



# SLEUTH

**S**ir Laurence Olivier once denounced "Sleuth," a play currently showing at Theatre in Port, as "a piece of piss." A bit ironic, considering the actor was nominated at the Oscars a few years later for his starring role in the film version.

Anthony Shaffer, the British author of this thriller, found his own play inescapable as well. He was a plagued man, after all. Shaffer quit his advertising job in the 1960s to experiment with LSD and become a writer, he had a twin brother who also wrote plays as his competition, and he hated detective stories, making it his personal mission to expose the mystery genre for its overly elaborate plots, class hatred, and formulaic characters.

"Sleuth" is primarily about a mystery writer leading his wife's new lover into a diabolical trap. Naturally, the stakes are high in this story where the two main characters try and outdo one another. And in this classic match-up, everything is done according to an old-school code of conduct.

What are these men playing for? The three staples of masculinity: money, sex, and power.

Terry Belleville skilfully plays Andrew Wyke, the wealthy and arrogant English novelist in "Sleuth." Wyke considers the detective stories he writes as "recreation for noble minds." However, when his estranged wife becomes involved with a new lover, Wyke's exalted sense of self is beset by jealousy and anxiety.

Wyke invites his rival, Milo Tindle, played by Edward Belanger, to his mansion so they may discuss his wife's lavish taste. Their friendly banter is a ruse for Wyke, who'd rather play games. For him "the surest way to a man's heart is through humiliation," and he plans to attack Tindle, hitting below the belt and aiming right for his wallet. Tindle, the naïve, working-class son of an Italian immigrant, is assumed to

be easy prey.

Belleville's performance oozes with the palpable desperation of one who's been cheated. He paces and delivers Wyke's wry one-liners with gusto. Belanger as Tindle, however, struggles with maintaining his British accent. At times, his portrayal fluctuates as well. One moment he's an inexperienced young man, then later a drunk manic.

Although sex is a frequent topic in "Sleuth," it's treated more like a business deal than a passionate liaison. The two men exchange sexual yarns to assert their masculinity; Wyke thinks of himself as an Olympic athlete in the bedroom, while Tindle claims to be the tender, romantic type. Yet they both speak of their lovers as objects to be won or traded in a transaction. Wyke even tries to reclaim his prize, shrieking that his ex is "mine, whether I love her or not!"

Later, another character notes how Wyke regards marriage itself as a game. Promptly delivering his retort, Wyke says, "Sex is the game, marriage is the penalty!"

Being an author of traditional detective stories, Wyke is also obsessed with murder, to the point where he sees it as a fine art. As Wyke becomes more frantic, it becomes increasingly important for him to prove his superiority. This power is linked directly to intelligence. Although he has more experience playing the trickster than Tindle, Wyke presumes victory before the

game is truly over.

Sleuth's numerous plot twists and drive come from the constant one-upmanship between the two adversaries. For the audience, though, it's hard to feel involved as neither character really evokes a sense of sympathy. In the end, many of the qualities associated with the mysteries Shaffer despised also afflict the overall enjoyment of his play. The story begins simply enough, but then again, it's all fun and games until...

[BY KATYA DIAKOW]

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BY ANTHONY SCHAFFER  
PLAYS FROM OCTOBER TO NOVEMBER 3  
AT THE THEATRE IN PORT  
PORT MANSION, PORT DALHOUSIE  
BOX OFFICE CALL 934-0575 EXT. 226