

## Chapter 8

### “I Feel Like a Spring Lamb” What Clay Shaw’s Literary Life Reveals

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A massive body of work has been produced investigating the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and one branch of this research focuses on Jim Garrison’s prosecution and trial of New Orleans businessman Clay Lavergne Shaw. The only person ever prosecuted in connection with Kennedy’s murder, Shaw is an intriguing personage with a contentious history. Despite all of the voluminous books, websites, and films that have been produced attempting to find answers to the lingering questions presented by the assassination and the Warren Report, relatively little is known about the particulars of Clay Shaw’s life.

Even reports of the basic facts contradict one another. For instance, of Shaw’s public school career, in 1969 attorney and Garrison critic Milton E. Brener writes, “Shaw quit before graduation” (62) and Professor Joan Mellen reports the same in 2005. Shaw, however, under oath states, I am a graduate of high school, I finished . . . in 1928” (“Testimony” 1). Brener claims that Shaw “took courses at Columbia University” (62). Shaw, however, when asked under oath by his attorney if he had attended college subsequently, said he hadn’t (“Testimony” 1). Did Shaw lie to Brener, or is Brener deliberately embellishing Shaw’s biography propagandistically in a book attacking Garrison subtitled “a study in the abuse of power”? Not one full-length biography of Shaw has been published, though researchers are at work. Even a pro-Shaw tome like novelist-playwright James Kirkwood’s *American Grotesque* (1970), which was enabled by Kirkwood’s new friendship with, and sympathy for, Shaw—brought about by *Midnight Cowboy* author James Leo Herlihy through Herlihy’s and Shaw’s mutual friend Tom L. Dawson<sup>1</sup> (Mitzel 8)—reveals much less about Shaw’s biography, politics, and philosophy than one would hope.

One of the fascinating facets of Clay Shaw is his early career as a playwright and his sustained interest in, and occasional authoring of, drama. It seems, however, that few know much about his literary output and even fewer have actually read his work. In fact, a Google search (July 2009) of “Clay Shaw” plus his early *nom de plume* “Le Vergne Shaw”—a variant of his middle name—yielded *zero* results. It is sometimes noted that at sixteen years old, Shaw wrote a one-act play, *Submerged* (1929), one successfully and frequently produced by amateur theatre companies in the thirties and beyond—this play,

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<sup>1</sup> James Leo Herlihy told an interviewer, “The meeting with Clay Shaw was arranged by mail by a mutual friend, Tom Dawson, in late 1967 in New York. Clay was a beautifully civilized man, warm, considerate, utterly rational and free of the impulse to judge others” (Mitzel 8)

like Shaw's three other published plays, was actually co-authored with H. Stuart Cottman. The editor of the duo's third play *The Cuckoo's Nest* (1936) in his Foreword boasts that *Submerged* is "commonly acknowledged to be one of the best short plays written by an American. It is doubtful if any other one-act play is produced as frequently at this time" (3). In 1970 Kirkwood claims that it has "had thousands of performances and is still widely played by amateur groups around the country" (18-19). *Submerged* was first produced while Shaw was a student at Warren Easton High School in New Orleans (a school Lee Harvey Oswald also attended), and like the rarely-mentioned other three published plays, was directed by Miss Jessie Tharp of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, who directed many plays at that historic theatre as early as 1918 ("Jessie"). All four published plays—*Submerged* (1929), *A Message from Khufu* (1931), *The Cuckoo's Nest* (1936), and *Stokers* (1938), are attributed to "H. Stuart Cottman and Le Vergne Shaw." Little is known of Herman Stuart Cottman, a classmate of Shaw's ("Clay Shaw"). Also a thespian, he played two roles in the original productions of his collaborations with Shaw. The Le Petite Théâtre in 1930 produced two plays he singly authored as "Herman S. Cottman": *For the Love of a Lady* and *Grandmere* ("Herman"). An actor named "Herman Cottman" plays the role of Officer Scott in Elia Kazan's film *Panic in the Streets* (1950), not credited onscreen—the film was shot in New Orleans, so this is likely the same Cottman.

