru. From here, Pizarro advanced to Cajamarca, where Atahuallpa – the Sovereign Inca – had gathered his forces.

The Civil War

When Pizarro and the Spaniards arrived in Peru, the Inca empire was still involved in a civil war started by the death of Atahuallpa’s father, Atahuallpa, an illegitimate son, had set out to claim the throne from his legitimate brother. This sparked off a civil war amongst the Peruvians and numerous factions were formed. Each faction supported the claim of a different heir (all sons of the deceased king). For years, these factions fought, made and broke alliances. Eventually, Atahuallpa and one brother, Huascar, emerged as the leaders of the two most powerful factions. Atahuallpa defeated and captured Huascar at the same time that he first came to hear of Pizarro’s expedition. The civil war had severely weakened the Inca state and Atahuallpa had not had time to consolidate his rule when the Spaniards arrived. As the Spaniards moved further into the empire, Atahuallpa had his brother executed to prevent him from making an alliance with the Spanish against him. He then allowed the Spanish to enter Cajamarca unharmed.

Pizarro had planned right from the start to kidnap Atahuallpa if he could. Although he became aware of Atahuallpa’s unusual status as Sun God only after he entered the empire, he knew from the start that he had to capture the king and, thereby, symbolically defeat the Peruvians. Pizarro knew that a symbolic defeat would demoralize the Peruvians. It was the only way he would be able to ensure the conquest of the empire with such a small army.

In a surprise attack with 167 men, swords, horses and a few guns, Pizarro’s men captured the Inca and killed thousands of Indians. The Spanish held Atahuallpa to ransom and promised to release him unharmed in return for vast quantities of gold. The Incas were able to meet this demand because their empire had more silver and gold than any other part of the Americas.
The Death of the Inca

The Spaniards were reinforced a few months later by Almagro who agreed to combine forces with Pizarro to conquer the rest of Peru. The reinforcements, however, resented the fact that they had not shared part of the ransom and they started to debate Atahualpa’s future. Atahualpa was soon executed. The death of the Inca had enormous implications for the Peruvians. John Hemming writes that:

his immediate followers were stunned by his death. When he was taken out to be killed, all the native populace who were in the square, of which there were many, prostrated themselves on the ground, letting themselves fall to the ground like drunken men (1970:155).

After the execution, Pizarro crowned one of Atahualpa’s half-brothers as king in his place. Pizarro then advanced to the mountain capital of the empire, Cusco, and took control of the city. He continued his conquest, in large part funded by the ransom. In 1535 he founded the city of Lima and made it the capital of Peru. While he was governor of Peru, large numbers of Spaniards settled there. They started mining, farming and building cities. Using Peru as its base, Spain was able to conquer most of the rest of the continent.

During the late 1530s, a dispute broke out between Pizarro and Almagro over who was to rule the area around Cusco and who would have the right to grant ecomiendas (a grant which gave the holder the authority to extract labour and tribute from the native communities). A
civil war erupted amongst the Spanish settlers. Pizarro’s forces won the conflict in 1538 and executed Almagro. Three years later, Pizarro was assassinated by several followers of Almagro’s son.

From Facts to Fiction: Shaffer’s Reworking of History

The story of Atahuallpa and the Spanish conquest captured Shaffer’s imagination. From this story he begins the imaginative process of creating a drama that allows him to address his contemporary concerns and create a piece of total theatre. In the process of creating his play, Shaffer made a number of choices with regards to his source. These are some of the ways in which he follows or changes Prescott’s version of the conquest:

- Shaffer chooses to include one of the historical myths Prescott perpetrates, namely the myth that Pizarro was brought up by pigs. In our first introduction to Pizarro in the play, he tells us: ‘I was suckled by a sow. My house is the oldest in Spain – the pig-sty’ (p. 9). He further describes himself bitterly as ‘the old pigherd lumbering after fame’ (p. 16). Where others inherited their honour, he says, he had ‘to root for [his] like the pigs’ (p. 16).

Prescott portrayed Pizarro as absolutely unscrupulous in his dealings with his fellow Spaniards, as well as the Peruvian Indians. His name, according to Prescott, ‘became a byword for perfidy’ (cited in Harbin, 1988:179). In other words, his name became synonymous with treachery and fraud. To explain his behaviour, Prescott describes the deprivation of Pizarro’s early childhood. While this description is not accurate, Shaffer uses it as the mainspring for his interpretation of the adult man. Pizarro is presented as bitter and as totally disillusioned: ‘Time cheats us all the way,’ he says, ‘I’ve been cheated from the moment I was born because there’s death in everything’ (pp. 46–48). It is this sense of having been cheated and his lack of belief in any ideals that leads him to pour scorn on his young servant’s glowing idealism. He bitterly attacks Martin for his beliefs:

You belong to hope. To faith. To priests and pretenses. To dipping flags and ducking heads; to laying hands and licking rings; to powers and parchments; and the whole vast stupid congregation of crowners and cross-kissers (p. 29).
Shaffer chooses to characterize Pizarro as a solitary individual who is alienated from his home and religion; as someone who is, therefore, 'beset by a sense of social and cosmic homelessness and resultant dread of the universe' (Harbin, 1988:179). And yet, for all his professed lack of belief, he is also presented as someone who yearns for something more. His first thoughts of Peru show this yearning when we are told that he longs ‘for a new place like a country after rain, washed clean of all badges and barriers’ (p. 47). Thus, Shaffer is able dramatically to set up Pizarro’s fascination with the Sun King: a man like himself, illegitimate, illiterate and a warrior, yet a man who believes himself to be a godhead. ‘It’s silly,’ asserts Pizarro, ‘but tremendous … Yes, he has some meaning for me, this man-god … He has an answer for time’ (p. 65).

- Shaffer stresses Pizarro's contempt for the Church in order to highlight Pizarro's fascination with the Inca and to set in motion the debates around belief, worship and power on which the play centres. Here Shaffer differs from his source. In Prescott’s book Pizarro is presented as far more conventionally religious-minded. Prescott tells us that Pizarro clearly supported the spread of Catholicism as the prime goal of the expedition.

- Shaffer also departs radically from his source in the depiction of the relationship between Pizarro and Atahuallpa. According to Prescott (and most historians), it was Pizarro’s half-brother, Hernando, who established a relationship with the Inca. Shaffer chooses to present a fictional relationship between Francisco Pizarro and Atahuallpa to enhance the ‘momentous nature of their encounter’. In fact, Shaffer chooses not to present Hernando Pizarro as a character at all. The relationship between the two leaders, Francisco Pizarro and Atahuallpa, allows Shaffer to personify the confrontation between these two civilizations, political systems and religious world-views. It also allows him to focus on the many conflicts that form the heart of the play and to provide the necessary dramatic ingredients for its moving climax.

**DOES SHAFFER TAKE SIDES?**

Shaffer is very critical of the Europeans' conduct and ideologies in the age of conquest. He does not, however, simply present the European political system as 'bad' and that of the Peruvians as 'good'. While critical of the conquest (the reasons for it and the consequences that followed), he does not present the Inca world as without its limitations, or as without its own elements of domination. We are told, for example, that the Inca has spies everywhere. Ask yourself why these spies are necessary. What function do they have in the play?

As you read the play be aware of how Shaffer weaves into his tale a strong sense of the way in which individuals' needs were provided for by Inca law and, at the same time, a strong criticism of how this denied the Inca people certain freedoms and choices.
Finally, Shaffer chooses not to include the Spanish reinforcements in his version of the events leading up to Atahualpa's execution. This allows him to enhance the dramatic climax of the play by not delaying its tragic end, and to focus on two central protagonists.

As Shaffer states in the quotation that opens this section, it is the confrontation between two such diverse cultures that attracted him to the conquest as a subject for a play. This confrontation, he implies, is not merely the confrontation of enemies on a battlefield, but is also the confrontation of two opposing ways of understanding the world. These cultures have different ideologies and political systems. They also have different religious beliefs and forms of worship.

- What are the elements of this confrontation?
- Why was it so momentous and violent?

Although Shaffer is fairly critical of both the Spanish and Peruvian social and political systems, he has chosen to dramatize the encounter by focusing on the European conquistadores for the most part. It is thus to the world of the conquerors that we must turn if we want to gain a better understanding of the confrontation at the heart of The Royal Hunt of the Sun.

**Cannibalism and Christianity**

You will notice that there are numerous references to the Eucharist and cannibalism in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. Shaffer is, on the one hand, referring to the Christian ritual — the holy communion ceremony based on Christ's last supper — in which bread is eaten and wine is drunk as a sign of Christ's life and death. On the other hand, Shaffer is drawing on the Spaniards' fear that they would encounter cannibals (eaters of human flesh) in the New World. The Spanish who ventured into the New World saw themselves, not without reason, as threatened. Not only did they face real dangers, but they had also long identified cannibalism as a practice of all non-Europeans and as a sign of extreme horror. Cannibalism was a sign of extreme horror because it implied 'that they [the Spaniards] would be assimilated, literally absorbed, by being eaten' (Greenblatt, 1991:136).

