EQUUS: A PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION
BASED ON MYTH

THESIS

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The following study is divided into five parts. The first part examines the use of myth in *Equus*. Various interpretations of myth are presented and their relationship to *Equus* is explored. Chapter II covers the relevance of psychology to the play. R. D. Laing's comments on normalcy as the goal of society and Carl Jung's theories on the subconscious are both important to a study of *Equus*. The philosophy of Nietzsche helps explain some of the ideas in *Equus*, and Chapter III summarizes his contributions to the study. Chapter IV is a close look at the symbolism of the horse, and Chapter V deals with the yearning for transcendence as discussed by early German Romanticists. *Equus* is a romantic statement incorporating the fields of myth and psychology.
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CHAPTER I

THE USE OF MYTH IN EQUUS

The play Equus, by Peter Shaffer, was first presented by the National Theater of England in 1973. A year later, it opened in New York to enthusiastic reviews and capacity audiences. Shaffer was inspired to write the play by a relatively insignificant incident. A friend told him about a horrible crime, the blinding of twenty-six horses by a stableboy in rural England. Shaffer put away another play that he was working on and spent the next two years imagining the circumstances that might lead to such an event and rendering them in dramatic terms. The final result, the play Equus, is a splendid theatrical performance in addition to an intellectually stimulating challenge.

Equus is rich in symbolism and in allusions to both myth and psychology. The following study of these matters is divided into five parts. The first part shows the strong mythic overtones of the play. The second part interprets the play and its mythic overtones psychologically. Nietzsche's ideas on the Dionysian are explored with specific emphasis on the horse as a powerful symbolic and Dionysian element in the play. The last section
deals with the importance of the romantic concept of transcendence in *Equus*. The play is a psychological statement on the double-edged sword we all carry within us, creativity and its direct counterpoint, our capacity for destruction. It is concerned with the endless ambiguity of the human situation. Worship as a Dionysian experience, that envisages God as both conquering and submissive, judging and gentle, is a very important element in the play. Theologians and psychologists have commented upon the various inferences open to the viewer, but Peter Shaffer's admission of his own preoccupation with myth is the key that unlocks all the other interpretations.

A summary of the plot of Peter Shaffer's richly endowed play is necessary before proceeding any further. Dr. Dysart has been asked by a judge to take the strange case of Alan Strang. The judge, Hester, tells him that Alan's crime, blinding six horses, will only revolt others and that she has confidence in Dysart's ability as well as his compassion. He agrees and thus begins his confrontation of the boy and his own undoing. Alan has everything that Dysart feels he lacks. Alan has a strong passion for the thing he worships; Dysart has not even kissed his wife in years. Reconciling the two extremes becomes Dysart's task, for his life comes under
careful scrutiny and is also found lacking. One is reminded of the Greek motto "Nothing in Excess," for here two extremes confront each other.

After several sessions with Alan, Dr. Dysart gains his confidence and trust. The psychiatric detective story moves ahead relentlessly as we look for clues, for motives to Alan's behavior, the blinding of six horses in a stable. From time to time Hester appears to remind Dysart of his priorities, "Children before grown-ups." She serves as the stabilizing element in this drama which writhes in agony from beginning to end. She represents the cure, hope, and salvation that never come. Alan's re-enactment of his trauma is a success story for the Freudian method, but Dysart sees no hope, no salvation. The bit is still in his mouth, never to be removed.

Alan may be normal as the result of the therapy, but normal does not satisfy Dr. Dysart, nor does it satisfy Peter Shaffer. In all of his plays he has experimented with different forms and techniques. *Equus* stands alone as a work of art, a complete synthesis of Shaffer's thought and feeling up to this time.
The play Equus is composed of many separate identities, as is its author. In a review for the New York Times he said,

When I was younger, I often was invaded by this feeling of invisibility, of having no definite outline to myself and others. There seemed to be so many people inside me, all of them contradictory: I could not imagine the shape which could contain them all, and so assumed that there was none. Part of this was a sense of chameleonism. I was confused by the number of people there were in me. . . . Of course, this sense of being many people is not exclusive to playwrights. We are all walking encyclopedias of human experience.  