Some might ask why one should care about plays that Shaw wrote as a teenager and young man. After all, we all go through youthful enthusiasms that may be disconnected to later life. But Shaw's early literary life was not just a phase later to be discarded. This facet of Shaw was deeply ingrained and important to his self-concept, and the work tells us something of the man. Shaw held literary aspirations throughout his entire life. Brener writes that Shaw penned a full-length play called *In Memoriam*, produced in New Orleans in 1948 (62). Professor Joan Mellen refers to a play authored under the *nom de plume* "Allen White," titled *Memorial* (130), perhaps the same play or a different draft, which is available in Shaw's manuscripts at the National Archives in Maryland. Shaw himself under oath stated, "in the early Fifties, I wrote a play that was produced here, and I used . . . the pen name, Allen White" ("Testimony" 2). Another Shaw play is *The Idol's Eye*, which Brener claims is published (63) but no bibliographic record exists. This may have been an alternative title of *Message from Khufu*. Later in his life Shaw would become friends with literary giants such as Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal, and James Leo Herlihy. Shortly before his retirement, the multilingual Shaw traveled to Spain to obtain permission to translate a play by Alejandro Casona, *Los árboles mueren de pie* (*The Trees Die Standing*) (Brener 63-64). When Shaw retired early at age 51, he "wanted, from here on in, to devote my life to writing" (Kirkwood 19). Prior to his arrest, "in early 1967 he was working on a drama concerning Antonio Ulloa, the first Spanish Governor of Louisiana" (Brener 63) and after the conspiracy trial Shaw said he hoped to write "a couple of plays" along with a book about the trial (Kirkwood 473). Shaw described to Kirkwood an idea he had an idea for a play about the recurring problem of individuals abusing power, a dig at Jim Garrison. Even from a brief glance at the plays we can note Shaw's fondness of aliases. Though Shaw denied using the aliases "Clay Bertrand" or "Clem Bertrand," and remarked that the whole idea of him using an alias is "ridiculous" (Kirkwood 20), he had already used two in his literary life.

Researcher and author of *Let Justice Be Done*, William Davy notes that “the number of people identifying Shaw as Bertrand is well into the double digits” and that he “was told by a veteran New Orleans police detective that Shaw’s use of this alias was an open secret” (293).

Regarding the plays’ relevance to later events, I posit that a person’s character and outlook retains much continuity throughout his or her life. Political and moral views can change, but many of our most deeply-held beliefs are already imprinted by adolescence. Clay Shaw’s early plays tell us about the man: his desires, his psychology, and his politics, and bear interesting connections to Jim Garrison’s prosecution and trial of Shaw. Ultimately I will argue that what these works reveal about Shaw, and his deployment of symbol and allusion, provides additional support to arguments that Shaw was involved, to some degree, with a conspiracy to assassinate President John F. Kennedy. My reading of the plays in light of biographical information about Shaw’s unconventional sexuality will suggest a novel way of understanding the Garrison-Shaw trial, one previously unexplored. Due to their accessibility yet current obscurity, I focus on the four published Cottman-Shaw plays, which are available at some university libraries and can be accessed through interlibrary loan.

One revealing aspect of the four published plays is their homoeroticism, which is certainly more legible today than in the end of the 1920s and 1930s. This is immediately evident in the scenarios of the three one-act plays, tragedies all: *Submerged*, *A Message from Khufu*, and *Stokers*. All three plays center on half-dressed men trapped in enclosed spaces: a wrecked submarine, an Egyptian tomb, and a steam-powered yacht’s boiler room respectively. Two photographs accompanying *Submerged* show two high school companies’ stage set and actors. In the first picture of a prize-winning high school production, two of the chiseled actors are shirtless, and one is on his knees directly in front of three other sailors, with his face near the crotch of one and his hand on the knee of another. In the play’s directions, these sailors’ “bodies glisten with sweat and are smudged with oil and grime,” their torsos covered only by “sleeveless undergarments” (25-6). In *Khufu*, set in a dark, Egyptian tomb, the three young male assistants wear “dirty, torn shirts” (27). *Stokers* opens with Leon, a “tall, well-built, healthy young man” laboring shirtless in the boiler room of a ship. On the whole, sweaty, muscular men closed together in tight spaces is what we find.

In the last of the four published plays, the three-act farce *The Cuckoo’s Nest*, which reflects Shaw’s new environment of New York City, we find what seems to be a gay character, the “handsome youth of 24,” Barry Cragwell, played by Cottman in the original production. Barry is “darkly Byronic in appearance; he knows it and does not attempt to disguise it” (8). Barry’s connection to the bisexual English Romantic poet Lord Byron is suggestive. Shaw and Cottman’s Wildean romp follows the exploits of an eccentric family with a faded aristocratic legacy, the Cragwells of Nashville. Aunt Fanny, her nephew Barry and niece Phyllis, and a disgruntled servant wanting back pay travel to the Big Apple in order to demonstrate Barry’s concerto, but their intended auditor Mr. Stokowski has gone abroad. They make their way penniless into an outdated but charming rooming house to find no one home. With few options, they take up

residence, going so far as to impersonate the landlords, collecting rent from new roomers that a cab driver, who is in on the hoax, brings from the airport. One of these boarders, Minorah Judd, has fled her husband in Wichita. When Barry asks what happened, she replies that Barry will never believe her. Our first clue that there's something a bit off-center about Barry, comes when he, "*smiling wickedly*," replies, "I'm a very credulous person. You just don't *know*" (39). When Minorah reveals, "He struck me!" Barry, "*still smiling*," asks, "Once or twice?" (39). She cozies up to the quirky modernist composer Barry, wishing to "inspire" him, but he rejects her advances (40).