Notice how Shaffer is being ironic (see section 3 of this introduction for a discussion of irony) in the way in which he brings the accusations of cannibalism into the play. In the play, the Spanish do not admit any similarity between actual cannibalism and the symbolism of the Eucharist. Nor do they entertain the idea that perhaps, in 'swallowing the whole vast land mass and its peoples ... theirs was the greatest experiment in political, economic and cultural cannibalism in the history of the Western World' (Greenblatt, 1991:136). By making this a recurring image in the play, Shaffer is perhaps asking us to entertain this idea. This ironic connection is reinforced by his use of the word 'hunt' in his title — the search for, and pursuit of, animals for food or sport — and his use throughout the play of images of spiritual hunger and nourishment.

- What is its contemporary significance for Shaffer?
- What significance does the confrontation have for us today?

**Inter-Cultural Encounters and Conflict**

The Europeans who went to the New World in the early sixteenth century shared complex, well-developed technologies. These tools and practices — writing, navigational instruments, ships, war
horses, attack dogs, effective armour, and highly lethal weapons, including gun powder – made them very powerful. Their culture was characterized by:

- an immense confidence in its own centrality; that is, a sense of its importance and dominance in the world;
- a political organization based on practices of control and obedience;
- a willingness to use violence on both strangers and fellow countrymen; and
- religious beliefs centred on the crucifixion of Christ – ‘the God of love’.

Such was the confidence of European culture that it expected perfect strangers to abandon their beliefs, preferably immediately, and embrace those of Europe as the only ones that were true. A failure to do so provoked impatience, contempt and murderous rage. On the one hand the Christian background of the Spanish conquerors led them to believe that all the people they encountered shared a common ancestry with themselves – Adam and Eve. But, on the other, because the people they encountered were not Christian, it also meant that they saw them as alien and as completely different from themselves.

‘A culture which “discovers” that which is alien to itself,’ argues anthropologist Bernard McGrane, ‘also thereby fundamentally reveals that which it is to itself’ (1989:ix). In other words, if we look at how the Spanish explained the ways in which the people they encountered were different from themselves, we gain an insight into how the Spanish understood themselves.

In the sixteenth century, the difference of non-European cultures and peoples was explained primarily through the frame of Christianity. In
It is interesting to note, in light of the violence of the conquest, that only those who converted were, as the Pope declared in 1533, 'true men'. If, however, someone rejected the Christian God he was not a 'true man'. The non-Christian, in this view, is less of a man (less human) than the Christian.

In the view of the conquistadores, the Incas had never been exposed to the word of God and they were, thus, open to the temptations of the devil. Although the Indians lived in a world without God's word, in what the Europeans saw as a state of nature, it did not mean that they were removed from the world of the devil and sin. This is because 'nature' in this Christian view was not natural or neutral. Nature was seen to be a fallen and demonic space, a darkness in which the devil may move if he is not stopped by men of God. The Incas then are understood to be representative of man in a fallen state and are, therefore, prone to evil. The preoccupation at this time is, thus, with conversion to Christianity.

As you read the play take note of when Shaffer refers to the issues of conversion, commercialism, cannibalism, writing and giving your word. Try to work out why Shaffer uses these ideas and beliefs in his dramatization of the conquest. In order to do this, ask yourself: What are we are shown about cross-cultural encounters? What do we learn about how our own cultural frame of reference (or way of explaining and understanding the world) influences our encounters with other peoples and cultures?

In relation to the question of cross-cultural encounters and the understanding of difference, we also need to look at what Shaffer does with the figure of the translator in the play.

Translators played a major role in the conquest of South America. They appear in all the literature of the conquest. The translator is an important yet ambivalent figure. Usually kidnapped or bought and baptized, the Indians who learned the language of the conquistadores served as informants and guides, as communicators between the two cultures. They were the conquerors' primary access to the world they were encountering for the first time and they were, thus, central to their hopes for success. However, even though the translators were converts, there was a fear amongst the conquerors that they would go
back to their ‘native’ ways and no longer serve the conquerors’ interests. In the play the translator, Felipillo, is characterized as devious and strangely ‘feminine’. He is presented as untrustworthy. It is not easy, though, to decide whether Shaffer repeats the conquerors’ stereotype, or whether he uses it to personify the problems at the heart of conversion and cross-cultural communication.

In relation to the question of how our cultural frame of reference influences our encounters with other frames of reference, also notice how Shaffer, while critical of the relative lack of freedom of the Inca’s subjects, is also critical of the ideology of ‘free choice’ upheld by the Christians in the play. The play presents both Christian freedom and Incan authority as ‘joyless powers’ (Shaffer, 1965:vii) and is critical of all individuals who are intransigent (uncompromising, unable to acknowledge other perspectives). Through its presentation of the collision of two political, social and religious systems, the play also explores the forces of belief in people; it explores why people hold certain beliefs in the face of events or actions that should lead them to question the universal rightness of those beliefs.

Valverde, one of the priests who accompanies the conquerors, for example, does not for a moment question the correctness of his beliefs. Valverde sees the oppressive aspects of Inca society but cannot see how those living in this society may feel as free as people living in his own society; nor can he see how his social system may be experienced as oppressive by those living within its rules and beliefs.

Valverde does not question his beliefs in the face of another system of beliefs. He rigidly upholds his ‘truth’ – that his religious and political world-view allows freedom of choice – and will not question how real this freedom is. Valverde sees the Inca’s subjects as indoctrinated (unthinkingly following a doctrine, creed or rules) but refuses to acknowledge that this may be true of the Church’s subjects. By refusing to consider other ways of understanding the world, Valverde puts off questioning his own world-view and, thereby, maintains the fiction that his beliefs do not involve indoctrination.

Throughout the play Shaffer reveals an interest in people’s beliefs and actions, whether these are found in religion; in a code of conduct such as chivalry; or in patriotic support of king and country. In this regard, the play is very critical of ‘the neurotic allegiances of Europe, the
Churches and the flags, the armies and parties are the villains of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (Shaffer, 1965:vi); and of ‘party, cult, worship, ritual ... forces ... that may be exploited for progressive or regressive alternatives’ (Harbin, 1988:181). All three major characters (Pizarro, Atahualpa and Martin) are preoccupied by the need for, and nature of, worship; as well as the consequences of its absence. For example:

- Pizarro is bitterly critical of the expedition’s priests who sanction the plundering of Peru and absolves the soldiers of any crime.

- The consequences of the loss of worship are dire for Martin. In his retrospective monologue that begins the play, he characterizes himself as having been, at the outset of the expedition, a callow teenager who would ‘have died for him [Pizarro] or for any worship’ (p. 8). Disillusioned by the immorality, treachery, ruthlessness and excesses of the expedition as the play proceeds, he later acknowledges that it was during this expedition that ‘[I] dropped my first tears as a man. My first and last. That was my first and last worship too. Devotion never came again’ (p. 88).

While critical of the beliefs and allegiances that the characters hold in the play, Shaffer does not, at the play’s end, imply that the loss of all belief is a good thing. At the end of the play both Pizarro and Martin inhabit a ‘desacralized’ world – one from which the sense of the sacred, here embodied in the Inca, has been irretrievably lost – and this emptiness is clearly dramatized as something to regret. As you read the final moments of the play notice how Shaffer dramatizes the loss of belief, but notice also how he is still critical of national politics and religious doctrines. What does Shaffer want us to understand and question in relation to belief and our motivations in our own society and historical period?

2 DRAMA

In ancient Greek, from which we take the English word ‘drama’, drama simply means action. In many respects, this sense of the word is still central to our understanding of what is at the heart of any play. Drama is, as theatre critic Martin Esslin puts it, ‘action in imitation or representation’ (1978:14). Drama imitates or represents people, ideas and events, but it does so through action – it is acted. At the heart of drama, then, are those elements that lie outside of, or beyond, the
words. Any play has to be seen as action to give the dramatist’s vision its full value.

When reading a play we must, therefore, keep in mind the obvious point that plays are written for the stage and not the page. In other words, for the playwright, the primary focus is the performance of the play. The playwright must, in the process of writing, think constantly of and use the advantages and limitations of the fact that the play is to be enacted in front of a live audience.

**Understanding the Stage**

Staging (the action of the performance) conveys more than the actual words that are written. The linguistic style in which the play is written makes us aware of what to expect and how to react (for example, the somewhat old-fashioned and stylized language of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* removes the play from everyday patterns of speech, and makes it clear that no attempt is being made to create the realistic effect of how people actually speak). Language is also an instrument of characterization. But language is only one of the tools available to the dramatist. In drama the meaning that a play communicates comes from the combination of elements that make up the overall action of the performance.

How does this affect us as readers who are removed from both the effect of the staging (the vision of the director, designer and actors) and from the immediacy of the live performance? The answer is that we are thrown upon the resources of our reading skills and our imaginations. In the theatre the play can rely on:

- the characters’ physical appearances;
- the costumes characters wear;
- the way they speak their lines;
- the movements and gestures of the actors;
- the music and sound effects;
- the use of light; and
- the setting and placement of the action in relation to the audience.

All of these ingredients add to the play’s impact on us and are essential to how we come to understand the play’s central themes or concerns.

