EQUUS: A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

THESIS

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By

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The play *Equus* presents a series of dialectics, opposing forces in dramatic tension. The multi-leveled subjects with which Shaffer works confront each other as thesis and antithesis working towards a tentative synthesis. The contrasts include the conflict of art and science, the Apollonian and Dionysian polarity, and the confrontation of Christianity and paganism. Modern man faces these conflicts and attempts to come to terms with them. These opposites are really paradoxes. They seem to contradict each other, but, in fact, they are not mutually exclusive. Rather than contradicting each other, each aspect of a dialectic influences its counterpart; both are necessary to make a whole person.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. ART VERSUS SCIENCE</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. APOLLONIAN VERSUS DIONYSIAN</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. CHRISTIANITY VERSUS PAGANISM</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The play *Equus* presents a series of dialectics, opposing forces in dramatic tension. The multi-leveled subjects with which Shaffer works confront each other as thesis and antithesis working towards a tentative synthesis. The contrasts include the conflict of art and science, the Apollonian and Dionysian polarity, and the confrontation of Christianity and paganism. Modern man faces these conflicts and attempts to come to terms with them.

In the case of art versus science, Alan personifies art and Dysart, science. Art is capable of transcending the everyday world, yet the destructive side of it paralyzes Alan. Science can benefit many people, yet it does not afford the transcendence Dysart longs for.

Similarly, the Apollonian and Dionysian confront each other in *Equus*. Dysart is the Apollonian man, rational and moderate. Alan is Dionysian in nature; he represents the irrational, intemperate mind. However, neither Alan nor Dysart is a complete being. Each must learn to have both the Apollonian and Dionysian in his life.

The third major dialectic in *Equus* is the conflict between Christianity and paganism. The Christian world is
shocked by Alan's paganism, yet Alan's unique religion is based on Christianity. Alan's departure from Christianity is due to a need for a more personal, meaningful relationship with God.

Before studying the play *Equus* itself, one might look at the background and development of its author, Peter Shaffer. Shaffer was born a twin (his brother is Anthony) in 1926 in Liverpool, England. He attended the St. Paul's School in London and worked during World War II as a conscript in a coal mine. He then attended Trinity College in Cambridge for three years where he studied history on a scholarship. 

In 1951 Shaffer came to the United States to work in New York. He wrote television plays later produced in Britain, including *The Prodigal Father*, *Balcony of Terror*, and *The Salt Land*. At the same time he was working in the acquisitions department of the New York Public Library on 42nd Street and at a Doubleday bookstore. During most of this period he lived in the infamous Hell's Kitchen area. 

*The Salt Land*, which dealt with the then new state of Israel, was particularly important to the young playwright. Although Shaffer was Jewish, he had never visited the fledgling country. However, the 1955 BBC production was well received, and it gave Shaffer the confidence to turn to a full-time writing career. 

Besides *Equus*, Shaffer's other plays include *Five Finger Exercise*, *The Private Ear*,
The Public Eye, The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Black Comedy, White Lies, and Shrivings.

Shaffer currently lives in London but spends several months a year in New York. He has pianos in both of his apartments and plays well. His other interest is collecting African masks. His fascination with New York continues, "being still entirely possessed of his fantasy concerning her, and how knowing with his eyes, ears, and inwards that she is the most beautiful and dreadful city on earth."  

A discussion of Shaffer's other works is necessary and beneficial for several reasons. With the exception of Equus and Shrivings his works are out of print and not widely known. In addition, as one examines the body of Shaffer's work, certain themes, motifs, and images emerge. Thus, one can see the development of the ideas which lead to the creation of a work such as Equus.

In 1958 Shaffer's first theatre play was produced in London and became a great success. Five Finger Exercise was brought to New York in 1959 and enjoyed a long run on Broadway too.

This drawing room play concerns the tensions within a family. The father, Stanley Harrington, is a furniture manufacturer. His wife, Louise, is a cultured, stylish woman. The son, Clive, is about nineteen years old; he is nervous, intelligent, but likeable. His sister, Pamela, is a happy, carefree child. The German tutor, Walter Langer, has been employed to teach
Pamela while the family is residing in the country. At twenty-two Walter is warm and precise.

In almost all of the plays Shaffer refers to Greece. In Five Finger Exercise Clive is fascinated by the Greek tragedies, an interest which Stanley views as silly and impractical. Clive and his father's continuous confrontations cause the boy great anxiety. The contrast between Clive and the other characters is the basis of the play. Clive tries to agree with whatever each parent says, but they are generally in conflict. Louise constantly criticizes Stanley for being uncultured and materialistic.

Clive finally screws up enough courage to tell his father that he wants to study poetry and the arts at Cambridge. Stanley does not understand Clive's direction because it is not useful; however, Louise defends Clive by her usual insults toward Stanley.

Pam and Walter enter, and as they banter, Walter reveals his hatred for Germany and his desire to make a home in England. Clive tells him he is lucky not to have a family, but Walter thinks Clive is the fortunate one. In fact, Walter would very much like to be part of the Harrington family. The contrast between Walter and Clive is an example of a recurring theme of Shaffer's, the theme of opposites. Clive wants to reject his family, but Walter wants to adopt that very family. Louise gives Walter a pet name as she has done for Clive in the past. The closer Louise and Walter become the more obvious is Clive's jealousy of their relationship.
Two months later when Clive is home from college on vacation, the family situation is still tense. Clive argues with his father, criticizing the cheap furniture he makes. Shaffer often uses stereotypes in his characterizations. The middle-class man, forceful, narrow-minded, opinionated, and aggressive is seen here in the form of Stanley.

Clive rejects his father's work as a furniture manufacturer. Stanley is so concerned with Clive's making a decision for the future that he is unable to see Clive for what he is. Shaffer emphasizes the importance of self as well as meaningful work. Clive tries to explain this concern to his father:

I am myself. Myself. Myself. You think of me only as what I might become. What I might make of myself. But I am myself now— with every breath I take, every blink of the eyelash. . . . But we can never exchange. Feelings don't write us, don't you see? They keep us apart. And words don't help because they're unreal. We live away from our skins minute to minute, feeling everything quite differently, and one minute's just as true about us as any other.7

Louise again sides with Clive, which only serves to increase the gap between father and son. The only person Clive is really able to communicate with at this point is Walter. Clive is typical of another stereotype Shaffer uses, the young man trying to find himself. But Louise's friendship with Walter has grown too; he confides in her regarding his knowledge of the evil in Germany and wins her sympathy by claiming to be an orphan. As Louise holds first Walter's hand and
then his face, Clive walks in on them and speaks in drunken confusion of Louise's French but unaristocratic background. Louise is similar to some of Shaffer's other middle-class women. Although she is middle class, she pretends to be of higher social standing. Clive warns Walter that Louise is manipulative and asks Walter to vacation with him at Christmas. Walter refuses because he wants to belong to the family too much. Clive, hurt by the rejection, reaches out for his father. Unable to communicate with him, he accuses Walter and Louise of kissing. Stanley responds by hitting him.

The following morning Louise tells Clive that he must not be jealous. However, Clive tries to persuade Walter to return to Germany. Walter finally admits that he is not an orphan; his father, a former Nazi from Auschwitz, has beaten him constantly. Nevertheless, Clive still wants Walter to leave.

Louise tries subtly to seduce Walter, but the young man misinterprets her suggestions and asks her to be his new mother. Devastated, Louise cools towards him and begins to talk to Stanley of divorce. She asks him, also, to fire Walter on the pretense that Pam has a crush on him. Stanley sees through the ruse and fires Walter, accusing him of trying to seduce Louise. He names Clive as his informant, but Clive confesses to having lied. He admits the real damage he and his mother have caused has been the damage to Stanley.
Louise is shattered by the preceding events. She even accuses her son of being homosexual. Walter, too, is destroyed by the crumpled illusion of the family he ideally loved; he tries to gas himself but fails. At the end Clive can only pray for courage for everyone.

The next plays Shaffer wrote were two short plays, The Private Ear and The Public Eye (1962). These also met with great success in London and New York. The Private Ear, another play of opposites, takes place in the attic apartment of Bob, an awkward young man totally lacking in self-confidence. Like Clive in Five Finger Exercise, he is the stereotype of the young man trying to find himself. His friend, Ted, who is cocky, extroverted, and slightly older, is helping Bob get the apartment ready for a date. Again, Shaffer uses the theme of opposites by placing the shy, awkward boy in a competitive situation with an aggressive, smooth man.

Bob has met Doreen at a music concert and has invited her over for dinner. Ted's role is to insure that Bob "scores" by fixing the dinner, serving it, and bridging the conversation gaps.

While waiting for Doreen to arrive, Bob reveals his nervousness and likens Doreen to a Greek goddess. The Greek reference is typically Shaffer. Bob reads from a handbook about Venus, envisioning Doreen:

"Venus, that is to say Humanity, is a nymph of excellent comeliness, born of heaven. Her soul and mind are Love and Charity. Her eyes,
Dignity. Her hands, Liberality. Her feet, Modesty." All signs, you see. "Venus is the Mother of Grace, of Beauty, and of Faith."

The idealized vision of the girl is doomed to be destroyed, for, after all, Doreen is not a goddess. She arrives, an ordinary, pretty girl, and they make stilted conversation.

After dinner Bob cleans up and Doreen and Ted have a chance to talk. She confesses that she knows nothing of music, Bob's great passion, and that she is sorry to have accepted the date. Ted proceeds to try to seduce her while Bob eavesdrops. Bob walks in and argues with Ted, who leaves abruptly.