When Minorah's husband George Judd arrives in Act III, she refuses to return to Kansas with him, concocting a tale of romance between Barry and her. Barry assures George that Minorah is lying, but George is not convinced and charges at Barry. Barry finally pins the older man to the floor and shouts, "Your wife's nuts and you ought to know it. She's fabricating all this to send you away. I've never even looked at her emotionally. I wouldn't if I could. Take her away from you? Ye gods, I wouldn't have her. If she's what you like, that's fine; but please understand she's not what I like" (75). Exasperated, Barry here as much as admits that he is gay. After Minorah works herself into a frenzy and shakes Barry violently by his shoulders, he "*calmly slaps her face*" (76). George remarks that this is just what the doctor ordered, so Minorah smacks George. Barry then bursts into laughter and Minorah "*fetches him a blow*," so Barry "*fetches her another one*" in return. George chuckles, and Barry collapses laughing. Humor is derived in the way this quirky gay man, Barry, matches Minorah blow for blow, and how her husband enjoys it. The pleasure that the playwrights expect the audience to derive from this violence even suggests sadomasochism (S/M), a subject I'll delve into later.

After Minorah Judd rushes out, Barry and George have a comical reconciliation, with homoerotic undertones. Finding that they agree about the proper way to tame the shrew, Barry offers, "Allow me to condole with you." George, taking Barry's hand, tells the young man twice that he has "a good head," congratulates him, and even though Barry just insulted his wife, George apologizes to Barry and declares, "Say, I could use you in my business!" First Minorah was spellbound by this handsome young composer, and now her husband follows suit. With phallic, homoerotic humor, George asks him, "Know anything about brass nozzles? . . . They're very interesting after you get into them" (76). Ultimately George enlists Barry to compose music for the nozzle company's commercials, and after all this talk of nozzles, Barry sadistically quips under his breath that the music will be so high-class, "you'll choke, but you asked for it" (77). The homoeroticism of this play is suggested not only by the stylistic debt to Wilde's comedies, but also through allusion when one boarder remarks of the house, "why, Oscar Wilde might have walked about in this room" (34).

These homoerotic scenarios and allusions to homosexuality suggest that Clay Shaw was aware of the gay milieu and his own desires at a relatively young age, and further supports the sustained importance of this aspect of Shaw's personal life. While I will later further discuss the literary and biographical connections between Shaw and non-normative sexuality, specifically S/M, for now I only mention that these gay resonances in Shaw's work reinforce his longstanding same-sex desire. Given the need

for mid-century gays to be discrete, Shaw's sexual identity led to his involvement with the gay subculture of New Orleans, which then included such figures as David Ferrie and Perry Russo—and, according to some reports, Lee Harvey Oswald. Jim Garrison called Oswald “a switch-hitter who couldn't satisfy his wife” (Phelan 151). Sources in the older gay community, both unknown and as famous as Gore Vidal,<sup>2</sup> claim Oswald was a gay hustler who worked the New Orleans bars. When asked if Oswald seemed gay, New Orleans attorney Dean Andrews said that Oswald “swang with the kids” (Kirkwood 138), the Latino “gay kids” whom he called “Mexicanos” (130). Andrews remarked that he didn't know “squares” to hang out with gays, reckoning “birds of a feather flock together” (138). Andrews, who received a phone call from “Clay Bertrand” asking Andrews to defend Oswald soon after Lee's arrest, claims these gay Latino youths had earlier accompanied Lee to Andrews' law office (these were likely anti-Castro Cuban exiles). The sunglasses-sporting “hepcat” Dean Andrews was known in the New Orleans gay community as a sympathetic lawyer. Andrews said he had already received multiple requests from this articulate gentleman “Clay Bertrand” (a name Andrews took to be a pseudonym), to defend gay youths who had been arrested.

Several sources claim to have seen Lee Harvey Oswald with Jack Ruby in Dallas and that moreover, they were gay lovers. Jack Ruby's alias that he used in the gay scene, according to Garrison, was “Pinky” (Phelan 151), which was how Rose Charamie, a long-time dancer in his club, knew him. Charamie claimed that Ruby and Oswald, seen together by multiple witnesses at Ruby's club, “had been shacking up for years” (“Rose” 203). The author of an excellent study of Ruby, journalist and researcher Seth Kantor writes that Ruby's defense psychiatrists decided he was a latent homosexual (323-24). Kantor notes that when arrested, Ruby was a 52-year-old bachelor who spoke with a lisp, enjoyed applying oils and creams copiously, and “lived with a succession of young men who sometimes worked as bouncers at the Carousel” (323-24). “Most women were commodities” to Ruby, women ranking third in importance to him following first, his bonds with men, especially the Dallas Police, for whom he felt a deep “love,” and second, his pampered dogs (Kantor 328-9).