When we look at a play in its printed form all we have is a description of the setting, the actor’s dialogue and a few stage directions or
character descriptions. We must, therefore, when reading a play make an effort to visualize scenes and to hear the dialogue. We must ask ourselves:

- What is the setting like and where are the characters in relation to that setting?
- What movements and gestures do these characters make?
- What do they sound like when they speak?
- And, most importantly, what do the various elements suggest or symbolize in relation to the play’s central concerns and themes?

When reading a play it is also important to ask how the playwright has chosen to enact (tell and stage) the story. In other words, be aware of the plot the dramatist has created. Ask:

- What does the audience know and when?
- How is the audience’s interest maintained?
- How has the playwright chosen to combine plot with character development?
- How has the playwright chosen to structure the time and space of the drama, and how does this contribute to the achievement of the play’s overall effect?

When, for example, Shaffer chooses to have a quiet scene in which the characters talk straight after a violent scene with a great deal of action and movement – like the scene with Pizarro that follows the execution of Atahuallpa – notice how this draws you into the ideas and be aware of how it gives you time to reflect on (think about) what is being said.

Central to drama, particularly in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, is the element of conflict. In this context, conflict refers to the meeting or clash of two opposing forces, principles and/or belief systems. At the heart of the play is a series of interconnected conflicts and tensions. When we look closely at these conflicts and tensions we discover a close relationship between character and action; that is, between what happens and who it happens to, or who makes it happen. Action then is both the product of character and the way in which character is effectively revealed. What characters do, or fail to do, reveals to us not only who they are, but what kind of changes or development they are undergoing. We can ask ourselves the following questions about the characters we encounter in the play:
What does the playwright tell us about the character?
What does the character tell you about himself or herself?
What do the character's actions reveal?
What do others say about him or her?
How does the character's background and history affect his or her actions?
What do the characters' reactions to conflict reveal about their attitudes and beliefs?
Does the character change during the course of the play?

The playwright tells us that Hernando De Soto, for example, is an aristocrat by birth who is a respected commander. De Soto tells us that he is impressed by the civilization of the Incas. Through his actions and what others say about him we learn that he is a religious man who believes in the power of the Church and the conquistadores' right to conquer foreign lands. But De Soto is also a kind and honest person who urges Pizarro to keep his word to the Inca despite the danger to the Spanish.

Because the playwright has limitations with regard to time (few plays ever run longer than three hours), he or she may reserve detailed characterization for the major characters of the play (for those who carry the actions) as opposed to minor characters. With minor characters the dramatist may use the knowledge the audience already has of certain types of people (commonly known as stereotypes) to create the sense of who a character is, quickly, without in-depth characterization. For example, Miguel Estete – the Royal Veedor – is a stereotype of a haughty aristocrat. He represents the state and embodies its self-interest. Similarly, Pedro De Candia, the Commander of the Artillery, is represented without much complexity as the sixteenth century equivalent of a mercenary. He is depicted as stereotypically ruthless, greedy and self-serving.

Drama, therefore, relies on the audience to be part of how meaning is made in the theatre. The audience has to read and understand the sub-text. They need to be active in the process of decoding and interpreting what is happening on stage. It is important then, when reading a play, to be aware of the fact that one of the central ways in which meaning is made in the theatre is by what happens in the imagination of the spectator. The playwright uses a number of devices to direct the attention of the audience to enhance their understanding of the play. In
many cases, these impressions may be independent of what the character on the stage is saying or doing. In *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, for example, the narrator, Old Martin, reveals to the audience right from the start the fact that the story he narrates will have a violent and tragic outcome. We follow the action on stage knowing this, although the characters do not. As you read through the play ask yourself how this foreknowledge affects your experience of the debate that unfolds. This is a form of irony that we call dramatic irony. Like other forms of irony, dramatic irony conveys meanings different from the surface meanings of the words spoken, but it does so through the gap that exists between what the audience knows and what is happening on the stage. It is through dramatic irony that the dramatist does most of his work – the steady and insistent communication to the spectator of meanings and/or knowledge hidden from the characters. In other words, the spectator shares with the playwright knowledge of which the characters are ignorant.

A playwright may also use visual irony to confirm or elaborate on the meaning of what we have just seen and heard. For example, the crosses sharpened to resemble swords in the opening of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* ironically juxtapose the central symbol of a religion of love with the weapons of war.

A playwright may also use verbal irony (a statement in which the speaker’s implicit meaning differs sharply from the meaning that is explicitly expressed) in order to reveal to us, but not to the other characters, the speaker’s attitude to the situation that is being enacted. In this regard, watch out for Shaffer’s use of the pause. The pause is often used by a playwright to teach the audience to hear the sub-text of what is being said. For example, when Pizarro declares that ‘there’s death in everything’, De Soto responds to him by saying ‘except in God’. After this response the playwright indicates that there is a pause before Pizarro speaks again. This silence draws our attention to the fact that Pizarro does not believe, as De Soto does, that God is the answer to death.

**Productions and Performances**

Although the text of a play is fixed, the particular staging and performance of the play is not. Because a performance is a collective creation that happens in front of a live audience, each production is
unique. However, let us turn briefly to the original production of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* to get some ideas for our own visualization when reading the text. Do not forget that this is only one realization of the text. You might have a very different picture in your head of how this play should be staged and as long as you can support your ideas from the play (justify your choices through an analysis of, for example, its themes and concerns) your picture cannot be wrong.

*The Royal Hunt of the Sun* was first produced by the British National Theatre Company in 1964. This production, directed by John Dexter, was a phenomenal success. 'The result of wonderful teamwork from author, director and designer, Peter Shaffer’s new play had an overwhelming reception on the occasion of its premiere,' reports *Theatre World Magazine*. In the play:

There are many unforgettable moments of visual splendour including the symbolic treacherous massacre of three thousand unarmed Incas, the ritual robing of the King, the death vigil, when mourners, wearing strangely haunting golden masks, wail with growing alarm as the body of their lifeless King fails to respond to the ray of sun for his expected resurrection (Stephens, 1964:31).

The play was one of the National Theatre’s most outstanding popular successes. After running at the Chichester Festival it transferred to the Old Vic theatre in London, where it ran for 122 performances over a period of three years. It opened in October 1965 in New York, where it enjoyed another long run of 261 performances. In 1969 a film version was produced. The play was unusual in its time for its use of visual spectacle, music, mime and its degree of physical action. As J.R. Taylor states,

anyone who saw the original productions will remember the extraordinary impression they created of a meeting of two worlds in a dead empty space brought to life by the magic of the theatre, long after any argument about the philosophic profundity of the words (or their … lack of it) has been forgotten (Taylor, 1974:21).°

We will return to the question Taylor raises here about the play’s success as a philosophic piece after we have looked at some of the ele-

°Taylor is referring here to a series of discussions amongst theatre critics about the achievement of the play with
regard to the questions it stages about the nature of belief and spirituality. A play with philosophic profundity is a play that shows great knowledge or insight; that is a deep study on the nature of universal principles and truth. 

ments of theatre magic that he mentions. In a prefatory note to the 1964 edition of the play, Shaffer particularly acknowledges the role played by the original set design in achieving his vision of a total theatre event: a bare stage below with an upper acting/observation area, dominated by a twelve-foot aluminium ring with twelve petals hinged around the circumference, each with a gold overlay. When opened, these formed the rays of a golden sun, a symbol sacred to the Incas; when closed, they comprised a giant medallion bearing the emblem of the *conquistadores*, a circle ‘quartered by four black crucifixes, sharpened to resemble swords’.

The production flexibly used the bare stage space to represent places from Spain to Panama to the town of Cajamarca in the mountains. Without any scenery or props, the director used mime and physical action to mould space and time. For example, the Spanish army embark on a lengthy march without ever actually taking a step forward; they climb through the mountains and ice conveying their exhaustion through mime and gesture; and they carry out the massacre of the Incas in the square in a slow-motion dance conveying the violence and horror of the scene without realistically representing it.

In the play we are introduced to the Inca world as a world that is alien and unfamiliar. It is a world with rigid codes of law and hospitality. The stylized and ritual-like speech of the Indians, as well as their formalized walk and gestures – as dictated by the stage directions – emphasize their difference from the Spaniards.

The long-awaited meeting between the Spanish *conquistadores* and the Inca’s royal court is a riveting theatrical happening. In the original production the audience is hit by an explosion of sound and colour as the Incas make their majestic ceremonial entry. The stage is filled with vibrant and colourful costumes and fantastic head-dresses. This colourful parade is accompanied by pulsating drum beats and strange music from reed pipes and cymbals. The music builds to a violent climax as the Spaniards sound the call for battle and the Indians scatter in confusion. Wave upon wave, they are killed by the relentless Spanish soldiers and a gigantic bloodstained cloth finally billows out over the stage to signify the great massacre.

At the heart of the original production is Atahualpa’s dance for his captor, Pizarro. While on the page this scene seems fairly unimportant
and unspectacular, one reviewer described it in performance as having ‘a powerful elemental appeal’ (Harbin, 1988:184) and another describes it as the ‘physical high spot of the evening’, the point where Pizarro’s ‘resistance to the Inca’s fascinating magnetism begins to soften’ (cited in The Financial Times, 1973). As you read this scene, imagine the actions that go with the words on the page: hear the sudden quiet after the noise of the earlier scenes; picture Pizarro, tired and disillusioned, confronted by the powerful and moving dance of a warrior; imagine how you would stage Pizarro’s attraction to this person who is so different and yet so similar.