Bob and Doreen talk, and the audience hears some of Bob's philosophy: the importance of doing something crucial rather than busy work; the importance of feelings. Like Clive in Five Finger Exercise, Bob senses the importance of self-awareness:

We weren't born to do this [busy work]. Eyes. Complicated things like eyes, weren't made by God just to see columns of pounds, shilling, and pence written up in a ledger. Tongues! Good grief, the woman next to me in the office even sounds like a typewriter. A thin, chipped old typewriter. Do you know how many thousands of years it took to make anything so beautiful, so feeling as your hand? People say I know something like the back of my hand, but they don't know their hands. They wouldn't recognize a photograph of them. Why? Because their hands are anonymous. They're just tools for filing invoices, turning lathes around. They cramp up from picking slag out of moving belts of coal. If that's not blasphemy, what is?
Doreen tries to leave but Bob gets her to listen to one more song, the love duet from *Madama Butterfly*. She responds to the music and they kiss, but he becomes too eager; she struggles to free herself by slapping him. He makes excuses by lying to her about a girlfriend (in reality Ted's) and finally blurts the name of the company where he and Ted work so she can get in touch with Ted. After she leaves he viciously scratches the record and plays the ruined record as the curtain falls.\(^\text{12}\)

The *Public Eye*, produced with *The Private Ear*, also involves three characters in dramatic tension: Charles Sidley, an accountant, Shaffer's typical middle-class man; Belinda, his pretty, young wife; and Julian Cristoforou, a private investigator. Julian is of Greek descent; he jokes, "My father was a Rhodes Scholar. I mean he was a scholar from Rhodes."\(^\text{13}\) His Greek background indicates that he is a sensual man, a man of feelings.

Julian comes to see Charles and indirectly informs him that Julian is the investigator who has been watching his wife as Charles requested. The marriage is in trouble and Charles suspects another man, hence the investigator. Charles reveals that when he met his wife she knew nothing. She was a waitress in a pub. He taught her everything: culture, style, taste. In turn, she showed him her youth.

Julian admits to Charles that Belinda is seeing another man, but only in public. They never touch or speak, but they
exchange secret smiles and glances of deep meaning. Belinda arrives and Julian apparently escapes through a back door without being seen. Charles confronts Belinda with the knowledge she is seeing someone else; Belinda confesses and describes the man, who Charles realizes is Julian. Clearly, Charles and Julian are opposites because Shaffer places them in dramatic tension.

Belinda discovers Julian eavesdropping in the hallway. The men tell her of Julian's occupation, and Julian orders Charles to go out for ten minutes so he can be alone with her. Julian tells Belinda she is really in love with Charles and offers to help them cement their marriage back together. She reveals that Charles' jealousy is unfounded; she should be the jealous one since he occasionally sees a prostitute.

Julian suggests that Belinda should guide Charles for one month in order to show him her interests as she did with Julian. However, they are not to speak so that Charles can discover how to feel. Julian explains the plan to Charles, offering to take Charles' job in his absence. Julian has had many jobs in the past, a fact of which he is proud. A job can be wrong for a person not only because the man fails the job. Julian boasts, "I had twenty-three positions before I was thirty. . . . I know what you're thinking. A striking record of failure. But you're wrong. I never fail in jobs, they fail me." Dysart in Equus feels the same way. He
does not feel that he is unworthy of filling his job as psychiatrist, but that "the job is unworthy to fill me."\(^1\)

Charles resists Julian's plan, but finally agrees when Julian threatens to blackmail him with the information about the call girl. Charles leaves to follow Belinda as Julian takes a customer's phone call.\(^1\)

The next play Shaffer wrote, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964), was the first contemporary work to be produced by England's National Theatre.\(^1\) The scope and production of the play were much grander than anything Shaffer had attempted before, and, again, it was very successful in both London and New York. Like Shaffer's other plays, it centers around two contrasting figures. The play begins in Spain in 1529. Francisco Pizarro is gathering an expedition to go to South America. Some join for the promise of gold, others to convert heathens. Pizarro explains his reason as the search for fame. As an illegitimate child he tended pigs; now he wants the world to recognize him forever. Young Martin, a boy, goes because he has romantic ideas of chivalry and war. In this play he is Shaffer's typical young man.

Pizarro learns that Atahuallpa, King of the Incas, has all of the fabled gold. The King has fought his half-brother for control of the kingdom. Like Pizarro, he is also a bastard. The Incas revere him as God on earth, the son of the Sun. He wears the ancient sun god mask. The use of the mask is a technique Shaffer later uses in *Equus*. 
As the Spaniards travel into Inca territory, they observe and learn the laws and civilization the "pagans" have. Pizarro immediately grasps the difference between the two civilizations:

Here shows every country which teaches we are born greedy for possessions. Clearly we're made greedy when we're assured it's natural. But there's a picture for the Spanish eye! There's nothing to covet, so covetousness dies at birth.

Challcuchima, the Inca general, greets Pizarro and delivers Atahuallpa's message: Pizarro is to meet him at Cajamarca, approachable only by an arduous mountain-climbing journey. Atahuallpa assumes that Pizarro is a god coming to pay homage; Pizarro leads the messengers to believe that the assumption is correct.

At the meeting the Spaniards massacre the Indians and capture Atahuallpa. Young Martin is sickened by the idea of murdering unarmed men. DeSoto, Pizarro's second-in-command, tries to justify the massacre in the name of Christ, but Martin does not believe him.

Atahuallpa strikes a deal with Pizarro (against DeSoto's advice) of exchanging the King's freedom for enough gold to fill a large room. While they are waiting for the room to be filled, Pizarro and Atahuallpa become friends, realizing that although they are opposites, they have much in common.
A study of opposites is the basis for *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. Pizarro and Atahuallpa represent the Christian versus the pagan, man versus God, the conqueror versus the conquered, the old versus the young. However, in some ways they are similar. They are both conquerors and bastards, and they both die. This theme is carried out in Atahuallpa's song:

You must not rob, O little finch.  
The harvest maize, O little finch.  
The trap is set, O little finch.  
To seize you quick, O little finch.  

Ask that black bird, O little finch.  
Nailed on a branch, O little finch.  
Where is her heart, O little finch.  
Where are her plums, O little finch.  

She is cut up, O little finch.  
For stealing grain, O little finch.  
See, see the fate, O little finch.  
Of robber birds, O little finch.  

In the harvest song the maize is the gold and Pizarro is the robber bird. But Pizarro reminds him that Atahuallpa, too, is a robber bird: "You killed your brother to get the throne!" The black bird is nailed on the branch as Christ was nailed on the cross. Since this is the fate of all robbers, it foreshadows the death of both Pizarro and Atahuallpa.

After the room is filled with gold, Atahuallpa is ready to leave, but he cannot promise safe journey to the Spaniards. Consequently, Pizarro reneges on the deal and keeps him prisoner.
Pizarro, an old man, is dying. As the Spaniards melt down the gold and divide it, Pizarro tells Atahuallpa that he must kill the Inca but that Atahuallpa should realize that time is the only thing of true value. Atahuallpa promises him renewed life if only Pizarro will believe the King is God. The dying man converts.

Meanwhile, Pizarro's men try Atahuallpa for the crime of murdering his half-brother and find him guilty. In order to avoid death by fire, Atahuallpa converts to Christianity and the Spaniards strangle him.

The Incas are dejected when Atahuallpa is not resurrected. Pizarro dies next to him, and Martin, now an old man, leaves the stage disillusioned.  

The next year Shaffer wrote a farce called Black Comedy, yet another success. The characters of this play include Brindsley Miller, a sculptor (the young man); Carol Melkett, his debutante fiancée; Miss Furnival, the spinster who lives upstairs (the middle-class woman); Colonel Melkett, Carol's commanding father; Harold Gorringe, Brindsley's gay neighbor, an interior decorator; Schreppanzigh, the German worker for the London Electricity Board (the middle-class man); Cleo, Brindsley's clever mistress; and Georg Bamberger, the hard-of-hearing wealthy art collector. They interact with each other under conditions of stress.

The trick of this play is in the staging. When the lights are off, the lights are on as far as the actors are
concerned. When the lights on stage are on, the actors are fumbling around as if they were in the dark. Such staging anticipates the experimental techniques which come to fruition in *Equus*.

Brindsley and his fiancée are expecting Georg Bamberger to come to Brindsley's flat to see his sculpture. Also invited that evening is Carol's father. In order to impress the men, Brindsley has "borrowed" some antiques from his neighbor, Harold, who is supposedly away for the weekend. While waiting for the visitors to arrive, Carol and Brindsley straighten the flat, and Carol questions Brindsley concerning his former loves. Brindsley mentions Cleo rather evasively.

Suddenly, a fuse blows and the lights go out (they go on on the stage). As the other characters enter, they reveal in this crisis their true natures: Colonel Melkett becomes shaky under pressure, Miss Furnival is a secret lush. Under normal circumstances Miss Furnival is religious and spinster-like. She is typical of Shaffer's middle-class women as she comments on the working class:

> They're not here to help, my dear. In my young days you paid your rates and you got satisfaction. Nowadays you just get some foreigner swearing at you. And if they think you're of the middle class, that only makes it worse.22

Harold arrives and ultimately discovers that Brindsley has borrowed his precious antiques. Much of the hilarity rests
on Brindsley's attempt to move them back to Harold's apartment without his knowing it. Harold is revealed as a petty, hysterical bitch.

The man from the electric company arrives to fix the fuse, but in the dark he is mistaken for Mr. Bamberger. Everyone attempts to flatter him and ask his views on art, which he expounds on.

Cleo arrives, senses the situation, and makes the most of it. She makes Carol look completely ridiculous and adds to Brindsley's discomfiture. By the end of the play Brindsley's relationships with Carol and Harold have totally disintegrated. Bamberger is locked in the cellar and Cleo has won Brindsley back. The play ends with the electrician throwing on the lights, which, in fact, is a blackout.

Produced concurrently with Black Comedy was a one-act play entitled White Lies. Shaffer not only uses contrasting characters but also parallel ones. The play revolves around Sophie, a middle-aged fortune teller, who lives in a run-down Victorian flat. A lonely woman, she worries about money and visits with her parakeet, Pericles, and a picture of a young man named Vassili. Vassili, Sophie's secret love, is a Greek student; his background is part of his attraction to her. A lonely woman with severe financial problems, she can muse, "Maybe it's specially Greek to laugh at the serious things of life." When she finally reveals to Vassili the truth of her own background, she justifies her lies to him:
Look, everyone cheats a little, my darling, even your Greek witches. What do you think your famous oracle at Delphi was doing?—one silly cow sitting in a lot of smoke, saying exactly what she was paid to say!