One of Jim Garrison's early theories, which to his credit was deliberately not exploited during the trial by the prosecution, had to do with the “homosexual” link between the conspirators. One source, known FBI informant and “journalist” James Phelan, even claimed Garrison talked about a “homosexual thrill killing” similar to that committed by Leopold and Loeb (150). It should be noted that Phelan acted aggressively to undermine Garrison's case. Phelan did this not only through biased, vitriolic articles in the press maligning Garrison, but also by gathering information via mysterious “informants,” who were likely government agents, about the witnesses Garrison was to call, handing this information over to the defense (DiEugenio “Jim Phelan”). Whatever early theory Garrison may have shared with Phelan, he and James Alcock did by no

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<sup>2</sup> Gore Vidal wrote a hand-written letter to Shaw researcher Don Carpenter from his Italian villa, responding to his queries (of which I own a photocopy). Vidal stated that Oswald was indeed a hustler in New Orleans and that Shaw had seen Oswald in the bars.

means exploit or emphasize the sexuality of the defendant, which was noted by gay author James Kirkwood<sup>3</sup> (585, 590).

In addressing a more mature work, *Stokers*, I move from the personal to the political, arguing that this play is significant because it establishes Shaw's strong anti-communism at an early age. Shaw was born in a small Louisiana town, Kentwood, into a prominent Louisiana family. His boyhood occurred in the midst of the first Red Scare, a time when our country's business owners were asked, "Is your washroom breeding Bolsheviks?" Growing up in a community where his grandfather had been sheriff and his father had been a U.S. Marshall (Davy 71), Shaw was without a doubt patriotic. *Stokers* was copyrighted in 1932 but was revised and published in 1938 in the historical context of Hitler's Third Reich and the terror of Joseph Stalin's Great Purges in the Soviet Union.

In *Stokers*, a seeming radical communist, the middle-aged Karst, tries to convince the other stokers on a steam-powered yacht privately owned by an explosives manufacturer, to blow up the yacht in order to set an example for other radicals to follow in smashing capitalism, and die "a martyr's beautiful death" (13). The handsome, strapping Leon, a solid citizen, rejects the rhetoric and plans of Karst, but it seems that George, an educated young man from the elite class who has rejected his father's profit-obsessed, dehumanizing capitalism, subscribes to most of Karst's ideology. George has read his Marx and mouths such unwieldy lines as, "the only salvation is in forcing the masses to see that the path to readjustment lies in complete submersion of self into an organized destruction of the tyrannical capitalist rulers" (11). After Leon exits the boiler room, George enters and Karst gradually persuades him that the time for action is imminent—it is necessary that they martyr themselves in exploding the boiler room to take down the whole ship.

So far the play maligns communism and socialism in attaching it to violent sabotage and pointless self-destruction. But the playwrights go further in revealing that Karst doesn't even believe in his own propaganda. In reality Karst holds a personal vendetta against the yacht owner, the gunpowder manufacturer Mr. Manning, and the communist propaganda was a ruse. According to Karst, he himself innovated the explosives technology from which Manning profits: in earlier years Manning, then a pacifist, convinced Karst to drop his project because of the potential lethal cost to humanity, goes Karst's tale. Karst had made plans to get away on a rowboat before the blast. Glowing with an almost "*insane light*" Karst tells George: "You believed it all, didn't you? It sounds very fine, doesn't it? Beauty and glory—humanity and salvation and the power of purifying the earth! They're big words, and they took you in!" (19).

So the playwrights' moral is "don't be a dupe to communism." Even the "communists" don't really believe what they espouse, and are only looking to exploit and sacrifice others for their own gain, Shaw and Cottman suggest. Communism is also

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<sup>3</sup> Kirkwood deliberately concealed Clay Shaw's homosexuality, and his own, throughout *American Grotesque*. Kirkwood's stress upon Clay Shaw's lady friends and his narrative of his own encounter with a female prostitute during Mardi Gras deceptively imply that both were sexually interested in women, which was far from the truth.

attacked when Karst explains, after George asks why the other stokers were to die in his plot, answers, “You don’t matter” (20). Shaw and Cottman suggest that communist leaders are perfectly willing to sacrifice the individual to the “people’s cause” to which they only pay lip service. “The only way to ensure my plan was to get you to believe my fine speeches. Then *you* worked for me! I’m the one who matters” (20). The play warns how easily even the educated can be swept away by the menace of communist rhetoric; the description of George notes that he has “*evidently received what is optimistically called ‘higher education’*” (11).