In the original staging of the play, the desecration of Peru is not presented realistically, but is, instead, symbolized by the plundering of the giant sun emblem on the back wall of the stage. The sun gives out terrible groans, ‘like the sound of a great animal wounded’, as the Spaniards use their daggers greedily to dismantle it. They ‘tear out the gold inlays and fling them on the ground’ until ‘only the great gold frame remains; a broken and blackened sun’. Of the experience of watching the ‘Rape of the Sun’, one reviewer writes that ‘to watch the gold of the Inca Empire being torn loose from its majestic moorings’ is ‘to be faintly sickened’ (Kerr, 1965). Remember that Shaffer had said that he wanted to create a play that is like ‘a cold that burns’. In other words, he wanted to write a play that combines feelings and intellectual debate both on stage and for the audience. In your reading of the play, imagine what it would be like to experience it as a member of an audience.

The Critical Reception

The first production of the play was highly praised by theatre critics. Subsequent stagings of the play have not been received with the same level of enthusiasm. These later criticisms of the play are often directed at the way it has been staged. Critics have also commented negatively on the scope of the questions and debates the play raises, its philosophic arguments, its politics, and the ways in which these are presented.

The criticism of later stagings of the play primarily address the choices of the director, designer and actors; but they also reveal a central difficulty for anyone wishing to do the play in performance. Few theatre companies have the financial and material resources necessary
to meet Shaffer's demands for a total theatre experience, and the play may not work as well in the absence of these elements.

The critical reception of the play's scope, philosophy and politics raises some questions for us to think about in our exploration of the play's themes. However, it is also important to remember that these criticisms reveal as much about the criteria for evaluation and the world-view of the person doing the criticizing as they do about the play.

Critics have accused the play of being too ambitious in its philosophic scope and, as a result, see the play as rather lifeless. This in turn results in characters without feeling 'except as a projection of ideas' (Taylor, 1973:277). What do you think? Is the play too ambitious? Are the characters lifeless?

Shaffer has also been accused of being politically sentimental (for supposedly using the liberal notion of the noble savage and the ignoble Catholic) and reductive for focusing the story of conquest on the encounter of two men. He has also been accused of repeating certain colonial stereotypes. For example, the story of the white man being seen as a god or of the native being entranced by the magic of writing often appear in colonial accounts and they are stories audiences know and recognize. It is difficult to decide, though, whether Shaffer merely repeats these stories and unintentionally supports the ideologies they are tied to, or whether he uses them to enhance his criticism of the power struggle that is at the centre of the play.

In a similar vein, the play has been criticized for the way in which it uses a historical event:

Shaffer ... is attracted to the historical phenomena of the mysterious Inca world with its sun king conquered by rapacious Spanish conquistadors, because of the opportunities it affords for romance, sensation and exotic spectacle (Harbin, 1988:156).

For Esslin, however, the use of spectacle arises out of the demands of the text rather than sensationalism:

it is above all a first rate text: witty, wise, well-written; if it owes much to being total theatre it is the basic conception, the text, which evokes these effects (1988:190).
As we explore the context in which the play was made and look in more depth at some of its themes and debates, try to make up your own mind about what the play does and doesn’t achieve in terms of its philosophy and theatricality.

3 THE PLAYWRIGHT AND HIS CONTEXT

The Playwright

Peter Shaffer (1926–) was born in Liverpool in England. He was raised in London and spent the years of World War II working as a coal miner, after which he attended Cambridge University. As with so many of the dramatists and artists of his generation, it was the 1944 Education Act (an act that finally opened the previously elite and exclusive universities) that enabled his studies. After completing his studies he turned to writing. He wrote several detective novels with his twin brother, Anthony, before emigrating to New York in the United States. Here he worked first as a librarian and then for a music publisher. While in New York he started writing plays for television. It was the British Broadcasting Corporation’s production of two of these scripts that brought him back to England in the mid-fifties and to full-time play writing. His first stage play, *Five Finger Exercise* (1958), immediately established his reputation as a dramatist; it also established his abiding concern with the struggle of human beings to find beliefs worthy of acceptance.

That concern can also be seen in the play that Shaffer wrote next, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (it was not staged until 1964 because its enormous cast and difficult staging caused directors to avoid it). In turn, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* clearly anticipates what is perhaps Shaffer’s best-known and most respected work, *Equus* (1973). Both plays turn to real events; both dramatize rituals and use ritualized elements; both explore the foundations of belief and people’s motivations for their actions; and both examine the tendency of human beings to destroy the things in which they believe.

*Equus* is based on a true incident – a young stable hand attacked six horses, putting out their eyes. The crime seemed motiveless since he loved, almost worshipped, the horses. The boy is placed in a psychiatric institution under the care of a doctor who decides to open up his
mind in the hope of curing him. A close relationship develops between the doctor and the boy, and the doctor comes to realize that the boy feels a passion and ecstasy that he has never known. In untangling the mystery of the boy’s crime, the doctor comes face to face with his own emptiness and despair. In restoring the boy to mental health, however, the doctor realizes that he must rid the boy of his ecstasy and, thereby, his ability to worship.

As with the blackened and unseeing sun in The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Equus explores the complex interrelationship between blindness and the recognition of truth. In both plays the ‘mystery’ of life and belief are sought by the central protagonists only for them to destroy it. Both plays are based on a dramatic structure in which two opposing but attracted forces meet.

‘I am not aware of the similarities in my plays,’ Shaffer remarked in a 1986 interview. ‘But,’ he goes on to say, ‘as the same head is creating them, it is not surprising.’ About the meeting of two opposing but attracted forces, Shaffer states that this is founded on his understanding that drama is a dialogue: ‘taken from the word duologue ... that means exploring two sides of an argument’ (cited in Colvin, 1986:11).
Shaffer's Socio-Political and Theatrical Context

The Royal Hunt of the Sun was written at a time in Britain of general social dissatisfaction and political questioning. From the early 1950s onward there was a growing frustration, voiced in numerous public, artistic and political arenas, with the state of British society – its elitism, its values, its post-war foreign policies, its continued involvement in colonialism, and its place in the Cold War. Historians have characterized this as a period of change and uncertainty. It is also a period in which Europeans were confronted with the possibility of nuclear war.

While The Royal Hunt of the Sun in no way directly addresses the political concerns of the time in which it was written, it does stage a series of ideas and questions that are relevant to modern society. In the section on the historical source of the play we learnt that Shaffer feels that he started out with a history play but ended up with a contemporary story. The question about what motivates people and how they justify their beliefs is, for example, as relevant to Britain in the 1960s as it is to the age of conquest.

The path theatre in Britain followed from the mid-fifties onwards was one of rebellion against the social establishment. This rebellion was mirrored in revision of and experimentation with theatrical form and content. Playwrights rebelled, for example, against the over-use of language in the theatre by turning to mime and dance, and they turned to new subjects – often historical – to question the politics of their own time. And, because so many of them were committed to the use of theatre as part of the struggle for a better society, they also looked for innovative and creative ways to confront their audiences: to make them question, think, and see the world differently.

For most critics and historians, John Osborne's play Look Back in Anger (1956) began a new period of creativity in English drama. Seen at the time as a play of political and social rebellion, the 'angry young man' label was soon attached not only to the play's central character, but also to its author, as well as a whole band of other writers at the time. Arnold Wesker, John Arden and Harold Pinter are amongst those playwrights generally acknowledged, alongside Osborne, as key figures in the 1950s 'revival' of English drama. All were idealistic, politically active and experimented with form.
One theatrical response to this questioning and rethinking of the status quo (the accepted, taken for granted, unchanged aspects of society and world-views) was the 'Theatre of the Absurd'. This became one of the most influential movements in theatre in the West in the 1950s and 1960s. The Absurdists, most notably Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco, chose to represent the ‘absurdity’ of the human condition in a universe that, they believed, is fundamentally irrational – without meaning or order. In other words, they set out to show that humans make meanings for themselves but that humans also absurdly (inappropriately and unreasonably) see these meanings as a reflection of the meaning and order that exists in the world. The Absurdists, therefore, wanted to show the meaninglessess of the world; to show, in other words, that it isn’t a rational and ordered place. To achieve this they rejected realist conventions, including psychologically motivated characters (characters with inner lives and histories), and many of the traditional conventions of Western drama: linear plot, motivation, rational dialogue, and the logical ordering of events. Absurdist drama therefore violates the audiences’ expectations of a theatrical experience, as well as their conventional assertions about the meaning of life itself.

The visit of Bertolt Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble to Britain in 1956 also contributed to the experimentations with theatrical form in British theatre, especially amongst those who believed that theatre has a political purpose. One of Brecht’s central contributions was his use of ‘epic’ conventions. The influence of Brecht can be seen in many plays from this period, including The Royal Hunt of the Sun. Although Shaffer’s play is not, strictly speaking, a piece of epic theatre, it does draw on a number of the staging devices of epic theatre, namely:

- the use of short scenes that are carefully dated to remind the audience that they are watching an account of history;
- the utilization of one space to convey multiple places and the abandonment of naturalistic scenery;
- time used in such a way that it is not limited to the action of the characters;
- the focus on representative characters rather than psychologically motivated ones (in other words, less attention is paid to the inner life of characters than to ideas, social roles and identities);
- a narrator who introduces his own alter-ego as a young boy (a split-image device) and who thus provides a different perspective on the events, which gives the audience some distance from the action as it unfolds;
the stress on ritual and ritualized elements;

• the use of past events to comment on the present; and

• the emphasis on critical thought.