Equus is also a "walking encyclopedia of human experience." It not only reveals the many personalities and questions of its author, but it also encourages those in the audience to probe their own personalities. Myth is one way—perhaps the primary way—that people interpret experience, and it is through myth that this play must be interpreted.

In an interview for the New York Times Shaffer said, "The play grew from my preoccupation with myth, with my own mental life." He readily admitted that the stress in Equus is on myth and ritual. He deliberately wrote a play in which he could use masks, thereby conveying a sense of the Greek theatre as well as foreshadowing the mythic elements of the play. Shaffer prepared himself carefully to write the kind of play that he envisioned. Conferring with psychiatrists, reading books
on child and animal psychology, and visiting stables asking questions about horses were all part of his preparation. After destroying thirty to forty pages a day, he finally produced a copy that satisfied him in every way. Not only did he want a perfect theatrical performance, but also a work rich in allusion that would serve as food for the intellect.

Equus has been described by psychologists, theologians, and literary critics in almost as many different ways as myth has been approached (taking into account the "youth" of the play in comparison with the "age" of the myth). The approaches to myth vary, and the definitions of myth come in almost every conceivable size, shape, and form. The ambiguity on the subject implies the depth and richness inherent in the field of myth. The abundant mythic content of the play Equus portrays this depth.

Carl Jung, a psychologist whose work has profoundly affected the field of literature, warns against a narrow approach to myth. "Special knowledge is a terrible disadvantage. It leads you in a way too far, so that you cannot explain anymore." Stith Thompson also says that "the monistic approach, suggesting all others are wrong, is too hard to accept." Myth is a subject which involves
vision, and a vision is a necessary part of any attempt to define it.

Many men with "special knowledge" have contributed to the vast storehouse of information on myth. It has been interpreted structurally by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Max Müller has coined the phrase "disease of language" as part of his definition of myth. The philosopher Ernst Cassirer, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, and the psychologists Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud have all made very special contributions.

Viewed historically, a tradition going back to the ancient author Euhemerus (4th century B.C.), myth is reduced to legend which can easily be reduced to exaggerated history. Phillip Rahv explains that "what the craze for myth represents most of all is the fear of history." History is such a storehouse of power and change that modern man has become intimidated by its multiplicities. Myth with its timelessness provides an anchor in the sea of change. Rahv also summarizes the study in the field by saying that the most commonly accepted tendency among scholars is to identify myth as a "narrative linked with a rite." Literature and myth have been viewed as one and the same by Richard Chase. Harry Levin sees the relationship, but says that myth is the raw material, which can be the stuff of literature.
Ernst Cassirer interprets myth as a problem of philosophy "insofar as it expresses an original direction of the human spirit, an independent configuration of man's consciousness. Anyone aiming at a comprehensive system of human culture has, of necessity, turned back to myth."12 Shaffer is deliberately attempting to express a direction of the human spirit in Equus. He is dealing with myth, using all its various definitions, and doing so deliberately. Some would say that the deliberate nature of the attempt removes it from its relationship to myth, which springs from the unconscious. Because the point is controversial among authorities, who cannot even define myth to everyone's satisfaction, I will interpret the play as a kind of microcosm of mythic theory.

Another interpretation of myth comes from the psychologist Freud. He was the first to recognize the value of the discoveries of the new field of anthropology to other fields. "The bond of anthropology and psychoanalysis is cemented at the very foundation" of both disciplines, therefore simultaneously of modern mythography.13 This union has been very fruitful, producing many valid theories concerning myth and its importance. A study of primitive people has revealed facts about the human psyche which are in turn used in the field
of psychology. A study of primitive ritual has provided clues to the basic nature of man (a concept relevant to the study of myth).