Sophie is an example of Shaffer's middle-class woman character. A young man, Frank, knocks on her door and offers her a proposition. He wants to play a joke on his best friend Tom, who is in love with Frank's girl Helen. Sophie is supplied with facts from Tom's past and present and is told to tell his future as follows: Tom is in bed with Helen and sees Frank enter; Helen goes to Frank, and they both spill oil on the bed and set fire to the bed.

Tom, a character parallel to Sophie, comes to Sophie to have his fortune told, and she tells it as Frank has instructed. But Tom reveals that his real childhood is different from what he has told Frank. Sophie tells him of her past. Vassili was a boarder Sophie had five years ago. She pretended to be a baroness and the young man loved her or, at least, what he thought she was. He had a fiancée so Sophie did not reveal her love for him, but, instead, encouraged him to marry the girl. Sophie broke off the relationship with Vasili because of her lies. Sophie finds out that Tom really loves Helen. He is attracted to her eyes. Shaffer's use of eyes as an image is explored in depth in *Equus*. In *White Lies*, Tom confesses that he is in love with Helen's eyes; this love parallels Sophie's love for Vassili's eyes. Tom tells Sophie,
"... I'm in love with feelings I see in her eyes--and I know they don't exist. They're only what I read into them." And Sophie muses, "Eyes. It's always the eyes." She tells Tom to tell Helen the truth about himself in order to let Helen love him for what he really is.

Frank discovers that Sophie has spoiled his joke. He takes back the money he has paid her and sets the parakeet loose. Clearly, Tom and Frank are shown to be opposites. Tom is kind and sensitive, in contrast to Frank, who is cruel and ugly. The play closes with Sophie discarding the picture of Vassili.

Shaffer wrote another play after Equus which was published but never produced. Shrivings (1974) deals with the relationship of four characters: Sir Gideon Petrie, a philosopher and President of the World League of Peace; Lois Neal, his young American secretary; Mark Askelon, a poet and former student of Gideon's; and David, Mark's teenage son (the young man). The play takes place at Gideon's house, Shrivings. Gideon, Lois, and David are planning a sit-in in Parliament Square to be held that weekend. Mark arrives, and the contrast between him and Gideon is immediately apparent. Mark is a drinker, an atheist; he is dirty and outspoken. In contrast, Gideon is a saintly man, a vegetarian, a committed pacifist.

Shaffer again refers to Greece in this play. Mark Askelon has lived in Greece. His dead wife, a woman of
instinct, was formerly a dancer. They lived in Corfu, where he did the majority of his writing.

David is living with Gideon after dropping out of Cambridge. Currently making furniture, he is searching for answers and direction. The confrontation between Mark and Gideon affects him most deeply. He is constantly trying to get Lois to fall in love with him, but she consistently rejects him.

Meanwhile, Mark worships in his room a crude shrine which holds his dead wife’s ashes. Again, Shaffer uses the image of eyes. Mark tells Lois about his dead wife’s eyes:

They were quite miraculous, you know. Round the pupils flared a sunring. In all other ways she was quite ordinary... but her eyes never lost their light. God knows where she got them. Her father was a grey civil servant with eyes like a carp. Her mother’s, two clams on a plate of spaghetti. I can only conclude, therefore, that Giulia’s were miraculous.29

But Mark’s son’s eyes haunt him. They accuse Mark in a way that Giulia’s never could. He screams to David, "Keep them on me, your eyes--your mother’s--yes! Ruined by me!"50 As the play progresses, Mark’s true feelings about his wife are revealed.

Mark speaks of a student he saw in New York protesting the Viet Nam War. Some workers in hard hats beat the child and tore clumps of hair from his head. The public murder of the boy parallels the private murder of Mark’s wife.
Mark proposes a battle: his cynicism versus Gideon's humanism. If Gideon throws him out after the weekend, he will win; but if Gideon keeps Mark and converts him, there is still hope that man is capable of goodness, that he is improvable.

Gideon, Lois, and David decide to fast during the vigil. After the first day they return to find Mark cooking meat. Lois and Gideon still fast, but David joins him in the meal.

Mark tells them all of a psychology experiment in which there was a board with six buttons which controlled electric wires hooked to an actor who was bound and gagged. People were asked to help with a scientific experiment. They were told the buttons ranged from a mild shock to a death button. Then they were left alone to play. Seventeen out of seventeen pushed the death button.

Gideon shows how Mark has exaggerated the experiment, so Mark offers an experiment at Shrivings. Using green apples, "the buttons of Original Sin," Mark says he will be the victim as long as he has the right of free speech. Mark sits in a throne David has made and is tied up with a string.

Mark proceeds to insult them and begins with Lois. He insinuates that she is in love with Gideon because he abstains from sex. But Mark claims Gideon's vow of chastity was made out of guilt because he was bisexual. David becomes so upset that he smashes the "death" apple. All go to bed, but Mark is shaken by the consequences of what he has done.
The next morning Lois asks Gideon to ask Mark to leave, but Gideon refuses, knowing that if he does, he loses. He also explains to Lois that his giving up sex was not due to guilt, but to the fact that he had come to view it as an aggressive act.

Gideon and David go for a walk and Mark continues the battle. He seduces Lois and lets Gideon and David know about it. Then he tells David that he is not his son, that he is illegitimate.

Gideon still refuses to ask Mark to leave, even though he is badly shaken. Mark tells David the real reason he neglected him for so many years. David always feared the death in his father's voice, which made Mark hate himself. The awe and reverence his wife gave him caused him to hate her because he knew he was unworthy of it. When his wife became totally paralyzed, he brought a girl in the bedroom and made love to her in front of his helpless wife. She died shortly after that incident.

David is shocked by his father's confession. He starts to strike Mark but, instead, kisses him. Meanwhile Lois, totally disillusioned with Gideon, taunts him. He finally strikes her.

Mark approaches Gideon and asks him to take his hand. Gideon, who is so changed now, finally drinks some soup from the spoon Mark holds as Mark says, "Peace."
Many of the themes, techniques, and images found in Shaffer's other works are also in Equus. For example, the reference to Greece noted in the other plays is more fully developed in Equus. Dysart's hobby is Greek art, his vacations are to Greece, his dream takes place in Greece. The psychiatrist's preoccupation with Greece lays a background for the rich mythological symbolism not only of his own frustrations, but of the psychosis of Alan as well.

Shaffer has used the image of eyes in several of his plays. No wonder Shaffer was fascinated by the true story he heard of a boy in a rural English village who blinded twenty-six horses. The boy was said to be the son of "Thou shalt not" parents of a strange religious sect. The boy was seduced on the floor of a stable by a girl under the eyes of horses. In his mind the horses would go tell his parents. The eyes of the horses become a major symbol in Equus. Alan's father consistently prohibits him from using his eyes. He is not allowed to watch television, he is not allowed to look at the poster of Christ in his room, he is not allowed to watch the pornographic movie. Finally, the eyes of the horses prevent him from having intercourse with Jill. According to psychiatrist Jules Glenn, "The displacement from father to horse leads the boy to feel the piercing, prohibiting equine Godlike eyes observing and inhibiting his intercourse. In a fury, Alan attacks the horses' eyes and then, like Oedipus, guiltily attacks his own eyes."
Shaffer is also concerned with the importance of meaningful work. Alan, the boy in *Equus*, hates his job. He does not go into his father's trade, the printing business, because it is a dying craft. Instead, he has a routine job at an electrical appliance shop:

> I loved it. . . . You get to spend every minute with electrical things. It's fun.
> . . . Of course it might just drive you off your chump. 35

In his characterizations, Shaffer often uses stereotypes to emphasize the contrasting natures of his characters. One type that often appears is the young man trying to find himself. In this sense, Alan in *Equus* is a typical Shaffer character. He is awkward, nervous, shy with women, and uncertain about himself.

Another type which appears in Shaffer's plays is the middle-class man. He is forceful, narrow-minded, opinionated, and aggressive. Mr. Strang in *Equus* is an example of this type.

The middle-class woman also appears in Shaffer's plays. She is generally religious and spinster-like. Mrs. Strang in *Equus* fits this pattern. However, she feels herself above being middle class, as do two other middle-class characters, Sophie in *White Lies* and Louise in *Five Finger Exercise*. Mr. Strang tells Dysart, "My wife has romantic ideas, if you receive my meaning. . . . She thinks she married beneath her. I daresay she did. I don't understand these things myself." 36
A technique which Shaffer repeats is the use of masks. In *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Atahuallpa wears the ancient sun god mask. In *Equus* the actors playing horses wear horse masks. The use of the mask reminds the audience of ancient drama and, again, lends texture to the use of mythology in the plays themselves. Shaffer comments on the masks used in *Equus* along with the bare set:

> There are almost no props in the play. It's as bare as a table. I like that a lot. It exercises the imaginative muscles of the audience.57

The recurring theme of opposites is fully explored in *Equus*. In the play, Alan and Dysart are apparently different. Alan is an insane young man; Dysart, a sane child psychiatrist. However, like Pizarro and Atahuallpa, they do have something in common: their inability to cope with ordinary sexual experience, their fascination with myth, and their desire to destroy.