If you think back, much of the criticism of Shaffer’s play is directed at his characterization, but from a Brechtian perspective it could be argued that some of his schematic characters show social ideologies and historical forces, rather than psychological motivations.

As noted above, many playwrights in the 1950s and 1960s turned to history as a source for their plays. And, like Shaffer, they drew on, and experimented with, a tradition of history dramas. The term ‘historical drama’ describes plays that bring together reality (historical events or personalities) and invention. These plays interact with, comment on, or derive authority from some version of historical reality. But in their use of factual detail and in the way in which they present the relationship between past and present, there are vast differences between ‘history’ plays. By drawing on this tradition of history plays, The Royal Hunt of the Sun sets up certain expectations for the audience. One such expectation is that what they will encounter is a representation of past events rather than one that mirrors contemporary events. This expectation allows the playwright to present action that the audience know is removed from their everyday lives and concerns. Distancing from the familiar, in turn, allows the playwright to create a dialogue between the time of the play and the time of the audience. This dialogue allows Shaffer to stage a debate about, for example, how power is upheld and how actions are justified, how people understand each other across the space of cultural difference, and about

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**FURTHER READING ON BRECHT**

Here are some books you could read on Brecht and the Theatre of the Absurd:

VERSE DRAMA

Less directly, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* can also be seen as using in a subversive way the conventions and themes of verse drama. There was a revival of verse drama in the 1930s, especially by T. S. Eliot and Christopher Fry. Those who turned to verse drama attempted to create a ‘theatre of ritual’. The exponents of verse drama felt that it was only through ritual and heightened verse that they could explore such large questions as the nature of religion and God, and how to live a spiritual life in a materialist world. Here too the characters are not individuals in the psychologically realist sense but are largely representative of ideas and debates.

RITUAL

Let us consider what we mean by ritual, those elements that give a play its ritualistic quality, and Shaffer’s concern with the role of ritual in people’s lives.

Ritual suggests a sequence of actions both serious in purpose and formal in style. Ritual follows a structured sequence of events that have a symbolic meaning. Rituals often involve the use of heightened language, song and spectacular visual effects. A play’s ritualistic quality can be supported by the staging of rituals and ceremonies, and can be communicated to the audience through dialogue, gesture and intonation. Shaffer both uses ritualistic qualities (for example, the stylized speech of the Incas and the blessing of the Spanish weapons in Panama) and explores the role of ritual in everyday life.

As we see in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, each society has its own mythology detailing its origins and sanctifying (making sacred) its norms and values. Myths reinforce the status quo in times of stability and provide a way to understand things that are new or different. Ritual practices are a major means of making these myths (and the norms and values they embody) part of our everyday lives. Rituals help to create our sense of political reality and, through our participation in them, we come to identify with the political forces that can only be experienced in symbolic form. Symbols are integral to the ways in which we make sense of our world and ourselves. They allow us to interpret what we see and who we are. Symbolism is also involved in politics in many ways – think of a national flag. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* explores the way in which political power, ritual and symbol are intermeshed. Think, for example, of how the Christian cross is used in the play.

the relationship of individual choice to community rules.

Given his interest in worship and belief, and in the relationship between individual choices and the larger social or moral order, it is not surprising that Shaffer also draws on (and expects his audience to know something about) the theatrical tradition of classical Greek tragedy. The similarities to this theatrical form can be seen in Shaffer’s use of:

- ritualized elements and a stylized approach to dialogue and physical movement;
- a central character who is ‘larger than life’; and
- a moral and political order in which the characters’ lives and actions are constrained.

As with much classical tragedy, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* is, according to Shaffer, concerned with the breakdown of moral order and universal social values. Shaffer sees the play as, in part, centred around ‘the search for God’ (1974:22); that is, for something to believe in. Shaffer, however, diverges from the worldview of classical tragedy in that his play questions the possibility of one definition of God, of establishing one moral and social order. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* tends to be more ‘dialogical’ than classical tragedy; that is, it presents multi-
pie points of view sympathetically and insightfully without putting forward any one answer.

In an age when theatrical discourse has often been dominated by angry outbursts and by experimental forms of social protest, Shaffer’s play avoids direct socio-political commentary or radical theatrical experimentation. His major characters do, however, resist the ordinary, the ‘average’, the ‘normal’ and the ‘accepted’. Shaffer questions the things that people take for granted in their everyday lives. His plays are remarkable for their carefully balanced dialectical structure, their revitalization of on-stage ritual, and their uniquely theatrical flair.

4 GUIDE TO READING

As we have seen, The Royal Hunt of the Sun combines many themes, images, approaches and theatrical elements in its exploration of the conquest of Peru. All of these contribute to the debates that the play stages and the theatrical experience that it tries to produce. Before turning to the text itself, let us summarize some of the aspects you should bear in mind in your reading of the play. You will notice as you read that the annotations in the text present you with a series of questions and guides to reading. These expand on, and make concrete, much of what we have explored in this introduction.

As you read be aware of

• the confrontations and conflicts around which the play is structured;
• when the central themes and images are introduced and how they contribute to the overall concerns of the play; and
• the dramatic choices the playwright makes in presenting the debates and the effect these would have on an audience.

Also take note of

• the staging of the play;
• how time and place are structured;
• the relationship between character and action; and most importantly,
• the work of irony and the audience’s contribution to the production of meaning.
Finally, as you read, ask yourself:

- What questions does the story of the conquest address to us?
- What significance does the play have for us?
The Royal Hunt of the Sun
Above: Robert Stephens as the Inca King in the Royal National Theatre production of the *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Old Vic Theatre, London. Twelve petals form the rays of a giant golden sun (photograph: Chris Arthur)

Left: The set for the Royal National Theatre production with the sun closed (photograph: Chris Arthur)
PETER SHAFFER'S
NOTES TO THE PLAY

THE TEXT
Each Act contains twelve sections, marked by Roman numerals. These are solely for reference, and do not indicate pauses or breaks of any kind. The action is continuous.

THE SET
In this version of the play I refer throughout to the set used by the National Theatre Company at the Chichester Festival, 1964. Essentially, all that is required for a production of The Royal Hunt of the Sun is a bare stage and an upper level. However, the setting by Michael Annals was so superb, and so brilliantly succeeded in solving the visual problems of the play, that I wish to recall it here in print.

Basically this design consisted of a huge aluminium ring, twelve feet in diameter, hung in the centre of a plain wooden back-wall. Around its circumference were hinged twelve petals. When closed, these interlocked to form a great medallion on which was incised the emblem of the conquistadores; when opened, they formed the rays of a giant golden sun, emblem of the Incas. Each petal had an inlay of gold magnetized to it: when these inlays were pulled out (in Act II, Scene vi) the great black frame remaining symbolized magnificently the desecration of Peru. The centre of this sun formed an acting area above the stage, which was used in Act I to show Atahuallpa in majesty, and in Act II served for his prison and subsequently for the treasure chamber.

This simple but amazing set was for me totally satisfying on all levels: scenically, aesthetically and symbolically.

THE MUSIC
The musical excerpts at the end of the play represent the three most easily detached pieces from the remarkable score composed for the play by Marc Wilkinson. This extraordinary music I believe to be an integral part of any production of The Royal Hunt of the Sun. It embraces bird cries; plainchant; a fantasia for organ; freezing sounds for the Mime of the Great Ascent, and frightening ones for the Mime of the Great Massacre. To me its most memorable items are the exquisitely doleful lament which opens Act II, and, most amazing of all, the final Chant of Resurrection, to be whined and whispered, howled and hooted, over Atahuallpa's body in the darkness, before the last sunrise of the Inca Empire.
THE PRODUCTION
There are, no doubt, many ways of producing this play, as there are of setting it. My hope was always to realize on stage a kind of 'total' theatre, involving not only words but rites, mimes, masks and magics. The text cries for illustration. It is a director's piece, a pantomimist's piece, a musician's piece, a designer's piece, and of course an actor's piece, almost as much as it is an author's. In this edition, as with the set, I have included as many details of the Chichester production as possible, partly because I was deeply involved in its creation, but mainly as a tribute to the superb achievement of John Dexter.

CHARACTERS

THE SPANIARDS

The Officers
FRANCISCO PIZARRO
Commander of the Expedition
HERNANDO DE SOTO
Second-in-Command
MIGUEL ESTETE
Royal Veedor, or Overseer
PEDRO DE CANDIA
Commander of Artillery
DIEGO DE TRUJILLO
Master of Horse

The Men
OLD MARTIN
Pizarro’s Page: Old Martin as a boy
YOUNG MARTIN
Blacksmith
SALINAS
Tailor
RODAS

The Priests
FRAY VINCENTE DE VALVERDE
Chaplain to the Expedition (Dominican)
FRAY MARCOS DE NIZZA
Franciscan Friar

THE INDIANS

ATAHUALLPA
Sovereign Inca of Peru
VILLAC UMU
High Priest of Peru
CHALLCUCHIMA
An Inca General
A CHIEFTAIN
A HEADMAN OF A THOUSAND FAMILIES
FELIPILLO
An Indian boy, employed by Pizarro as Interpreter
MANCO
INTI COUSSI
OELLO non-speaking
A Chasqui, or Messenger
Step-sister of Atahuallpa
A wife of Atahuallpa

SPANISH SOLDIERS AND
PERUVIAN INDIANS

PLACE

Apart from two early scenes in Spain and Panama, the play is set in the Upper Province of the Inca Empire: what is now South Ecuador and north-western Peru. The whole of Act II takes place in the town of Cajamarca.