Mircea Eliade sees the importance of the paradise myth in almost every culture. This myth shows man in a state of "blessedness, spontaneity, and liberty."\(^1\) Something happens, and he becomes lost in the "fall." In Oceania and Southeast Asia the myths reveal that heaven is near the earth but separated by a tree, stairway, rope, or other means of connection. Eliade relates this concept to the matriarchal ideology prevalent in these areas.\(^2\) The shaman seeks to recover this "paradisial state" during ecstasy (going out of oneself).\(^3\) Alan Strang in *Equus* shares this ecstasy with the primitive shaman. For the primitive mystic, experience is equivalent to a return to the beginning. Christian mysticism is analogous in that there is a yearning for paradise in every Christian sect.\(^4\) Alan is indoctrinated with Christian beliefs by his mother. When he substitutes the horse as his object of worship, he maintains the yearning for paradise and achieves it through ecstasy, his midnight orgiastic ride on the horse. Symbolically, one aspect of this yearning—a man's effort to control animals—can be interpreted as the mind ruling the sensitive appetites. Passion
obeys reason. Alan has not reached this state, and we see him yearning for paradise.

Richard Chase's definition in *The Quest for Myth* summarizes many aspects important to a study of *Equus*.

Myth is an esthetic device for bringing the imaginary but powerful world of preternatural forces into a manageable collaboration with the objective (i.e., experienced) facts of life in such a way as to excite a sense of reality amenable to both the unconscious passions and the conscious mind.¹⁸

The dichotomy so prevalent in *Equus*—reason versus passion, Apollo versus Dionysus—is clear in this definition. The unconscious represents passion and the conscious represents reason. Cassirer calls it the power "that lives on the feather line between fantasy and reality."¹⁹

Most definitions of myth refer to symbols, the unconscious, and power. Eric Dardel says that the mythic does not exclude the rational. Neither does it precede it or disappear before its advance. "The mythic coexists with it, and is complementary to it."²⁰ This definition helps balance a seeming contradiction, that myth and the rational cannot coexist. Myth has been defined as the "symbolic answers to questions raised by man's curiosity about causes,"²¹ but this definition is too narrow for a treatment of *Equus*. A more meaningful definition in context with the play is that "Myth is a way of living in the world, of orienting oneself
in the midst of things, of seeking an answer in the quest for self.\textsuperscript{22}

Alan is in search of "self." His search becomes his way of living. The only meaningful part of his life occurs once a month in his ritualistic worship of his god. He is alienated from his parents (an atheistic father and an overly religious mother), refuses to read books in rebellion at being denied television, and has no friends until he meets Jill, the young lady who also works at the stables. For Alan, myth is the "externalization of the inner stirrings, the emotion of man, as he meets the world. . . . \textsuperscript{23} It is a "primary medium for intuitive insights into the ultimate nature of human existence."\textsuperscript{24} And Alan has not rationalized his behavior or even thought about it. His acts stem from his unconscious, the region of myth and dream.

Ira Progroff explains that both dream and myth are aspects of a single dimension of experience, the symbolic experience.\textsuperscript{25} The play \textit{Equus} is a symbolic experience, the symbols ranging from the horse (centaur, Christ) to the riding apparatus of bit and reins. Freud views symbols as substitutes for original experiences which have been repressed.\textsuperscript{26} Alan did have the memory, brought out in psychoanalysis, of a joyful ride on a horse taking place on a beach. The phrase "bear me away," part of
this early memory, plays a role in his monthly ritual of riding and becoming his god. The memory had been repressed, and his worship of the horse may well have originated in this early experience.

Myth fulfills a wide range of needs. It "unfolds the living chain which connects the recurrent recognition scenes of the human drama." Myth involves strong emotional attachments and beliefs in 'verities' which are declared to be true." Myth assures us that we are not strangers and alone in the world. Jung sees mythology as the collective dreams of a people, expressing for the group what poetic imagination, phantasies, visions, and dreams express for the individual.

Joseph Campbell lists the four functions of mythology as follows: 1. the metaphysical, or the reconciliation of consciousness with the preconditions of its own existence; 2. the cosmological, or formulating and rendering an image of the universe, a cosmological image in keeping with the science of the time; 3. the sociological, "validating and maintaining some specific social order, authorizing its moral code"; and 4. the psychological, "that namely, of shaping individuals to the aims and ideals of their various social groups, bearing them on from birth to death through the course of human life."
Equus, with its strong mythic overtones, fulfills these four functions. It 1. shows a young boy approaching his unconscious; 2. renders an "image of the universe," a universe where passion is denied; 3. maintains a social order, in that Dysart and the judge seek to bring Alan within the social and moral code of the time; and 4. shapes individuals to the goals of various social groups, for Alan, at the end, becomes "normal."