This early demonstration of Shaw’s vehement anti-communism is important, given the nature of later accusations of conspiracy. Researchers and authors such as Joan Mellen, James DiEugenio, William Davy, and Jim Garrison argue that “free trade” advocate Shaw was involved with anti-communist groups and individuals, and was an informer for and asset of the CIA while he was head of the International Trade Mart in New Orleans, the predecessor of the World Trade Center there. “Shaw’s friends were extreme conservatives,” Mellen writes (129). Shaw’s involvement with groups infiltrated or backed by the CIA, such as the CIA front business PERMINDEX, Italy’s Centro Mondiale Commerciale, and anti-Castro Cuban exiles, connects him with ultra right-wingers, neo-fascists, and old-world aristocrats, all fierce anti-communists (Mellen 131-42, Garrison 100-04, Davy). Such parties held that John F. Kennedy was dangerously “soft on communism” and ought not to have withheld promised air support at the Bay of Pigs. Shaw, an international businessman serving American establishment neo-colonialist interests in Latin America (Gibson 171), did a banana-bunch of spying for the CIA (Mellen 134, Davy 195-201). Lee Harvey Oswald was also connected to the CIA, who “sheepdipped” the compliant Oswald as a “communist” with staged sidewalk scuffles and agitation for “Fair Play for Cuba” and TV talk show appearances of an ostensibly Marxist-Leninist Oswald. According to evidence presented by Professor Donald Gibson, Professor Joan Mellen, Jim DiEugenio, William Davy, and many others, Oswald, Ferrie, Russo, and Shaw were all radical right-wing anti-communists despite Oswald’s leftist front and Shaw’s “FDR-Wilsonian-liberal” facade.

*Stokers*, then, helps to further challenge Shaw’s presentation of himself, promulgated by charmed defenders such as James Kirkwood, as a classic “liberal” who felt that Kennedy was “a splendid president.” As is evident from such famous cases as Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, poets, playwrights, and patrons of the arts are not necessarily left-leaning in their politics. On a sidebar, in light of Garrison’s accusations, there is an odd coincidence: *Stokers* depicts a middle aged man attempting to guide a younger man named Leon (as Lee Oswald was known to some) into a conspiracy to kill a prominent man of the power elite, with the intention of letting Leon be sacrificed in the end. In the play, however, the “not unusually intelligent” working-stiff Leon is never convinced. The real patsy here is George, also revealed to be an indecisive coward in the end. Karst fails to escape with his life, but neither does anyone else in the end. Thus the peril of Red rhetoric and as George’s father puts it, the “Parlor Pink” tragedy.

Politics doesn’t play as obvious a role in Cottman-Shaw’s second one-act play, *A Message from Khufu*, which exploited the contemporary craze for Egyptology following

Howard Carter's discovery of the King Tutankhamen tomb in 1922. Featuring an ancient Egyptian curse, deadly green vapors that dispatch those who disrespect the bones of Khufu, and a tomb wall that closes when an emerald is removed from a Khufu's time-wasted hand, to the contemporary reader the play is reminiscent of the adventure movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. According to the publisher, "a very successful contest play," *Khufu* seems to have been fairly successful if not nearly so as its predecessor. Howard University produced the play in 1933 ("Theatrical").

Relevant to later events, this play, using a sarcophagus with hieroglyphics and set in the Great Pyramid of Khufu at Giza, evidences Shaw's interest and facility in symbolism, code, and mysticism. The color symbolism of green, signifying envy and avarice, and connecting to Khufu's emerald, operates as Professor Arthur Hardin is revealed to be selfish and corrupt, determined to take all the credit for the discovery from Professor Britling, who is heading the overall excavation. Hardin plans to pocket and sell Khufu's emerald, refusing to share with his handsome assistants, who are AWOL from the Foreign Legion. Motivated by avarice, one of his helpers, Butch, suddenly stabs him to death. Also related to green, the Great Pyramid of Khufu is featured on the back of the U.S. One Dollar bill, tying into the play's theme of the consequences of greed, and tapping into mystical Egyptian symbolism, such as that commonly deployed by the Freemasons. Ben, the only character who feels that ignoring the curse of Khufu and disrespecting the tomb and sarcophagus is wrong, is the only one who survives when he replaces the emerald in Khufu's bony old hand and the stone wall re-opens. Here we find something indirectly political: a critique of Western, colonial Social Sciences plundering and disgracing the sacred burial grounds of non-First World and indigenous cultures and nations. After all, these men are led by a corrupt, greedy archeologist named Arthur.

Shaw's literary interest in hieroglyphics and their suggestion of enigma, encryption, and code foreshadows Shaw's involvement in the clandestine, enciphered world of the CIA. With regard to Garrison's charges later made at Shaw, one interesting coincidence is that in the original production of *A Message from Khufu*, Shaw played the brawny villain, dark-haired Butch, who knifes and kills the leader, the selfish archeologist Professor Arthur Hardin (played by co-author Cottman in New Orleans). Butch's use of a knife as weapon, penetrating another man, suggests phallic homosexual sadism. And surely there is some campy in-group humor evident in the fact that Shaw, an unusually tall and broad-shouldered masculine gay man, is playing a character named "Butch." (Recalling that this play is the work of men under twenty, it is also tempting to also see "Hardin" as a pun of "hard on" in Arthur's excitement and rapaciousness at the discovery of Khufu.)