TIME
June 1529 – August 1533

Act I: THE HUNT
Act II: THE KILL
ACT I

THE HUNT

A bare stage. On the back wall, which is of wood, hangs a huge metal medallion, quartered by four black crucifixes, sharpened to resemble swords.

We meet the narrator, Old Martin, who directly addresses the audience. He sets up the story that is about to unfold as well as numerous themes, images and ideas. Old Martin introduces his alter-ego, himself as a young boy of fifteen, and he recalls Pizarro, his beliefs and his subsequent disillusionment. While Old Martin is still on stage the action goes back in time to Trujillo, Spain, where Pizarro is recruiting men for his expedition. We meet Valverde, one of the emissaries of the Church who will accompany him, as well as Felipillo, his interpreter. We are also introduced to De Soto, Pizarro’s second-in-command, who questions Pizarro about his motivation for undertaking another dangerous expedition given his age and old battle wounds.

[Darkness. OLD MARTIN, grizzled, in his middle fifties, appears. He wears the black costume of a Spanish hidalgo in the mid sixteenth century.]

OLD MARTIN: Save you all. My name is Martin. I’m a soldier of Spain and that’s it. Most of my life I’ve spent

**Old Martin**

**hidalgo:** Spanish term for a noble or knight

**Save you all:** greeting – note Shaffer’s use of ‘old’ language to create the sense of another time.
ways in which these are connected to the themes of religion, worship, belief and salvation.

Shaffer chooses to have Old and Young Martin on the stage at the same time. This is a split-image convention. Note how this convention provides the audience with two perspectives simultaneously, i.e. the perspective of the action as it unfolds and the perspective of the narrator years after the action has taken place. What is the effect of this double perspective? What does it add to the audience's understanding of the play?

Old Martin, who is looking back at events in the past, introduces us to the action we are about to see. What effect does this

fighting for land, treasure and the cross. I'm worth millions. Soon I'll be dead and they'll bury me out here in Peru, the land I helped ruin as a boy. This story is about ruin. Ruin and gold. More gold than any of you will ever see even if you work in a counting house. I'm going to tell you how one hundred and sixty-seven men conquered an empire of twenty-four million. And then things that no one has ever told: things to make you groan and cry out I'm lying. And perhaps I am. The air of Peru is cold and sour like in a vault, and wits turn easier here even than in Europe. But grant me this: I saw him closer than anyone, and had cause only to love him. He was my altar, my bright image of salvation. Francisco Pizarro! Time was when I'd have died for him, or for any worship.

[YOUNG MARTIN enters duelling an invisible opponent with a stick. He is OLD MARTIN as an impetuous boy of fifteen.]

If you could only imagine what it was like for me at the beginning, to be allowed to serve him. But boys don't dream like that any more - service! Conquest! Riding down Indians in the name of Spain. The inside of my head was one vast plain for feats of daring. I used to lie up in the hayloft for hours reading my bible - Don Cristobal on the rules of chivalry. And then he came and made them real. And the only wish of my life is that I had never seen him.

[FRANCISCO PIZARRO comes in. He is a man in late middle age: tough, com-

counting house: where money and gold is counted and records are kept

vault: cellar or basement, beneath a church or bank where one stores the dead or money, usually cold with stale air. The relationship between death and money is being evoked, as is the staleness (sterility) of Peru now that the Europeans have conquered it.

wits turn easier: in Peru one's thinking may turn to distraction or madness far easier than in Europe. Old Martin implies that he might be lying about the story that he will tell. But since he was closer to Pizarro than anyone else and worshipped him, perhaps he is not falsifying the historical record.

duelling an invisible opponent: Young Martin pretends to fight a duel. Duels were fought to settle a quarrel or avenge one's honour, and were conducted according to very strict rules in the presence of witnesses. This sets up one of the recurring themes
Imagine how an actor would convey this description of Pizarro’s character to the audience through, for example, his movements.

Why does the dramatist uphold the myth that Pizarro was born in a pigsty? How does this contribute to the conflicts around which the play is centred?

manding, harsh, wasted, secret. The gestures are blunt and often violent; the expression intense and energetic, capable of fury and cruelty, but also of sudden melancholy and sardonic humour. At the moment he appears more neatly than he is ever to do again: hair and beard are trimmed, and his clothes quite grand, as if he is trying to make a fine impression.

He is accompanied by his Second-in-Command, HERNANDO DE SOTO, and the Dominican FRAY VINCENTE DE VALVERDE. DE SOTO is an impressive figure in his forties: his whole air breathes an unquestioning loyalty to profession, his faith, and to accepted values. He is an admirable soldier and a staunch friend. VALVERDE on the other hand is a peasant priest whose zeal is not greatly tempered by intelligence, nor sweetened by any anxiety to please.

PIZARRO: I was suckled by a sow. My house is the oldest in Spain – the pigsty.

OLD MARTIN: He’d made two expeditions to the New World already. Now at over sixty years old he was back in Spain, making one last try. He’d shown the King enough gold to get sole right of discovery in Peru and the title of Viceroy over anything he conquered. In return he was to fit out any army at his own expense. He started recruiting in his own birthplace, Trujillo.

[Lights up below as he speaks. Several Spanish villagers have entered, among them SALINAS, a blacksmith, RODAS, a tailor, VASCA, DOMINGO and the CHAVEZ brothers. PIZARRO addresses DIEGO, a young man of twenty-five.]
Why would Shaffer choose the English title 'Master of Horse' here rather than the Spanish?

PIZARRO: What's your name?
DIEGO: Diego, sir.
PIZARRO: What do you know best?
DIEGO: Horses, I suppose, if I was to name anything.
PIZARRO: How would you feel to be Master of Horse, Diego?
DIEGO [eagerly]: Sir!
PIZARRO: Go over there. Who's smith here?
SALINAS: I am.
PIZARRO: Are you with us?
SALINAS: I'm not against you.
PIZARRO: Who's your friend?
RODAS: Tailor, if it's your business.
PIZARRO: Soldiers never stop mending and patching. They'll be grateful for your assistance.
RODAS: Well, find some other fool to give it to them. I'm resting here.
PIZARRO: Rest. [To YOUNG MARTIN] Who's this?
DIEGO: Martin Ruiz, sir. A good lad. He knows all his codes of chivalry by heart. He's aching to be a page, sir.
PIZARRO: How old?
YOUNG MARTIN: Seventeen.
PIZARRO: Don't lie.
YOUNG MARTIN: Fifteen, sir.
[OLD MARTIN goes off.]
PIZARRO: Parents?
YOUNG MARTIN: Dead, sir.
PIZARRO: Can you write?
YOUNG MARTIN: Two hundred Latin words. Three hundred Spanish.
PIZARRO: Why do you want to come?
YOUNG MARTIN: It's going to be glorious, sir.
PIZARRO: Look you, if you served me you'd be page to an old slogger: no titles, no traditions. I learnt my trade

Master of Horse: third official in an English noble household
smith: a worker in metal, for example, blacksmith or goldsmith
page: a boy or man who works as the attendant of a person of rank as part of his training for the knighthood
old slogger: an old fighter, someone who fights for money
as a mercenary, going with who best paid me. It’s a closed book to me, all that Chivalry! But then, not reading or writing, all books are closed to me. If I took you you’d have to be my reader and writer, both.

YOUNG MARTIN: I’d be honoured, my Lord. Oh, please, my Lord!

PIZARRO: General will do. Let’s see your respect. Greet me. [The boy bows.] Now to the Church. That’s Brother Valverde, our Chaplain.

VALVERDE: The blessing of God on you, my son. And on all who come with us to alter the heathen.

PIZARRO: Now to our Second-in-Command, Cavalier de Soto. I’m sure you all know the Cavalier well by reputation: a great soldier. He has fought under Cordoba! No expedition he seconds can fail. [He takes a roll of cloth, woven with the design of a llama, from DE SOTO.] Now look at this! Indian stuff! Ten years ago standing with the great Balboa, I saw a chieftain draw this beast on the leaf of an aloe. And he said to me: ‘Where this roams is uncountable wealth!’

RODAS: Oh, yes, uncountable! Ask Sanchez the farrier about that. He listened to talk like that from him five years ago.

DIEGO: Who cares about him?

RODAS: Uncountable pissing wealth? It rained six months and his skin rotted on him. They lost twenty-seven out of fifty.