Dr. Jules Glenn, a psychiatrist, has studied the contrasting figures in Shaffer's plays and feels that Shaffer's fascination with opposites is partly due to the fact that he is a twin:

> The protagonists in the plays manifest characteristics and interactions of twins even though they are not represented as such. Among these traits are identification, role reversal, intense rivalry and affection, as well as a desire to keep things "even."58
The desire to keep things "even" is evident in *Equus* when Alan will only answer Dysart's questions if he is allowed to question the psychiatrist. By answering in turns, "the antagonism characteristic of twins can be dampened by making things even. For a twin's hostility arises to a great extent from his fantasy that he is but half a person, deprived of his double, the other twin who is similar to him."39

In *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* the twinlike behavior of Pizarro and Atahuallpa is apparent. Atahuallpa's father divides the kingdom into two parts for his sons, but Atahuallpa wants it all, so he kills his brother. This twinlike action of retrieving the lost half has its roots in mythology. Oedipus' twin sons were supposed to rule in turns, but instead they battled for the kingdom. Atahuallpa rationalizes the fight with his brother by claiming the dead brother was only fit to tend herds. Pizarro emphasizes the latent twinship he has with Atahuallpa by reminding him that his job in Spain was tending pigs.40

In *Equus*, the twin symbolism is heightened. Alan is fascinated with the word "Equus" because he has never seen a word with a double u. Glenn comments, "We may suspect that an unconscious pun manifested itself here, that a twin-like image of two adjacent 'you's' existed."41 The jingle Alan chants in the beginning of the play is a commercial for Double Diamond Beer. For the American production Shaffer changed it to Doublemint gum, a product which uses twins in its commercials.42
The end of the first act of Equus finds Alan riding the God-horse in a meadow. Glenn argues that this scene enacts the twin fantasy. Twins feel they were originally a single organism in the womb and that later they were split in two. The fantasy is to join once more to undo the loss of half a body. When Alan fuses with the horse he cries, "Make us One Person!"

The dialectics presented in Equus are complex and fascinating. Certainly Dr. Glenn's theory of twin fantasy is interesting as to why Shaffer is so concerned with opposites. The antagonism and simultaneous duality of two characters possessing latent twinship offers the possibility of contrast which is not mutually exclusive. This paper is intended to examine closely the contrasts Shaffer uses in Equus: Apollonian and Dionysian; artistic and scientific; Christian and pagan.
NOTES


3 Tom Buckley, "'Write Me,' Said the Play to Peter Shaffer," New York Times, 13 April 1975, Sec. 6, p. 25.

4 Shaffer, Shrivings, p. 215.

5 Guernsey, p. 146.


7 Shaffer, Five Finger Exercise, p. 57.

8 Shaffer, Five Finger Exercise.

9 Guernsey, p. 146.


11 Shaffer, The Private Ear, p. 53.


13 Shaffer, The Public Eye, p. 66.

14 Shaffer, The Public Eye, p. 65.


16 Shaffer, The Public Eye, pp. 63-120.

17 Guernsey, p. 146.

19 Shaffer, Royal Hunt, p. 160.
21 Shaffer, Royal Hunt, pp. 146-68.
23 Shaffer, Black Comedy, pp. 47-123.
24 Shaffer, White Lies, p. 11.
25 Shaffer, White Lies, p. 22.
26 Shaffer, White Lies, p. 33.
27 Shaffer, White Lies, p. 34.
28 Shaffer, White Lies, pp. 9-42.
29 Shaffer, Shrivings, pp. 188-89.
31 Shaffer, Shrivings, p. 172.
32 Shaffer, Shrivings, p. 211.
33 Buckley, p. 20.
35 Shaffer, Equus, p. 61.
36 Shaffer, Equus, p. 38.
39 Glenn, American Imago, p. 276-77.
40 Glenn, Psychoanalytic Quarterly, p. 296.
ART VERSUS SCIENCE

One of the dialectics in Equus is the contrast between art and science. These seeming opposites have nothing to say to each other, yet personified as Alan (art) and Dysart (science) they, in fact, influence each other greatly. They become no longer separate entities, but interwoven threads of the human mind.

The art of Equus originates in Alan's imagination, his conceptualization of Equus, and his pain. Alan likens the horse to an artistic performer, the ballerina:

"Have you noticed," he [Alan] said, "about horses: how they'll stand one hoof on its end, like those girls in the ballet?"1

The last scene before the end of the first act is tightly choreographed so that the boy and the horse seem to merge. The revolving stage heightens the sense of dance by giving the couple added visual movement. This technique, the 360° angle, mimes a technique used in another art form, film. The rotation of the stage results in the same visual perception as the use of the 360° angle lens in film.

Dysart includes Alan's pain as the art. Dysart knows he can take Alan's pain away, but he questions his
right to do it. Alan's pain is his art; it is self-created:

His pain. His own. He made it. . . . Look . . . to go through life and call it yours--your life--you first have to get your own pain. Pain that's unique to you. You can't just dip into the common bin and say "that's enough!" . . . He's done that. All right, he's sick. He's full of misery and fear. He was dangerous, and could be again, though I doubt it. But that boy has known a passion more ferocious than I have felt in any second of my life. And let me tell you something: I envy it (p. 94).

Alan's name even suggests his pain. Strang reminds one of the word "strangle." Alan, in fact, is strangling on his art.

Outside of his imagination, Alan has very little culture. His music consists of commercial jingles he has ingrained in his mind from watching television. He rarely reads books, a fact which embarrasses his father:

Actually, it's a disgrace when you come to think of it. You the son of a printer, and never opening a book! If all the world was like you, I'd be out of a job, if you receive my meaning! (p. 32).

The only stories he does absorb are the Bible stories and fairy tales his mother has told him and the Westerns on television. His mother, remarking on Alan's fascination with cowboys, says, "We saw an awful lot of Westerns on the television. He couldn't have enough of those" (p. 37). In his tape recording Alan explains the importance of cowboys to him:
No one understands! ... Except cowboys.
They do. I wish I was a cowboy. They're free.
They just swing up and then its miles of grass ... 
I bet all cowboys are orphans! ... I bet they are! (p. 56).

In hypnosis as he rides Equus, the cowboys watch him and honor him by taking off their hats.

Dysart understand the lack of culture in Alan's life.

The doctor knows that he is going to excise from Alan the one thing which is important to him, his art:

What else has he got? Think about him. . . . He knows no physics or engineering to make the world real for him. No paintings to show him how others have enjoyed it. No music except television jingles. No history except tales from a desperate mother. No friends. Not one kid to give him a joke, or make him know himself more moderately. He's a modern citizen for whom society doesn't exist. He lives one hour every three weeks--howling in a mist (p. 93).

However, Alan's art leaves him impotent. He is unable to have intercourse with Jill because of his art:

When I touched her, I felt Him. Under me ... 
His side, waiting for my hand ... His flanks ... I refused him. I looked. I looked right at her ... and I couldn't do it. When I shut my eyes, I saw him at once. The streaks on his belly ... I couldn't feel her flesh at all!
I wanted the foam off his neck. His sweaty hide. Not flesh. Hide! Horse-hide! ... Then I couldn't even kiss her (pp. 117-18).

The pain Alan is feeling, characterized by impotence and terrible nightmares as well as the violent crime he has committed, bring him into the world of science, the office of Dr. Dysart. Martin Dysart is a child psychiatrist in a provincial English town. He is overloaded with sick children.
In fact, he tries to refuse to take Alan's case when Hesther first approaches him because his schedule is so heavy. As he anticipates Alan's arrival, Dysart reveals his cynicism towards the science of the mind:

What did I expect of him? Very little, I promise you. One more dented little face. One more adolescent freak. The usual unusual. One great thing about being in the adjustment business: you're never short of customers (p. 25).

Dysart really does not like being a psychiatrist, a man of science. He tells Alan, "I don't actually enjoy being a nosy Parker, you know" (p. 100). Alan asks him why he does it. "Because you're unhappy," Dysart replies (p. 100).

Dysart feels the conflict between art and science. He cannot be creative due to the way of thinking which science affords him:

The thing is, I'm desperate. You see, I'm wearing that horse's head myself. That's the feeling. All reined up in old language and old assumptions, straining to jump clean-hoofed on to a whole new track of being I only suspect is there. I can't see it, because my educated, average head is being held at the wrong angle. I can't jump because the bit forbids it, and my own basic force--my horsepower, if you like--is too little (p. 22).

The scientific mind is trained to think by inductive and deductive reasoning. Dysart thinks that logic and creativity are not compatible. Even his name emphasizes the contrast; "Dysart" implies that in him art has died.

Dysart is married to another person of science, a dentist. His approach to sex is conducted in the scientific manner with "antiseptic proficiency" (p. 70):
We suited each other admirably. I see us in our wedding photo: Doctor and Doctor Mac Brisk. We were brisk in our wooing, brisk in our wedding, brisk in our disappointment. We turned from each other into our separate surgeries: and now there's damn all (p. 70).

Science even informs Dysart of his sterility. He and his wife cannot have children because he has "the lowest sperm count you could find" (p. 93). He cannot create on any level.

Dysart becomes more confused within himself as he treats Alan. The conflict between art and science seems insurmountable. Science cannot answer any of the fundamental questions that art purports to answer. This conflict makes him feel totally impotent:

A child is born into a world of phenomena all equal in their power to enslave. It sniffs--it sucks--it strokes its eyes over the whole uncountable range. Suddenly one strikes. Why? Moments snap together like magnets, forging a chain of shackles. Why? I can trace them. I can even, with time, pull time apart again. But why at the start they were ever magnetized at all--just those particular moments of experience and no others--I don't know. And nor does anyone else. Yet if I don't know--if I can never know that--then what am I doing here? I don't mean clinically or socially doing--I mean fundamentally! These questions, these whys, are fundamental--yet they have no place in a consulting room. So then, do I? . . . This is the feeling more and more with me--no place. Displacement. . . . "Account for me," says staring Equus. "First account for me! . . ." I fancy this is more than menopause (p. 88).

Dysart has a dream in which he takes the role of chief priest. However, in the dream he is really a scientist dissecting children:
Then, with a surgical skill which amazes even me, I fit the knife and slice elegantly down to the navel, just like a seamstress following a pattern. I part the flaps, sever the inner tubes, yank them out and throw them hot and steaming on to the floor. . . . It's obvious to me that I'm tops as chief priest. It's this unique talent for carving that has got me where I am (p. 29).