Shaw and Cottman's Egypt play was in some ways a sequel to their most famous work, the 1929 tragedy *Submerged*. This debut, along with being their most successful and produced play, is also the most relevant to Clay Shaw's later involvement in conspiracy to murder President Kennedy, and crucially, features a character actually named "Shaw." As the title may suggest, the play carries Freudian undertones; the literal denotation of six trapped sailors submerged in the wrecked sub is paired with the

connotation of the subconscious, what lies beneath the surface of a person's actions and stated motivations.

The trapped submarine crew, the victim of a violent storm, is forced into one compartment of the sub, because water has broken into an adjacent part of the craft. The noble commander at one point informs the crew that the sub's oscilloscope is broken so they haven't been sending out distress signals after all. The commander announces to them that after much thought he has decided that the only hope is for him to sacrifice himself by launching himself out of the torpedo hold. This means certain death, but the plan is to strap their location onto his body, which will float to the top and be spotted by rescue ships. The conspiracy-minded reader notes here the introduction of the idea of the head, the "commander," being sacrificed for the good of the body, the social unit. This is a similar logic to that of the anti-communist conspirators who figured that the "soft on communism" commander-in-chief, JFK, must be sacrificed for the good of the body politic, in the face of the communist threat.

Despite the commander's noble decision, the crew refuses to allow the great man to sacrifice himself, in what amounts to mutiny. Two of the men volunteer to go in his place, while a third steadfastly refuses. They ultimately decide to draw cards and whoever has the highest card will be shot into watery oblivion, perhaps to save the rest. The "coward" Brice draws the highest, but he cowers and blubbers, saying he doesn't want to go. The "dreamer" Shaw steps up and offers himself as sacrifice, saying, "I wouldn't let you put him through that tube now if I had to kill every one of you with my bare hands. Now you've got to let me go" (40). Embracing death, he reveals, "I never did care. What does it matter, this endless, futile struggle. If I want to do it, I can. And I do want to do it" (41). Shaw injects Freudian and archetypal symbolism here, with Shaw's fascination for the sea representing his attraction to the mystery of death: "Who knows what lies out there? Many beautiful things are far beyond the imagination . . . Who knows what I may see?" (41). Shaw's obsession with the mystery of the sea and death, reveals Freud's Thanatos, or death drive. "It seems to me I've been searching for something all my life. I haven't found it, however much I've looked. The sea has always had something to tell me. I never could learn what it was. Maybe I'll find out now," Shaw says (41). The fact that the willing sacrificial lamb Shaw is ejected out of a phallic submarine to his doom, but to the possible rebirth of his fellows, suggests the connection between death drive and orgasm, Thanatos and Eros. (The coward Brice gets his comeuppance, as becomes a trademark of the Cottman-Shaw one-acters, since the remaining crew locks him into another compartment of the sub, which then unbeknownst to the rest, springs a leak.) The fate of the rest of the crew is unknown, but there is at least a shred of hope that the commander's plan, with Shaw as the sacrifice, will bring about their rescue.

The character Shaw in this play is most fascinating considered in light of later events and statements of Clay Shaw. In these plays, Clay Shaw reveals a literary mind facile in symbolism, allusion, and metaphor. If there is a correspondence between the character Shaw and the author Shaw, I wish to call attention to, first, the notion of the death drive, Thanatos, mixed with the life force, Eros, and second, Shaw as sacrificial lamb. It is today generally understood that Shaw was a gay man who participated in

sadomasochism (S/M), which I am not judging in the least. An FBI memorandum dated March 2, 1967 from W. A. Branigan to W. C. Sullivan, routed to several others, states that the FBI received reports in 1954, 1964, and 1967 that Shaw is “homosexual.” In 1964 one informant tattled that he had sex with Shaw, whom he described as a “brilliant and powerful man, given to sadism and masochism in his homosexual activities” (Davy 293, “Some”). Chains, five whips, ropes, black robes, several leather strips, “cat-of-nine-tails,” and “marble statues of penises” were all found in the upstairs bedroom of Shaw’s home by detectives following his arrest (Brenner 113, Tyler). But “the thing that astonished” former assistant D.A. William Alford most was two “very large hooks” mounted in a white beam on the bedroom ceiling. “You could clearly see, to the side of each hook, full handprints” on the white surface, Alford states in director Stephen Tyler’s documentary on Garrison’s investigation, *He Must Have Something*. “They were significant enough that you could tell many hands had been next to those hooks” (Garrison 171, Tyler).