There is a need in modern society for a revival of myth. This comment has been made by many authorities, including Carl Jung. Walter Kerr of the New York Times expresses the idea in this manner:

If there is one thing more than another that a contemporary playwright would like to do, it is to make a myth. We feel a desperate need these days for new icons, images, clothed symbols that will help us come to terms with the 'dark cave of the psyche,' the cave that thousands of years of reasoning haven't quite lighted after all. We want a picture of ourselves that renders us whole, with all of the violent contraries and inexplicable self-betrayals locked in. Not an explanation but an intuition become flesh; not thinking, seeing. But, it turns out, myths are extraordinarily hard to make, just by the willing of it. We are used to thinking now, used to explaining before we really see, and it's not easy to wheel about and go back to magic.

Equus comes powerfully close to reanimating the spirit of mystery. Most reviewers have commented on the vision apparent in Equus, and this vision is related to myth if
not mythical itself, stemming from the unconscious, the "dark cave of the psyche."

One major function of myth is to portray the "creation, destiny and quest" inherent in all of life. "Where do I come from?" is a question asked in the play by both Dr. Dysart and Alan. "Where am I bound?" refers to destiny, and the doctor continually asks this of himself. "What way is this?" (p. 125). "What must I do to get there?" is evident as the question of quest. Alan needs to know the answer to this question, although consciously he does not ask it. Dysart in many of his soliloquies does ask this question. "All the same, whatever the reason they are now, these doubts, not just vaguely worrying--but intolerable . . ." (p. 22).

Shaffer does not intend for his play to answer any of these basic questions. He intends to ask them. "Today people have a tendency to know almost too much. That can be inhibiting to a playwright. An exact record of fact doesn't always help the imagination." A summary of myth by Eric Dardel states that

myth, although based on instinct and emotion, contains an unconscious wisdom; it is not something to be superseded by science, even though it may assume the fact of science and the diction of reason. Our basic social faiths, like those of primitive man, are grounded in myth. This explains the "impassioned tonality which makes certain verities vibrate inside us, which ought to remain serene and indifferent to contradictions."
The myth is what we never see in ourselves, the secret spring of our vision of the world, of our devotion, of our dearest notions."

Equus has just this effect on many of its viewers. It shows "what we never see in ourselves," and the "vibration" begins. It does not stop upon leaving the theatre, but abides as part of the psyche.

Carl Jung broadened man's concept of the psyche. Enlarging Freud's concept of dreams and symbols, Jung brought to the forefront many new ideas concerning man's unconscious. It is through the psychology of Jung, grounded in myth and its relationship to the unconscious, that Equus can best be interpreted. Shaffer calls him the "poet of psychiatry" and one of the "greatest minds in the twentieth century" because he is "so intensely grounded in myth." Jung has a tremendous influence upon Equus, not only generally, as an inspiration for the mythopoeic basis of the work, but specifically, as a source for the method of analysis used by the psychiatrist Dysart.

The myth of Oedipus, psychologically interpreted, tells of a time in a young man's maturing process when the father seems a threat to his attention from the mother. Freud's interpretation, being strictly sexual in nature, is enlarged upon by Jung to include all kinds of hostility between parent and child. Psychologically
interpreted, myth reveals something about the personality of each human being. For Jung, archetypes are present and appear in the dreams of a person as well as of a culture. These archetypes (to be discussed in more depth later) portray trends of thought evident in all individuals that are based in myth. Myth interpreted psychologically becomes the archetypal image that everyone carries around in his head.