Dysart sees and is sickened by the violence with which he carves up the children. This violence of science parallels Alan's violence due to art. As Alan has struck at the horse's eyes, so does Dysart at his patients. He says, "I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking at heads!" (p. 125).

Dysart questions the scientist's right to interfere with art. He knows that Alan trusts him, that Alan wants to be free of pain. But Dysart is afraid he will remove more from the boy than just his pain:

My desire might be to make this boy an ardent husband--a caring citizen--a worshipper of abstract and unifying God. My achievement, however, is more likely to make a ghost. . . . I'll heal the rash on his body. I'll erase the welts cut into his mind by flying manes. . . . Hopefully, he'll feel nothing at his fork but Approved Flesh. I doubt however, with much passion! . . . Passion, you see, can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created (pp. 123-24).

To Dysart, being "normal" is not necessarily advantageous. He defines normal, the end result of his science, as follows:

The Normal is the good smile in a child's eyes--all right. It is also the dead stare in a million adults. It both sustains and kills--like a God. It is the Ordinary made beautiful: it is also the Average made lethal (p. 74).
After Alan abreacts, Dysart promises that he will now be well. But in his own mind, Dysart still feels that science will remove Alan's creativity permanently. He is afraid the boy will become like him:

When Equus leaves--if he leaves at all--it will be with your intestines in his teeth. And I don't stock replacements . . . If you knew anything, you'd get up this minute and run from me as fast as you could (p. 123).

Shaffer has been criticized by psychiatrists for Dysart's view that psychiatry destroys art. Dr. Sanford Gifford claims that therapy does not eliminate creativity:

The thrust of Equus is that if we give up our symptoms, we lose our imaginative powers and must accept a bleak, plastic "normality" without color or passion.²

Gifford says that Equus is, in fact, harmful to the science of psychology because it perpetuates a myth. He further claims that art and insanity are totally unrelated.³

Shaffer agrees with Gifford on this point. He does not believe "that Art and insanity have anything to say to each other. The greatest Art--the symphonies of Hayden or the paintings of Bellini--virtually defines sanity for me."⁴

The reader may assume that Shaffer's voice in Equus is not that of Dysart. Rather, Shaffer presents thesis (art) and antithesis (science) to form a tentative synthesis. The voices of this synthesis are those of Shaffer's point of view. By presenting opposites, he is trying to show how opposite they are in their extreme and how they can merge at their common point.
For example, Dysart (science) can trace all of the individual moments which led to Alan's present situation. But Shaffer in the voice of Mrs. Strang refuses the logical approach. At some point an individual forms his own ideas and perceptions; environmental and genetic influences cannot totally account for Alan's actions. Mrs. Strang tries to tell Dysart that his science cannot blame her for what Alan has done. She argues for the unique individuality of her son:

Whatever's happened has happened because of Alan. Alan is himself. Every soul is itself. If you added up everything we ever did to him, from his first day on earth, you wouldn't find why he did this terrible thing--because that's him: not just all of our things added up. Do you understand what I'm saying? I want you to understand, because I lie awake and awake thinking it out, and I want you to know that I deny it absolutely what he's doing now, staring at me, attacking me for what he's done, for what he is! (pp. 90-91).

Hester, the judge, is also the voice of Shaffer. She, too, is speaking of synthesis. She tells Dysart that he must make Alan normal. But normal to her is not a dirty word:

You know what I mean by a normal smile in a child's eyes, and one that isn't--even if I can't exactly define it. Don't you? . . . Then we have a duty to that, surely? Both of us (p. 72).

She has a great deal of compassion for Alan and a great deal of faith that Dysart can help him. She sees science as a means of freeing Alan, not of destroying him:

The boy's in pain, Martin. That's all I see. In the end . . . I'm sorry. . . . That stare of his. Have you thought it might not be accusing
you at all? . . . Maybe he just wants a new Dad. Or is that too conventional too? . . . Since you're questioning your profession anyway, perhaps you ought to try it and see (pp. 95-96).

Art and science are contrasted in Equus. Art, personified by Alan, can possibly be destroyed by science, specifically psychiatry, personified by Dysart. But Shaffer feels the strength of the individual and the viability of sanity are important values to the artist. Science, then, can help the artist towards a more productive life. True, it might destroy the art; Alan may become the passionless robot Dysart envisions. However tentative the synthesizing process might be, Shaffer does leave the audience the possibility that art and science are compatible, that Alan might yet belong to the normal, sane world in its very best sense.
NOTES

1 Shaffer, Equus, p. 87 (Hereafter, all references to Equus will be noted with page numbers in the text).


3 Gifford, pp. 1, 5.

4 Buckley, p. 38.
CHAPTER III

APOLLONIAN VERSUS DIONYSIAN

Perhaps the most significant contrast presented in Equus is that of the Apollonian versus the Dionysian. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, the Apollonian and Dionysian are both creative tendencies which are usually in fierce opposition. Furthermore, Morford expresses the Apollonian as the rational and the Dionysian as the irrational; they are forces of human psychology, philosophy, and religion. Both Apollo and Dionysos represent a basic duality inherent in the Greek conception of things. These contrasting forces may, however, be synthesized; Nietzsche says, "By the thaumaturgy of an Hellenic act of will, the pair accepted the yoke of marriage and, in this condition, begot Attic tragedy, which exhibits the salient features of both parents."

Nietzsche compares the Apollonian and Dionysian states to those of dream and intoxication specifically. The dream is in the Apollonian realm; one of the functions of Apollo is interpreter of dreams. Thus, Dysart, the psychiatrist, functions as an Apollo by interpreting the dreams of his patients.

The dream is in the realm of plastic art. The dreamer immediately apprehends form and shape, but he always senses they are illusions. Man experiences these dreams with
delight and a sense of necessity. This concept of the dream is in keeping with the Greek image of Apollo:

Apollo is at once the god of all plastic powers and the soothsaying god. He who is etymologically the "lucent" one, the god of light, reigns also over the fair illusion of our inner world of fantasy.

However, the dream may not become a reality. If it does so, it becomes pathological. Nietzsche is careful to differentiate between the dream state and consciousness. This limitation is in keeping with the image of Apollo, who prohibits extravagant urges.

Shaffer's characterization of Martin Dysart is like Nietzsche's description of Apollo, "reign(ing) over the fair illusion of our inner world of fantasy." As a dreamer also, he fits the Apollonian mold. His dream has form and shape; he envisions himself as a priest wearing a mask, which he describes clearly. The audience has a vivid picture of setting and space. However, when the dream becomes too threatening, the Apollonian doctor wakes up.

In contrast, the Dionysian state is like physical intoxication:

Dionysiac stirrings arise either through the influence of those narcotic potions of which all primitive races speak in their hymns, or through the powerful approach of spring, which penetrates with joy the whole frame of nature. So stirred, the individual forgets himself completely.

In his intoxicated state man radiates a supernatural power; it is the same power which makes animals speak. Man feels godlike. No longer an artist, he has become a work of art.
Alan Strang is intoxicated by the Dionysian. The first time he sees a horse, the smell and feel of the horse titilate his senses:

I was pushed forward on the horse. There was sweat on my legs from his neck. The fellow held me tight, and let me turn the horse which way I wanted. All that power going any way you wanted... His sides were all warm, and the smell... (p. 55).

The presence of the supernatural power is emphasized because the horse speaks to Alan. Alan is able to admit his feeling of intoxication at being near the horse. He says, "It was sexy" (p. 55).

Thus, the Apollonian is satisfied by his dreams. As plastic art they create an illusion which is separate from reality. In antithesis, the Dionysian realizes an ecstatic reality which either destroys him or redeems him through the mystical experience.⁹

Apollo is the ideal of the principium individuationis in whom the goal of original Oneness, i.e., redemption through illusion, accomplishes itself. Apollo shows man that there is a need for a world of torment in order for man to produce the redemptive vision. Man accomplishes this vision by sitting quietly, absorbed in contemplation.¹⁰ Dysart's fantasy is totally Apollonian in this respect. He would like to retire to a small village in Greece and look at the sea:

There's a sea--a great sea--I love... It's where the gods used to bathe... There's a village I spent one night in, where I'd like to live. It's all white (p. 100).
The Apollonian image demands self-control. This demand implies a knowledge of self. Thus, the god's dicta make sense: "Know thyself" and "Nothing too much." When Alan suggests to Dysart that they take turns telling secrets, Dysart agrees on the condition that they tell the truth. This corresponds to the Apollonian imperative, "Know thyself." Later Dysart gives Alan a "truth" drug so that Alan can abreact and reveal himself. Dysart rationalizes the use of the placebo by claiming that Alan "won't be able to deny it after that, because he'll have shown me. Not just told me--but acted it out in front of me" (p. 93).

Dysart follows the other Apollonian dictum as well. "Nothing in excess" characterizes his relationship with his wife. Alan accuses him of never having intercourse with Margaret:

I bet you don't. I bet you never touch her. Come on, tell me. You've got no kids, have you? Is that because you don't fuck? (p. 69).

Even Dysart's trips to Greece are moderate. He pretends his summer visits are Dionysian in nature, but he finally admits the reality of his sabbaticals:

Such wild returns I make to the womb of civilization. Three weeks a year in the Peleponnese, every bed booked in advance, every meal paid for by vouchers, cautious jaunts in hired Fiats, suitcase crammed with Kao-Pectate! Such a fantastic surrender to the primitive. And I use that word endlessly: "primitive." "Oh, the primitive world," I say. "What instinctual truths were lost with it!" And while I sit there, baiting a poor unimaginative woman with the word, that freaky boy tries to conjure up the reality! I sit looking at pages of
centaurs trampling the soil of Argos--and outside my window he is trying to become one, in a Hampshire field! ... I watch that woman knitting, night after night--a woman I haven't kissed in six years--and he stands in the dark for an hour, sucking the sweat off his God's hairy cheek! (p. 95).