PIZARRO: And so we may again. What do you think I’m offering? A walk in the country. Jellies and wine in a basket, your hand round your girl? No, rather than a cause. He claims not to belong to the tradition of chivalry that Martin wants to become a part of. Note Pizarro’s play on his illiteracy when he uses the idiom ‘it’s a closed book to me’.

heathen: one who does not adhere to the Christian faith
Cavalier: English term for a cavalryman and knight
Cordoba: Fernández de Córdoba (1453–1515) was a Spanish military leader renowned for his exploits. He was known as El Gran Capitán, the Great Captain. De Soto is obviously a soldier of some experience and ability.
llama: an animal similar to a camel but smaller and without a hump
Balboa: Vasco Núñez de Balboa (1475–1519) was a conquistador and explorer who was the governor of the first stable Spanish settlement on the South American continent. Balboa organized a series of gold- and slave-hunting expeditions and his Indian policy included the use of barter, torture and armed force.
Shaffer is deliberately using the colonial image of the native as less manly, more feminine. Why do you think Shaffer chooses to present Felipillo, the translator, this way? How do these words give Felipillo womanly characteristics?

What two justifications are we given for conquest?

Note the use of irony here: you are forgiven your crimes if you agree to go and lift gold from the Indians. The irony questions the notion that a crime is not a crime when committed for a higher good.

I'm promising you swamps. A forest like the beard of the world. Sitting half-buried in earth to escape the mouths of insects. You may live for weeks on palm tree buds and soup made out of leather straps. And at night you will sleep in thick wet darkness with snakes hung over your heads like bell ropes – and black men in that blackness: men that eat each other. And why should you endure all this? Because I believe that beyond this terrible place is a kingdom, where gold is as common as wood is here! I took only two steps in and found cups and pans made out of it solid!

[He claps his hands. Felipillo comes in. He is a slim, delicate Indian from Ecuador, loaded with golden ornaments. In actuality Felipillo is a treacherous and hysterical creature, but at the moment, under his master's eye, he sways forward before the stupefied villagers with a demure grace.]

I present Felipillo, captured on my last trip. Look close at his ornaments. To him they are no more than feathers are to us, but they are all gold, my friends. Examine him. Down?

[The villagers examine him.]

Valverde: Look at him well. This is a heathen. A being condemned to eternal flame unless you help him. Don't think we are merely going to destroy his people and lift their wealth. We are going to take from them what they don't value, and give them instead the priceless mercy of heaven. He who helps me lift this dark man into light I absolve of all crimes he ever committed.

Farrier: blacksmith who puts iron shoes on horses' hooves
Pissing: old form of cursing, showing disapproval

Men that eat each other:
Pizarro is referring to cannibalism (see also Act II, Scene IV), the practice of eating human flesh for ritual purposes. Since ancient times the accusation of cannibalism has been used to prove that someone is a barbarian. Shaffer may be pinpointing the irony of the conquest in which the 'civilized' Europeans accuse others of barbarity while acting in a barbarous fashion themselves.

Treacherous and hysterical:
Felipillo is characterized as a creature, in other words, as closer to the animal world and as a traitor, someone who is deceptive. The adjective 'hysterical' feminizes him. Hysteria has traditionally been thought to occur more in women than men. It was taken as a sign of mental or moral weakness.

Stupefied: made stupid, amazed, unsure what to think
Eternal flame: fires of hell
Lift: colloquial for steal
Dark man into light: the image of moving dark men from darkness into light is a central
If you are not a nobleman in Spain you get to be less than a dog or live like a pig in a sty, but in Peru even the lowliest Spaniard can be a master of slaves. In other words, in the New World (Peru) the distinctions between classes can be ignored and anyone can become a important person.

PIZARRO: Well?
SALINAS: That’s gold right enough.
PIZARRO: And for your taking. I was like you once. Sitting the afternoon away in this same street, drunk in the inn, to bed in the sty. Stink and mud and nothing to look for. Even if you die with me, what’s so tender precious to hold you here?
VASCA: You’re pissing right!
PIZARRO: I tell you, man: over there you’ll be masters – that’ll be your slave.
VASCA: Well, there’s a thought: talk about the slave of slaves!
DOMINGO: Oh, no, sir …
VASCA: Even if he does, what’s to keep you here? You’re a cooper: how many casks have you made this year? That’s no employment for a dog.
PIZARRO: How about you? You’re brothers, aren’t you?
DIEGO: That’s the Chavez brothers, Juan and Pedro.
JUAN: Sir.
PEDRO: Sir.
PIZARRO: Well, what d’you say?
JUAN: I say right, sir.
PEDRO: Me too.
VASCA: And me. I’m going to get a slave or two like him!
DOMINGO: And me. Vasca’s right, you can’t do worse than stay here.
RODAS: Well, not me, boys. Just you catch Rodas marching through any pissing jungle!
SALINAS: Oh, shut your ape’s face. Are you going to sit here for ever and pick fleas? He’ll come, sir.
PIZARRO: Make your way to Toledo for the muster. Diego, enrol them all and

cooper: maker of barrels and storage casks

Toledo: a Spanish port
muster: assembling men, espe-
Here Pizarro is referring to himself. He sees in Young Martin an image of himself as a young, eager, idealistic man whom he now despises. How does this moment contribute to our understanding of Pizarro's character?

Take note of the different characters' relationships to gold. Notice the many references to value and exchange, materialism and spirituality.

If gold is not Pizarro's main concern and neither is a cause (King or God), what is it that takes them along.

DIEGO: Sir!

[Young Martin makes to go off with the rest. Pizarro stays with him.]

PIZARRO: Boy.

YOUNG MARTIN: Sir.

[A pause.]

PIZARRO: Master me the names of all officers and men so far listed.

YOUNG MARTIN: Oh, sir! Yes, sir!

Thank you, sir!

PIZARRO: You're a page now, so act like one. Dignity at all times.

YOUNG MARTIN [bowing]: Yes, sir.

PIZARRO: Respect.

YOUNG MARTIN [bowing]: Yes, sir.

PIZARRO: And obedience.

YOUNG MARTIN [bowing]: Yes, sir.

PIZARRO: And it isn’t necessary to salute every ten seconds.

YOUNG MARTIN [bowing]: No, sir.

VALVERDE: Come, my son, there's work to do.

[They go off.]

PIZARRO: Strange sight, yourself, just as you were in this very street.

DE SOTO: Do you like it?

PIZARRO: No, I was a fool. Dreamers deserve what they get.

DE SOTO: And what are you dreaming about now?

PIZARRO: Gold.

DE SOTO: Oh, come. Gold is not enough lodestone for you, not any more, to drag you back to the New World.

PIZARRO: You’re right. At my age things become what they really are. Gold turns into metal.

DE SOTO: Then why? You could stay here now and be hero for a province.

lodestone: magnet

gold turns into metal: gold loses its value as a precious commodity and becomes...
Why is Pizarro so bitter? How does Pizarro feel about the class hierarchy in Spain?

Pizarro yearns to live on in history as the hero of a ballad. Here the dramatist is using dramatic irony, since the audience would be well aware of what Pizarro is known for today.

What's left to endure so much for—especially with your infirmity? You've earned the right to comfort. Your country would gladly grant it to you for the rest of your life.

PIZARRO: My country, where is that?
DE SOTO: Spain, sir.

PIZARRO: Spain and I have been strangers since I was a boy. The only spot I know in it is here—this filthy village. This is Spain to me. Is this where you wish me comfort? For twenty-two years I drove pigs down this street because my father couldn't own to my mother. Twenty-two years without one single day of hope. When I turned soldier and dragged my arquebus along the roads of Italy, I was so famished I was beyond eating. I got nothing and I gave nothing, and though I groaned for that once I'm glad with it now. Because I owe nothing ... Once the world could have had me for a petty farm, two rocky fields and a Senor to my name. It said 'No'. Ten years on it could have had me for double—small estate, fifty orange-trees and a Sir to them. It said 'No'. Twenty years more and it could still have had me cheap: Balboa's trusty lieutenant, marched with him into the Pacific and claimed it for Spain: state pension and dinner once a week with the local mayor. But the world said 'No'. Said 'No' and said 'No'. Well, now it's going to know me. If I live this next year I'm going to get me a name that won't ever be forgotten! A name to be sung here for centuries in your ballads, out there under the cork trees where I sat as a boy with ban-

infirmity: weakness caused by old age; usually refers to physical weakness but can also imply weakness of mind and judgement

own to: publicly admit his connection with her

arquebus: early type of portable gun that was supported on a tripod by a hook because it was large and heavy

Senor: similar to Mister; title originally given to those who owned land; lower on the class scale than a Sir. Unlike De Soto, Pizarro has not inherited a name or nobility and has to work for it. He has had, he says later, to root for his honour like the pigs, who turn up the ground with their snouts to find food

ballad: song of several verses each sung to the same melody
Imagine how the music used here — the blending of harsh, stern sounds — sets the scene. What extra information does the music give the audience? What expectations does it create?

The narrator fills in the information we need to understand the scene — the change in time and place.

Note the mingling of secular and sacred language in this dages for shoes. I amuse you.

DE SOTO: Surely you see you don’t.

PIZARRO: Oh, yes, I amuse you, Cavalier de Soto. The old pigherd lumbering after fame. You inherited your honour — I had to root for mine like the pigs. It’s amusing.