Clay Shaw and his New Orleans high-society and media friends, and literary friends including Kirkwood, countered that these exotic items were merely Mardi Gras costumes. This, while likely true in the case of certain items, still doesn’t account for the hooks and leather straps, nor does it explain why “the whips had on them what appeared to be dried blood” (Garrison 171). If they were also Mardi Gras costumes, Shaw himself remarked that such garb exposes an inner truth: “Mardi Gras, the day we mask up and reveal our true selves” (Kirkwood 342). As *The Cuckoo’s Nest* would echo the style of Oscar Wilde, here Shaw echoes Oscar Wilde’s *bon mot*, “give [a man] a mask and he’ll tell you the truth.”

Shaw is said to have been particularly fond of the masochistic (M) role. Assistant D.A. William Alford states that after examining all of the evidence, “the logical conclusion that [he] arrived at was that” Shaw “had a masochistic side to him” (Tyler). Perry Russo, who testified for the prosecution, said that his “friends . . . people I’d generally associated with”—all participants in the S/M scene in New Orleans into “whips and belts and chains and belts” in Russo’s words—were well aware that Clay Shaw “entertained those kind of desires” (Kirkwood 611). Director Oliver Stone portrayed Shaw as a masochist in *JFK* but it must be noted that the scene was sensationalistic, exploitative, and homophobic and was denounced by some gay writers and critics such as Gore Vidal (Weir). Masochism is arguably a manifestation of Thanatos and Eros in a controlled situation. The masochist (M) desires to be hurt, punished, humiliated, maybe even to have his or her life threatened, and while this is exciting and arousing for the M, the S and M both know that they will not cross a certain line, no one will die.

But when Jim Garrison arrested and prosecuted Clay Shaw in New Orleans, the stakes were higher. Garrison knew that Shaw was only one small piece of the conspiracy, probably one involved in managing Oswald’s activities in New Orleans (Gibson 171). But with David Ferrie, Jack Ruby, Lee Oswald, and Guy Banister all dead, Garrison had to work with what he had, so he focused most of his energies and scrutiny on Shaw. Garrison did not have access to many of the then-classified documents that confirmed Shaw’s extensive involvement with the CIA (Mellen 143). With the aid of

information not available until after Garrison's death, Mellen, DiEugenio, and Davy make a strong case for Shaw's deep connections with the CIA, building upon Garrison's *On the Trail of the Assassins*. Shaw, who was seen by several witnesses in close company with Lee Harvey Oswald and David Ferrie in the town of Clinton, Louisiana (eight of whom testified to this under oath), was clearly involved with the conspiracy, but the precise extent of his involvement is still murky, even when we learn of all his CIA, anti-communist, ultra right-wing, and old-world aristocratic ties.

Like his dramatic alter ego Shaw, Clay Shaw was sacrificed, this time by the CIA, who felt that Americans were no longer buying the "lone-nut assassin" narrative. Shaw was to be a "limited hang out," a sacrificial lamb to attract attention away from CIA complicity. They knew that Garrison would not be able to prove Shaw's CIA involvement with the evidence to which he had access. In light of this sacrifice of Shaw, it is fascinating that when Shaw was asked before and during the trial, "how do you feel," Shaw repeatedly, to the point where Kirkwood says he could reply for Shaw, smiles and declares, "I feel like a spring lamb," (100, 101). Kirkwood, though a great storyteller, (see his novels *P.S. Your Cat is Dead* and *There Must Be A Pony!*) did not possess a particularly analytic mind, and never comprehended the significance of this repeated remark, which Shaw wanted to be recorded in the press and in Kirkwood's book. Here Shaw reveals his gift for symbolism and allusion. A "spring lamb" is a young suckling lamb, and while the expression "to feel like a spring lamb" connotes feeling energetic, with Shaw's literary mind and facility with symbolism, other layers reveal themselves. First, it also suggests that he is as innocent as a white, pure lamb. But "Spring lamb" also connotes "sacrificial lamb," a scapegoat. A sacrificial lamb is killed for the good of the rest of the social unit, who remain pure or are purified by the blood sacrifice. Clay Shaw knows he is being made a sacrifice by the CIA, and what's more, on some level, like his character "Shaw" in *Submerged*, something deep within him welcomes it, is excited by it. Shaw's repeated remark amounts to communicating to insiders that he is being sacrificed. Those with inside knowledge of his role as a CIA asset would be able to decode Shaw's remark when it appeared in print. Kirkwood—whose book, while significant and well-written, lacks "a shred of political insight" (Mellen 522)—never grasps Shaw's deeper meaning or wonders why he persisted in using that particular idiomatic phrase.

Shaw, at some level welcoming his own possible sacrifice, never behaved in the expected manner of a man accused of conspiring to kill a president. Shaw's cool affect and emotional bearing during the trial seemed strange to some observers. He even seemed cheery and affable prior to, and after each day's trial proceedings, with smiles and handshakes for the press and audience. James Kirkwood describes one of Shaw's entrances into the courtroom: "There seemed to be a genuine smile upon his face as he said, 'Good morning, good morning!' to members of the press and then took his seat [...] his early morning spirits were not dampened" (96). In the courtroom, whenever Shaw was spoken of, whether accused of conspiracy or homosexuality by the prosecution's witnesses, he would look each speaker directly in the eye, without a hint of suspicion, bitterness, or anger, almost seeming to welcome the verbal onslaught. Simultaneously, his death drive manifests in his chain smoking throughout the whole trial, a habit that would cause lung cancer, killing him in 1974.