Dysart yearns for the Dionysian experience, but his longing is a fantasy he cannot make real. For he, too, is a plastic, brisk person. He cannot comprehend the gods in the sense that Alan can, i.e., by becoming one with them. He is, at heart, an Apollonian. The thing that makes Alan's treatment so difficult is that Alan's Dionysian experience shows Dysart how Apollonian he really is:

The doubts have been there for years, piling up steadily in this dreary place. It's only the extremity of this case that's made them active. I know that. The extremity is the point! All the same, whatever the reason, they are now, these doubts, not just vaguely worrying, but intolerable (p. 22).

The extremity of the Apollonian—Dionysian duality confronts Dysart at the end of the first act. Dysart is left alone with the haunting memory of Equus:

I can hear the creature's voice. It's calling me out of the black cave of the Psyche. I shove in my dim little torch, and there he stands--waiting for me. He raises his matted head. He opens his great square teeth, and says--"Why? ... Why Me? ... Why--ultimately--Me? ... Do you really imagine you can account for Me? Totally, infallibly, inevitably account for Me? ... Poor Doctor Dysart!" (pp. 87-88).

The tremendous difference between the Apollonian and Dionysian is reflected in music. The primitive folk song is stirred by the Dionysian image. Nietzsche calls it "a musical
mirror of the cosmos." Alan's first utterings are modern folk songs, the television commercials, which have no significance to man other than a reflexive tune which sticks in the mind, rooted in the unconscious.

The music of the doctor is Apollonian: the tapping of a pen on the rail to hypnotize Alan. The sound has rhythm but is cold and contained:

The taps are evenly spaced. After four of them the sound cuts out, and is replaced by a louder, metallic sound, on tape. Dysart talks through this, to the audience—the light changes to cold—while the boy sits in front of him, staring at the wall, opening and shutting his eyes (p. 74).

The controlled Apollonian sound is contrasted to the sound of the approaching god, Dionysos, in the form of Equus. As Alan first enters the stables, the audience hears "an exultant humming from the Chorus" (p. 63). The rich sound of Dionysos is completely opposite to the metallic ring of Apollo.

The horse, itself, is a symbol of the Dionysian. The beginnings of animal symbolism are closely related to animal worship and animal totemism. The most generally accepted classification of animals with regard to symbolism lists mammals (because they are warm-blooded) with fire. After Alan rides Equus, he "twists like a flame" (p. 85). The action represents the fact that the god has possessed him.

However, the tamed animal reverses the symbolic meaning associated with the same animal when it is wild. Alan's
mother's concept of the horse is degrading to the god:

We've always been a horsey family. At least my side of it has. My grandfather used to ride every morning on the downs behind Brighton, all dressed up in bowler hat and jodhpurs! He used to look splendid. Indulging in equitation, he called it (p. 37).

To Alan, the dressing for the horse, the taming of the horse denies the animal its full expression. For the animal stands for the non-human psyche, the world of subhuman instincts, the unconscious area of the psyche. Thus, identifying with animals represents "the integration of the unconscious and sometimes--like immersion in the primal waters--rejuvenation through bathing in the sources of life itself."¹⁵

The animal with the power of speech is a Dionysian symbol. It also symbolizes the Golden Age, a period which preceded the intellect. The Golden Age was a time in which the blind forces of Nature were endowed with many extraordinary and exalted qualities. Thus, the horse speaking to Alan takes on a primitive, natural tone:

Dysart: You ask him a question. "Does the chain hurt?"
Alan: Yes.
Dysart: Do you ask him aloud?
Alan: No.
Dysart: And what does the horse say back?
Alan: "Yes."
Dysart: Then what do you say?
Alan: "I'll take it out for you."
Dysart: And he says?
Alan: "It never comes out. They have me in chains" (pp. 75-76).
The horse, specifically, is a Dionysian symbol:

It (is) an ancient symbol of the cyclic movement of the world of phenomena; hence, the horses, which Neptune with his trident lashes up out of the waves, symbolize the cosmic forces that surge out of the Akasha--the blind forces of primigenial chaos.16

The horse symbolizes intense desires and instincts.
Its association with water is evident in *Equus*. Alan's first encounter with the horse is on the beach. He hears the hooves splashing in the water. The association with water is also due to the horse's speed; he can also signify wind and sea-foam.17

The horse also pertains to the natural, unconscious, instinctive area.18 Alan's unusual attraction to horses begins at an early age. He does not consciously understand his love for horses. He only feels a magnetism toward them:

Every time I heard one clop by, I had to run and see. Up a country lane or anywhere. They sort of pulled me. I couldn't take my eyes off them. Just to watch their skins. The way their necks twist, and sweat shines in the folds ... I can't remember when it started (p. 56).

In antiquity horses often had powers of divination.
In fact, horses in fables are often clairvoyant; they give timely warnings to their masters.19 *Equus'* warning to Alan comes when Alan tries to have intercourse with Jill:

Dysart: And He? What does He say?
Alan: "Mine! ... You're mine! ... I am yours and you are mine!" ... "I see you. I see you. Always! Everywhere! Forever!"
Dysart: Kiss anyone and I will see?
Alan: Yes!
Dysart: Lie with anyone and I will see?
Alan: Yes!
Dysart: And you will fail! Forever and ever you will fail! You will see ME--and you will FAIL! (pp. (120-21).

An interesting note is that the horse is often associated with the myth and symbol of the Gemini, pairs or twins, in illustrations. The Indian Asvins, the probable source of the myth of Castor and Pollux, depicted themselves as horsemen. The horse is also found in medieval illustrations of the Gemini such as the Zodiac of Notre Dame in Paris. The pair of horses, usually one white and one black, represent contrasts such as life and death. Thus, the horse symbol supports the claim of latent twinship as described in the introduction.

However, Equus is more than a horse. He becomes a fabulous animal and, a powerful instrument of psychological projection. Sometimes the change from animal to fabulous creature is simple and positive such as that of Pegasus. Pegasus, the winged horse, sprang from the blood of the Gorgon Medusa, when Perseus cut off her head with help from the gods. In addition, Bellerophon rode Pegasus in his fight with the Chimaera. Pegasus is a symbol of the heightening power of natural forces, the innate capacity for spiritualization of a lower force. But usually the transformation from animal to fabulous creature is a more ambiguous and
complex process of the imagination. Most fabulous animals are ambivalent symbols, the importance of which is heightened by a belief in their great power as well as the magic suggested by abnormality.22

The centaur, part man and part horse, is a fabulous creature which Alan creates when he rides Equus. He cries, "Make us One Person!" (p. 85). The centaur is supposed to be the child of Centaurus and the Magnesian Mares. As a symbol it is the antithesis of the knight (an Apollonian image). It represents the complete domination of a being by baser forces and, thus, denotes cosmic force, instincts, or the unconscious, uncontrolled by the spirit.23

Another image which symbolizes the Dionysian is the eye. Although the eye is normally an Apollonian image symbolizing the sun, a source of light and spiritual and intellectual understanding, multiple eyes symbolize disintegration or psychic decomposition.24 The photograph of the horse in Alan's room is strange because "it comes out all eyes" (p. 52). The staring eyes of the horse in the photograph parallel Alan's stare, which is, in fact, the staring of the god Dionysos:

That's the Accusation! That's what his stare has been saying to me all the time. "At least I galloped! When did you?" (p. 94).

Jill thinks eyes are the most fascinating part of the opposite sex. She speaks, too, of horses' eyes; she teases Alan,
"I love horses' eyes. The way you can see yourself in them. D'you find them sexy?" (p. 103). Seeing oneself in the horse's eyes holds sexual and mystical connotations for Alan because it represents being one with the horse and, thus, one with the god.

The god Dionysos is the sole protagonist of tragedy according to Nietzsche:

all the famous characters of the Greek stage, Prometheus, Oedipus, etc., are only masks of that original hero. The fact that a god hides behind all these masks accounts for the much-admired "ideal" character of those celebrated figures. In Equus, the god is doubly masked; first, Dionysos is masked as Equus (and Alan), and second, Equus is physically masked. Shaffer describes the god-masks as follows:

On their (the horse actors') heads are tough masks made of alternating bands of silver wire and leather: their eyes are outlined by leather blinkers. The actors' own heads are seen beneath them: no attempt should be made to conceal them (p. 17).

The transformation from actor to horse to god is accomplished by the mask. By seeing the human head through the horse head, the audience is able to accept the elevation from ordinary beast to divine being. In this case the mask as a simple face expresses the solar and energetic aspects of the life process. The use of the mask in Dysart's dream symbolizes something altogether different. Cirlot speaks of the use of the mask as a transformation:
All transformations are invested with something at once of profound mystery and of the shamef ul, since anything that is so modified as to become "something else" while still remaining the thing that it was, must inevitably be productive of ambiguity and evaluation.27

Hence, the metamorphosis must be hidden; the mask is used to this end. Dysart's mask is "a white gold mask, all noble and bearded, like the so-called Mask of Agamemnon found at Mycenae" (p. 29). When the mask slips, threatening to reveal Dysart and endangering his life, he wakes up. The mask in his case is Apollonian; it reflects plastic art and differs sharply from reality.

The staging of Equus also reflects the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy which Nietzsche describes as being central to tragedy. The chorus which precedes the tragic chorus and tragedy is of utmost importance:

the chorus is seen as a living wall which tragedy draws about itself in order to achieve insulation from the actual world, to preserve its ideal ground and its poetic freedom.28

The chorus as a living wall, is more truthful in picturing reality than is civilized man. It gets at the eternal core of things rather than experiencing the entire phenomena of the world.29 It functions as a dispassionate observer.

In Equus, the entire cast sits on the stage throughout the performance. The actors, especially the horses, act as a chorus. Shaffer speaks of the Equus noise the chorus makes:
I have in mind a choric effect, made by all the actors sitting round upstage, and composed of humming, thumping, and stamping—though never of neighing or whinnying. This Noise heralds or illustrates the presence of Equus the God (p. 18).