II

The action moves to Panama, Central America, where the Spanish colonists are well-established. The weapons to be used in the conquest are consecrated (blessed). We meet Valverde’s assistant, Marcos De Nizza, a far more idealistic priest than he is. We are also introduced to Pedro de Candia, a Venetian Captain, and to Miguel Estete, the King’s emissary. Pizarro asserts his authority over the expedition and explains his cynicism to Young Martin.

[Lights whiter, colder. He kneels. An organ sounds: the austere polyphony of Spanish celebration. VALVERDE enters, bearing an immense wooden Christ. He is accompanied by his assistant, FRAY MARCOS DE NIZZA, a Franciscan, a man of far more serene temper and intellectual maturity. All the villagers come in also, wearing the white cloaks of chivalry and carrying banners. Among them is PEDRO DE CANDIA, a Venetian captain, wearing a pearl in one ear and walking with a lazy stealth that at once suggests danger. OLD MARTIN comes in.]

OLD MARTIN: On the day of St John the Evangelist, our weapons were consecrated in the Cathedral Church of Panama. Our muster was one hundred and eighty-seven, with horses for...
Note Shaffer's use again of the image of food and nourishment. Note also the exchange implied here between gold and God.

De Nizza says that the conquerors will sow fields with love. Given what we already know about the conquest and its consequences for Peru (see Act I, Scene I), how is Shaffer using dramatic irony here to question De Nizza's assertion?

DE NIZZA: And comfort, we pray, all warriors that shall be in affliction from this setting out.

OLD MARTIN: Fray Marcos de Nizza, Franciscan, appointed to assist Valverde.

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

VALVERDE: Approach all and be blessed.

[During this, the men kneel and are blessed.]

OLD MARTIN: Pedro de Candia, Cavalier from Venice, in charge of weapons and artillery. These villagers you know already. There were many others, of course. Almagro, the General's partner, who stayed to organize reinforcements and follow in three months. Riquelme the Treasurer. Pedro of Ayala and Blas of Atienza. Herrada the Swordsman and Gonzales
Here Shaffer creates a sense of the Spanish social hierarchies and rituals of state, as well as the ways in which these rituals enforce this hierarchy throughout this scene. What is Pizarro’s reaction to this show of power? How are we shown his alienation from conventional society?

Take note of how Shaffer uses language to create a sense of the class difference between the men and the priests and nobles.

of Toledo. And Juan de Barbaran whom everyone called the good servant out of love for him. And many smaller men. Even its youngest member saw himself with a following of Indians and a province for an orchard. It was a tumbled company, none too noble, but ginger for wealth!

[Enter ESTETE: a stiff, haughty man, dressed in the black of the Spanish court.]

And chiefly there was –

ESTETE: Miguel Estete, Royal Veedor, and Overseer in the name of King Carlos the Fifth. You should not have allowed anyone to be blessed before me.

PIZARRO: Your pardon, Veedor, I don’t understand affairs of Before and After.

ESTETE: That is evident. General, on this expedition my name is the law: it is spoken with the King’s authority.

PIZARRO: Your pardon, but on this expedition my name is the law: there will be no other.

ESTETE: In matters military.

PIZARRO: In all matters.

ESTETE: In all that do not infringe the majesty of the King.

PIZARRO: What matters could?

ESTETE: Remember your duty to God, sir, and to the throne, sir, and you will not discover them.

PIZARRO [furious]: De Soto! In the name of Spain our holy country, I invest you as Second-in-Command to me. Subject only to me. In the name of Spain our holy country – I – I –

[He falters, clutching his side in pain. A pause. The men whisper among themselves.]
Take the banners out …
DE SOTO: Take up your banners.
March!

[The organ music continues: all march out, leaving PIZARRO and his PAGE alone on the stage. Only when all the rest are gone does the General collapse. The boy is frightened and concerned.]

YOUNG MARTIN: What is it, sir?

PIZARRO: A wound from long ago. A knife to the bone. A savage put it into me for life. It troubles me at times … You’ll start long before me with your wounds. With your killing too. I wonder how you’ll like that.

YOUNG MARTIN: You watch me, sir!

PIZARRO: I will. You deal in deaths when you are a soldier, and all your study should be to make them clean, what scratches kill and how to cut them.

YOUNG MARTIN: But surely, sir, there’s more to soldiering than that?

PIZARRO: You mean honour, glory – traditions of the service?

YOUNG MARTIN: Yes, sir.

PIZARRO: Dungballs. Soldiers are for killing: that’s their reason.

YOUNG MARTIN: But, sir –

PIZARRO: What?

YOUNG MARTIN: It’s not just killing …

PIZARRO: Look, boy: know something. Men cannot just stand as men in this world. It’s too big for them and they grow scared. So they build themselves shelters against the bigness, do you see? They call the shelters Court, Army, Church. They’re useful against loneliness, Martin, but they’re not true. They’re not real, Martin. Do you
In asserting that 'noble's a word', Pizarro introduces a central image and theme of the play; that is, some words are actions (like the word of honour he later gives the Inca to protect him) and other words are empty (when he has to break his word). Here Shaffer predicts Pizarro's later dilemma, when the man of action is forced to make his words empty and meaningless like those he despises. Why can't Martin believe? How does this assertion advance our knowledge of the theme of belief as integral to people's sense of themselves?

Here hope (light) is juxtaposed with the darkness and terror (screaming) of where they are about to go but, ironically,

**YOUNG MARTIN**: No, sir. Not truthfully, sir …

**PIZARRO**: No, sir. Not truthfully sir! Why must you be so young? Look at you. Only a quarter formed. A colt the world will break for its sightless track. Listen once. Army loyalty is blasphemy. The world of soldiers is a yard of ungrowable children. They play with ribbons and make up ceremonies just to keep out of the rest of the world. They add up the number of their blue dead and their green dead and call that their history. But all this is just the flower the bandit carves on his knife before shoving it into a man's side … What's Army Tradition? Nothing but years of Us against Them. Christ-men against Pagan-men. Men against men. I've had a life of it, boy, and let me tell you it's nothing but a nightmare game, played by brutes to give themselves a reason.

**YOUNG MARTIN**: But sir, a noble reason can make a fight glorious.

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

**YOUNG MARTIN**: I can't believe that, sir.

**PIZARRO**: Look at you – hope, lovely hope, it's on you like dew … Do you know where you're going? Into the forest. A hundred miles of dark and screaming. The dark we all came out of, hot. Things flying, fleeing, falling dead – and their death unnoticed. Take your noble reasons there, Martin.

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*a colt*: a young horse  
*sightless track*: a race run with blinkers on; blind progress  
*blasphemy*: to talk impiously; to swear against the Church
Pizarro implies that this dark is also a place of birth. The possibility of rebirth is linked to death. As you read to the end of the play, ask yourself how this is shown to be tragically wrong. How does this speech reveal Pizarro’s cynicism about the Church?

Pitch your silk flags in that black and wave your crosses at the wild cats. See what awe they command. Be advised, boy. Go back to Spain.

YOUNG MARTIN: No, sir. I’m coming with you! I can learn, sir.

PIZARRO: You will be taught. Not by me. The forest. [He stumps out.]

The scene shifts and we move from the intimacy of a dialogue between two people to the stylized and formalized world of the Incas, from the cynicism of Pizarro to the God-king of Peru. Atahualpa is revealed to us ceremonially. He is amazed to hear that a ‘white god’ is in his land. He interprets this as a fulfillment of an old prophecy and sees it as a blessing on his rule. However, his high priest, Villac Umu, warns him that it is an omen of bad things to come.

Imagine the effect of the music and the sudden revelation of Atahualpa in the sun. Why do you think that the dramatist chooses to have Martin stay on stage for the opening part of this scene?

Why do the Incas speak in this way? What effect would this have for the audience? How would this reinforce the difference between them and the Spanish?

[The boy is left alone. The stage darkens and the huge medallion high on the back wall begins to glow. Great cries of ‘Inca!’ are heard. The boy bolts off the stage. Exotic music mixes with the chanting. Slowly the medallion opens outwards to form a huge golden sun with twelve great rays. In the centre stands ATAHUALLPA, sovereign Inca of Peru, masked, crowned, and dressed in gold. When he speaks, his voice, like the voices of all the Incas, is strangely formalized.

Enter below the Inca court: VILLAC UMU, the High Priest, CHALLCUCHI-MA, MANCO and others, all masked, and robed in terracotta. They prostrate themselves.]

MANCO: Atahuallpa! God!

ATAHUALLPA: God hears.

[terracotta: reddish-brown clay colour
prostrate themselves: lie down with their faces on the ground]
What is the effect of having Atahualpa on stage until Scene VII? What does this split staging device add to what follows?

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

ATAHUALLPA [astounded]: The White God!

VILLAC UMU: Beware, beware Inca!

ATAHUALLPA: All-powerful spirit who left this place before my ancestors ruled you! ... The White God returns!

CHALLCUCHIMA: You do not know this.

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

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

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

VILLAC UMU: Out of a green sky.

CHALLCUCHIMA: On to a house of gold.

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

ATAHUALLPA: Cover your mouth.

[All cover their mouths.]

If the White God comes to bless me, all must see him.

[The court retires. ATAHUALLPA remains on stage, motionless in his sunflower. He stays in this position until the end of Scene VII.]