Stated plainly, the Garrison-Shaw trial can be understood as a public performance of S/M. Like his character Shaw in *Submerged*, Shaw is at some level attracted to the idea of being sacrificed, of surrendering to death, the withheld telos of masochism. Garrison plays the role of sadist. Perry Russo's testimony was crucial for the prosecution's case, as both sides pointed out in their closing arguments, and Russo's words were likened to sadism by *S/M participants themselves*. Russo's friends, who as stated are into the S/M scene and know Clay Shaw to be also, "wondered where [Russo] was at" when they learned he was testifying against Shaw (Kirkwood 611). Russo said they teased him: "who am I beating up now," they would ask him, "and all that sort of stuff. They'd just rap on . . . I got a lot of that" (Kirkwood 611). As District Attorney, Garrison personally or through his detectives interrogates, surveilles, and arrests Shaw. During the trial he puts Shaw through a grueling, lengthy legal process, one that exposes Shaw's secret sexuality via witnesses like Russo, humiliating him. Shaw lived highly discrete public and private lives. Meanwhile Garrison himself doesn't even appear in court during most of the proceedings, as if to taunt Shaw with the image of Garrison relaxing in the pool or slumber room at the New Orleans Athletic Club (a male homosocial milieu that many of the city's power players, including Shaw and Garrison, frequented) while Shaw is laid out under the spotlight of public scrutiny. But in the back of Garrison's mind he doesn't know with any precision *how* guilty Shaw is, even if he is sure that Shaw is not innocent. Yet because Garrison is sure Shaw is involved to some extent, he wants to hurt and humiliate him.

Garrison didn't really want Shaw to die, as is fitting to the S role. Strangely, when Shaw was found not guilty, Garrison was "relieved." "I was really glad myself when the verdict came in. I felt relieved for the defendant," Garrison remarked (Kirkwood 574, 488). This seems like a rather unusual reaction, since, as Kirkwood noted, if you really know that someone was conspiring to kill the President, you would want him found guilty and punished. This suggests that Garrison was less than 100% sure that Shaw was deeply involved in the conspiracy. Today much more evidence, marshaled by Mellen, Davy, Gibson, and DiEugenio, points to Shaw's complicity much more forcefully, but Garrison was not allowed to access this.

So both Shaw and Garrison were on one level hoping for the guilty verdict, with Shaw subconsciously desiring to be that sacrificial "Spring lamb," a masochistic martyr like his character Shaw. On the other hand Garrison was consciously hoping for a guilty ruling to further debunk the Warren Report's conclusion that Oswald was a "lone-nut" assassin. But on another level they both wanted the "not guilty" ruling that was handed down—Shaw, consciously, for obvious reasons and Garrison, perhaps only subconsciously, due to his lack of unequivocal evidence that would clarify the extent of Shaw's involvement in the conspiracy. With the unavailability of slam-dunk evidence in Garrison's case and doubts about Perry Russo's and oddball Charles Spiesel's testimony, Garrison probably knew that it was unlikely that Shaw would be found guilty, yet he needed to expose the Warren Report and screen, for the first time, the Zapruder film in a public forum. Certainly a guilty verdict would strengthen the public's belief in conspiracy. Both Garrison and Shaw realized that a guilty verdict, though unlikely, was

possible, adding to the high-stakes S/M thrill of the case, that could actually lead to the M's eventual death if things got out of hand. Shaw was found not guilty, but according to Shaw his finances were depleted by legal costs and he had to go back to work (restoring and selling houses in the French Quarter) rather than pursue his desire to renew his writing.

Clay Shaw's plays have led me to a new, perhaps unusual way of thinking about the Garrison-Shaw trial. Regardless, what these plays reveal about Shaw's sexuality, politics, and psychology make them important documents that have heretofore been neglected. The importance of literary techniques such as symbolism and allusion to Shaw and their relevance to the assassination trial should not be ignored, nor the importance of Shaw's self-concept as a writer, a rhetorician, and weaver of tales. These plays help to establish at an early age Clay Shaw's homosexuality, his masochism, his death drive, and his stark anti-communism. These attributes support the arguments made by Garrison, Davy, DiEugenio, Gibson, and Mellen that Shaw was a conspirator. Beyond the relevance to later events, the Cottman-Shaw plays are economical, entertaining, sometimes thought-provoking minor works. *Submerged* was even dusted off for a 1997 production, a part of the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival. They are worth a read on their own merit, the product of a forgotten Twentieth Century gay playwright.

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