The Greek theatre was a terraced structure with rising concentric arcs. Each spectator could view the cultural world and feel himself to be a member of the chorus. The staging of Equus mimics the ancient Greek theatre. The tiers of seats at the back of the stage form a backdrop, a wall of people, on which the Chorus as well as members of the audience sit. In effect, Shaffer asks the members of the audience to become members of the Chorus.

The chorus of primitive tragedy is a chorus of satyrs. It moves on ideal ground which is raised to differentiate it from the path of man. Scaffolding is built for this godlike realm and filled with nature spirits. The position of the stage makes tragedy free of copying reality. However, its position is real like Mt. Olympus. Thus, "the satyr, as the Dionysiac chorist, dwells in a reality sanctioned by myth and ritual." The ladders which hold the horse masks in Equus look like the primitive scaffolding Nietzsche describes. The box on the stage is a raised platform which is separated from the rest of the stage. Finally, the horses, part man and part beast, resemble the primitive satyr chorus. Shaffer directs the horse actors as follows:

The actors should never crouch on all fours, or even bend forward. They must always ... stand upright, as if the body of the horse extended invisibly behind them (p. 17).
The image of the satyr is central to the Dionysian celebration, of which the chief concern is sexual promiscuity. The satyr is man's prototype; it is indicative of man's own aspirations. The satyr is a reveler, filled with enthusiastic transport in the approach of the god. Yet, he is a compassionate companion by re-enacting the sufferings of the god.

Alan is fascinated with the idea of the satyr. His mother has told him that when the Christian cavalry first came to the New World, the primitive people thought horse and rider to be one person. In fact, the pagans thought it was a god. As Alan's worship of Equus becomes more developed, Equus tells Alan to become a satyr, to fuse with Him:

Dysart: What does he say to you?
Alan: "I see you." "I will save you!"
Dysart: How?
Alan: "Bear you away. Two shall be one."
Dysart: Horse and rider shall be one beast?
Alan: One person! (p. 76).

Equus promises Alan redemption through mystical oneness. The Dionysiac who wants truth and nature at their highest point sees himself changed into a satyr.

In tragedy there is always catastrophe. The Dionysian ecstasy Alan experiences in the field becomes terror in the stables. In the field he is possessed by the god in a sexual frenzy; in the stable he is possessed by the god in a sexual nightmare. After failing with Jill, "he turns on her hissing. His face is distorted--possessed" (p. 119).
After the point of catastrophe, the Apollonian and Dionysian synthesize. To the Dionysiac man like Hamlet, the apprehension of truth turns to terror:

The truth once seen, man is aware everywhere of the ghastly absurdity of existence, comprehends the symbolism of Ophelia's fate and the wisdom of the wood sprite Silenus: nausea invades him.

Then, in this supreme jeopardy of the will, art, that sorceress expert in healing, approaches him; only she can turn his fits of nausea into imaginations with which it is possible to live.35

Thus, Dysart comes to Alan to relieve his terror and make possible his normal existence.

Dysart, the Apollonian, also comes to terms with the Dionysian. He ultimately realizes he can never be a Dionysian, yet somehow he can accept the fact that it exists. He recognizes the Dionysian spirit even though he cannot explain it rationally:

I need--more desperately than my children need me--a way of seeing in the dark. What way is this? What dark is this? . . . I cannot call it ordained of God: I can't get that far. I will however pay it so much homage. There is now, in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out (p. 125).

Thus, Apollo and Dionysos reconcile. Although they keep their own bounds, each honors the other by periodic gifts.36

Yet, as Alan and Dysart show us, each needs the other in order to understand himself and exist.
NOTES


3 Nietzsche, p. 19.

4 Nietzsche, p. 32.

5 Nietzsche, p. 21.

6 Nietzsche, p. 19-21.

7 Nietzsche, p. 22.

8 Nietzsche, pp. 23-24.

9 Nietzsche, p. 24.

10 Nietzsche, pp. 33-34.

11 Nietzsche, p. 34.

12 Nietzsche, p. 43.


14 Cirlot, p. 9.

15 Cirlot, p. 13.
16 Cirlot, p. 144.
17 Cirlot, p. 145.
18 Cirlot, p. 145.
19 Cirlot, p. 145.
20 Cirlot, p. 145.
21 Cirlot, pp. 239-40.
22 Cirlot, p. 11.
23 Cirlot, p. 39.
24 Cirlot, pp. 95-96.
25 Nietzsche, p. 66.
26 Cirlot, p. 196.
27 Cirlot, p. 195.
28 Nietzsche, p. 49.
29 Nietzsche, p. 53.
30 Nietzsche, p. 54.
31 Nietzsche, pp. 50
32 Nietzsche, p. 25.
33 Nietzsche, p. 52.
34 Nietzsche, p. 53.
35 Nietzsche, pp. 51-52.
CHAPTER IV

CHRISTIANITY VERSUS PAGANISM

Another dialectic found in Equus is the contrast between Christianity and paganism. The Christian world in the play worships an abstract god and maintains a distance from that god. Dysart, Hester, and, especially, Dora live according to the Christian laws which govern little more than ethical behavior. In contrast, Alan worships an animal-god which is tangible; his pagan god governs his entire being until he is totally possessed by the god. However, these opposites also merge. Alan's pagan beliefs are strongly influenced by Christianity, and at least one Christian, Dysart, can understand Alan's departure from Christianity.

Alan is reared in a home in which religion is a divisive issue. Mr. Strang is an atheist, a fact which he admits freely. He disapproves of his wife's attempts to instill religion in Alan; in fact, he claims her excessive religiosity is the cause of Alan's problems:

A boy spends night after night having this stuff read into him: an innocent man tortured to death--thorns driven into his head--nails into his hands--a spear jammed through his ribs. It can mark anyone for life, that kind of thing. I'm not joking. The boy was absolutely fascinated by all that. He was always mooning over religious pictures. I mean real kinky ones, if you receive my meaning. I had to put a stop to it once or twice! . . . Bloody religion--it's our only real problem in this house, but it's insuperable: I don't mind admitting it (p. 39).
Whereas Frank blames Alan's neurotic behavior on Dora's teaching of the Bible, Dora, a devout Christian, explains Alan's problems as being from the Devil. She refuses to be responsible for what Alan has done:

If you knew God, Doctor, you would know about the Devil. You'd know the Devil isn't made by what mummy says and daddy says. The Devil's there. It's an old-fashioned word, but a true thing... I only know he was my little Alan and then the Devil came (p. 91).

But Dora's biblical teachings do influence Alan. She tells him stories about horses in the Bible. She quotes from the Book of Job (39:19-25):

Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?
Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible.
He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men.
He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword.
The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield.
He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet.
He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smellleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

But Alan never understands the passage as an illustration of God's power. Job has questioned God and has demanded to see God. The Lord's response, in part, is to show Job that the majesty and strength of the horse is derived from His power; He created it. But to Alan, the terrible wonder of the horse is divine in its own right.
Dora also tells Alan about the white horse in Revelation. Actually, there are two white horses in Revelation. The first refers to the white horse (in contrast to horses of other colors) as a conqueror:

And I saw and, behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer (Revelation 6:2).

Alan sees himself sitting on the white horse prepared to conquer the enemies of the horse as well as his own:

Alan: Tonight, we ride against them all.
Dysart: Who's all?
Alan: My foes and His.
Dysart: Who are your foes?
Alan: The Hosts of Hoover. The Hosts of Philco. The Hosts of Pifco. The House of Remington and all its tribe!
Dysart: Who are His foes?
Alan: The Hosts of Jodhpur. The Hosts of Bowler and Gymkhana. All those who show him off for their vanity. Tie rosettes on his head for their vanity! Come on, Equus. Let's get them! (p. 84).

The other white horse reference in Revelation concerns the second coming of Christ in His glory. Christ is sitting on a magnificent white horse as the writer sees Him:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called The Word of God.
And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, and LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:11-16).

Again, Alan misunderstands the passage. Instead of envisioning Christ on the horse, he sees himself. Alan is "faithful and true" to Equus, and only Alan knows the name of the horse-god.

Dora tries to teach Alan the concept of an omnipotent God. She tells him, "God sees you, Alan. God's got eyes everywhere" (p. 56). But the idea of a god seeing one's every move is terrifying to Alan. His mind is simply too literal to grasp the sophisticated meaning of an invisible, all-knowing God.

Alan's rejection of Christianity reveals the basic inadequacies which Nietzsche also perceives. Nietzsche finds Christianity to be a false system of ethics since the absolute truth of God implies that all art is false. Logically, therefore, according to Christianity, worldly life is not valuable; one is taught to hate the world with the illusory promise of a better life:

Thus it happened in those days, with this problem book, my vital instincts turned against ethics and founded a radical counterdoctrine, slanted esthetically, to oppose the Christian libel on life. . . . I christened it rather arbitrarily--for who can tell the real name of the Antichrist?--with the name of a Greek god, Dionysos.1
Alan's rejection of the harsh Christianity his mother forces upon him is similar. He turns to a vital, instinctual god which he names "Equus."

Alan's choice of the horse as god is influenced by his father. Frank tells Alan that television is "a dangerous drug" (p. 32). He also tells Alan that "religion is the opium of the people" (p. 34). Alan obviously sees that religion is a dangerous drug according to his father. On the beach Frank tells the horseman, "In my opinion that is a dangerous animal" (p. 48). Thus, Alan begins to equate the "dangerous" horse with the danger of religion.

Furthermore, Frank is the one who removes the picture of Christ from Alan's room. He gives Alan the picture of the horse which Alan hangs in the same place as the other picture.

Dysart understands that Christianity does not offer the meaningful, personal worship that Alan requires. He envies Alan's being able to conjure up a primitive god; Dysart is incapable of the kind of worship which makes life comprehensible. For him the horse's head is fundamentally unaccountable.

Because of his jealousy, Dysart questions the right to take Equus away from Alan:

He lives one hour every three weeks--howling in a mist. And after the service kneels to a slave who stands over him obviously and unthrowably his master. With my body I thee worship! ... Many men have less vital with their wives (p. 93).
Frank claims that religious people "always think their susceptibilities are more important than non-religious" (p. 39). In like manner, Dysart feels that by interfering with Alan's paganism, he is imposing his Christian ethics on the religion Alan has created for himself to make life meaningful.

Alan's worship of Equus stems from the myth of Equus and the ritual associated with it. Freud relates the development of myth to that of dreams which involves a three-step process: the condensing of daytime stimuli; the displacing of elements of the daytime experience; and the representing of the resulting elements in the form of symbols and images. Thus, Alan condenses the experiences of the horse on the beach, his mother's biblical teachings, and his father's admonitions. He displaces Christ with the horse and represents God as Equus. Walter Kerr speaks of the power of Equus which turns "a horrifying aberration into a contemporary myth."  

As is well known, myth is often closely associated with ritual. Cultic rituals on behalf of the gods include the offering of food or gifts, the cleaning of the temples, and the ritual recital of deeds coupled with requests for aid. Alan observes the traditional cultic rituals in his worship of Equus. However, these rituals are also closely associated with the ritual worship of Christ. For example, Alan offers Equus a lump of sugar, his gift to the god. But this gift is also a ritual of Communion, for Alan names it "His Last Supper" (p. 82). Alan
also participates in the cleaning of the temple by way of his job as stable boy. The stable is the temple of the horses, the place where cultic rites are performed. When Alan first enters the stable, he almost involuntarily kneels to the horses. Later, Dysart gets him to name the stable as the temple:

Dysart: Now: think of the stable. What is the stable? His Temple? His Holy of Holies?

Alan: Yes.

Dysart: Where you wash him? Where you tend him, and brush him with many brushes?

Alan: Yes (pp. 76-77).

Another cultic ritual which Alan performs is the recital of deeds. Frank, overhearing Alan's chanting, compares the recital to the lists of genealogy in the Bible:

Prince begat Prance. . . . And Prance begat Prankus! And Prankus begat Flankus! . . .

Flankus begat Spankus. And Spankus begat Spunkus the Great, who lived three score years! . . . And Legwus begat Neckwus. And Neckwus begat Fleckwus, the King of Spit.

And Fleckwus spoke out of his chinkle-chankle! . . . And he said "Behold--I give you Equus, my only begotten son!" (p. 58).

Part of the ritual that Alan observes is closely associated with Christianity. Equus' chinkle-chankle, the bit, symbolizes the chains in which Jesus was bound. Equus, born in the straw like Jesus, wears sandals like Jesus, which Alan ceremoniously places on his feet. The entire ritual of riding Equus, which takes place once every three weeks, is related to the trinitarian concept of Christ; Equus is reborn every three weeks in a meadow.
Alan is told by the horseman on the beach that in order to make the horse go he must say, "Bear me away" (p. 46). Shaffer comments on the religious symbolism of this phrase which Alan incorporates into the ritual worship of Equus:

There is an immense orgiastic release. The boy says to the horse "Bear me away," which is what a lot of religious poets say to God in their poetry. This particular god is capable of carrying him away. 5

However, parts of the ritual are unique to Alan's myth. The manbit which Alan places in his mouth is his own creation. It is sacred to his religion; he keeps it in a holy place. The timing of the putting on and taking off the horse masks conforms to the rites; the precise timing creates a ceremonial effect which is in keeping with the elements of cultic ritual.

The square on the stage which represents the temple is not only the temple of Equus, the stable. It also functions as the dissecting room, the temple of "the indispensable, murderous God of Health" (p. 74). It is also the temple of sex, the pornographic movie theatre. Alan comments on its religious quality.

All round me they were all looking. All the men—staring up like they were in church. Like they were a sort of congregation (pp. 105-06).

Furthermore, it is the field of Ha-ha where the Dionysian rites take place.

As a temple, the square on the stage symbolizes the intersection of heaven and earth. In temple symbolism it is an image of
paradise since vegetation seems to grow on its terraces. The temple is often seen as a mountain-top:

The climb to the top . . . [is] equivalent to an ecstatic journey to the "Centre" of the world; once the traveller has reached the topmost terrace, he breaks free from the laws of level; transcends profound space and enters a region of purity. The movement to the Centre reveals to man the meaning of the paradisal state and teaches him to identify with the supreme principle of the universe. Alan reaches the Centre as he rides Equus in the center of the raised square, the field.

The square on the stage is set on ball bearings on top of a circle. When Alan rides Equus, the square is rotated. The square, representing earth, and the circle, representing heaven, are, thus, united. The aim of squaring the circle, a symbol found in many temples, is to obtain unity in the material world and spiritual life over the differences and obstacles, the static order of the square. By rotation of the square, the quaternary is restored to purest simplicity and innocence.

As Alan rides Equus, he mystically and sexually becomes one with the god. This experience goes far beyond what Christianity offers him, for Christianity suggests redemption through death. Since sexual intercourse is a symbol of death, Alan finds redemption through sexual fusion with the horse. For this reason, Alan's case is "shocking" (p. 23); it violates the Christian ethic by pagan worship, specifically sodomy.
Shaffer comments on the sexuality of the horse:

The horse is a warm, beautiful, proud and ravishing object.... People can understand boys sexual interest in girls, and, today, boys in boys, but boys with horses? Yet horses quite clearly have a sexual identity. They are born savage and powerful--they could stamp us to death--but they are also submissive.

To Alan, sex and religion are directly related. Frank calls the preoccupation with religion "bad sex" (p. 40).

Alan's knowledge of sex from his mother has religious overtones:

I told him the biological facts. But I also told him what I believed. That sex is not just a biological matter, but spiritual as well. That if God willed, he would fall in love one day. That his task was to prepare himself for the most important happening of his life. And after that, if he was lucky, he might come to know a higher love still.... (p. 40).

Thus, Alan naturally relates his love of Equus with sexual love.

However, his love for Equus turns to guilt because of his impotence in "normal" sex. The god prevents Alan's rites of passage from adolescence to manhood. When Alan asks forgiveness for being attracted to Jill, Equus refuses and punishes Alan by promising that the boy will always fail sexually. The horse becomes the kind of god that Job envisions:

They [the horses] are archetypal images--judging, punishing, pitiless. They do not halt at the rail, but invade the square. As they trample at him, the boy leaps desperately at them, jumping high and naked in the dark, slashing at their heads with arms upraised (p. 122).
The contrast between Christianity and paganism is outlined. The Christian world is shocked by Alan's case, by the pagan god he has created, and by the ritual in which Equus is worshipped. However, much of Alan's religion evolves from Christianity. The myth of Equus is the synthesis of primitive worship and Christian dogma resulting in a horror for Alan which is only relieved by Dysart's capacity to understand the terror and its roots.
NOTES

1 Nietzsche, p. 11.


4 Kirk, p. 249.

5 Gussow, Sec. 1, p. 50, col. 2.

6 Cirlot, p. 316.

7 Cirlot, p. 39.

8 Cirlot, p. 293.

9 Gussow, Sec. 1, p. 50, col. 3.
CONCLUSION

Equus is a play of contrasts. The dialectics with which Shaffer presents his audience are those which modern man faces. However, resolution of these conflicts is not simple; there are no easy answers to the questions the conflicts raise. Dysart is able to respond scientifically to the whos, whats, and wheres, but why remains an enigma to him:

These questions, these Whys, are fundamental--yet they have no place in a consulting room. So then, do I? . . . This is the feeling more and more with me--No Place. Displacement. . . . "Account for me," says staring Equus. "First account for Me! . . ." (p. 88).

One conflict considered in Equus is that of art versus science. Art as personified by Alan is seen in both its positive and negative aspects. The creative force gives Alan the capability to rise above his mediocre life, to transcend the everyday world. However, it also destroys him; like Icarus, he is unable to control that which he has created.

In contrast, Dysart represents the scientific mind. He can be of great service to the children he treats, but science does not afford him the height, the passions that Alan experiences.

In a sense, resolution of the conflict between art and science is achieved through the relationship Alan and Dysart
establish with each other. As personifications of art and science, they have something to learn from each other. Alan trusts Dysart to deliver him from the destructive side of his being. Alan, the romantic, understands the need for some pragmatism in his life. And Dysart learns from the strange boy that art is not necessarily accountable but possibly experiential. The creative urge might not be explainable rationally, but one might be able to feel it enough to acknowledge its presence.

Another dialectic found in Equus is that of the Apollonian versus the Dionysian. Dysart as Apollo represents the rational, moderate being; Alan as Dionysus represents the irrational, intemperate mind. However, Shaffer demonstrates that man needs both. Man must have the Dionysian in his life in order to experience the richness, the texture, the fullness of life. Yet he must also have the Apollonian in order to remain in control of himself. Achieving a synthesis of these opposing forces is not a simple matter. In becoming more rational, Alan risks losing the Dionysian altogether. In searching for the Dionysian, Dysart risks losing touch with the reality of helping those who need him. Nevertheless, both Alan and Dysart must take those risks in order to live fulfilling lives.

A third dialectic in Equus is that of Christianity versus paganism. The Christian world which worships an abstract
god is shocked by Alan's paganism. Yet, the religion of Equus evolves directly from Alan's awareness of Christianity. Shaffer condemns the non-god he sees most Christians worship as much as the pagan god Alan creates. He offers the possibility of God as a personal, meaningful entity in man's life through the synthesis of this dialectic.

The opposites in Equus are really paradoxes. They seem to contradict each other, but, in fact, they are not mutually exclusive. Art and science, Apollonian and Dionysian, Christianity and paganism, as well as the minor dialectics of sexuality and impotency, romanticism and pragmatism, normality and abnormality are all parts of human life. Rather than contradicting each other, each aspect of a dialectic influences its counterpoint; both are necessary to make a whole person.
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