Walter Kerr says of Equus, "It has power to turn a horrifying aberration into a contemporary myth able to speak for all our lives." At the beginning, when four brown-clad figures lift high above their heads the silvery skeletons that serve as masks for pawing, stomping horses, the audience is made aware of the mythic nature of the play. The mere elevation of the skulls is obviously sacrificial in nature, and the ritual is underway. According to Kerr, we are not disappointed as the layers are stripped away; we are not left with a pat, unrewarding solution. A "remarkable reversal" takes place, and a "heaping up occurs where a shearing away" was expected. Every layer Shaffer strips away becomes an added layer of depth.

Myth too has this quality, this depth through layers. One never arrives at a single, simple solution, whether he is concerned with the origins of man or just one
aspect of his behavior. Stith Thompson, in a summary chapter on various theories concerning myth, summarized the complexity of myth. "But why should myth be accurately defined?" This play cannot be accurately defined either. Joan Plowright, the actress who played Alan's mother in the original production, finds it ambiguous and feels that the interpretation depends on which character one identifies with.

But the play is dependent upon myth for its structure as well as its content. The bare stage and the use of masks are intentionally reminiscent of early Greek tragedy. One of the most well-known theories of tragedy, dating back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, is that it began as a ritualistic worship of the god Dionysus. An altar was present on the stage, a chorus appeared, and eventually an actor stepped forth, separate from the chorus, to tell the ancient story of the birth and death of Dionysus. Thus was born tragedy. Shaffer's stage does not literally contain an altar, but a sacrifice does take place upon the stage. According to Dr. Dysart, his psychoanalysis is a sacrifice to the god "Normal."

The Normal is the indispensable, murderous God of Health, and I am his Priest. My tools are very delicate. My compassion is honest. I have honestly assisted children in this room, I have talked away terrors and relieved many agonies. But also--beyond question--I have cut from them parts of individuality repugnant to this God, in both his aspects. Parts sacred
to rarer and more wonderful Gods. And at what length . . . Sacrifices to Zeus took at the most surely, sixty seconds each. Sacrifices to the Normal can take as long as sixty months. (p. 74)

The dream of Dysart takes us back to a civilization heavily entrenched in myth, the Homeric era of the Greeks.

That night, I had this very explicit dream. In it I'm a chief priest in Homeric Greece. I'm wearing a wide gold mask, all noble and bearded. Like the so-called Mask of Agamemnon found at Mycenae. (p. 29)

Dreams and their relationship to myth play a very important role in Equus. Ira Progroff, in "Waking Dreams and Living Myth," comments that dreams can occur in three different states, that of sleeping, waking, and the twilight state between the two. "In all three states the quality of the psyche that unfolds in terms of symbols, may be either symbolic imagery, symbolic experiences, or intuitive perception of the symbolic meaning of life. All these together constitute the symbolic dimension of human experience." Dysart has a recurrent dream while sleeping and a waking dream, the dream of experiencing the passion he finds in Alan. Alan dreams nightly of Equus, often awakening and screaming, while in the daytime his dreams are submerged in his unconscious mind. Once a month he lives his dream while riding a horse at
midnight, naked, across a field of nettles. This ritual
is the re-enactment of a dream, a wish-fulfillment.

Another reference to myth found in the play is
the use of the centaur image. The stage is bare and
"silvered, skeletonized horses heads hang like totems
of ancient gods from the pillars that shape the arena."\textsuperscript{4,2}

A young man clad in brown

has risen to his full height, digging brilliant
steel hooves very much like Greek Cothoerni . . .
into the stage floor as he hoists a blazing-eyed
youngster onto his shoulders and the two become,
in effect, a centaur.\textsuperscript{3}

Centaurs were monstrous creatures, half-horse and half-man.
They had an early connection with the retinue of Dionysus,
lived in the mountains, and ate raw flesh. They liked
to abduct young girls and were brutish in their habits.
Sometimes a satyr, another among Dionysus' regular
escorts, was depicted with the torso of a human being
and the lower part of a horse.\textsuperscript{4,4}

The origin of the centaur is found in the story
of the union between Ixion and a cloud. Naturally the
seed fell to the ground, and from this seed came the
centaur. Hephaestus' seed also fell to the ground while
he was trying to mate Athena, engendering the snake-man
Erichthonious. Thus there is a connection, distant though
it may be, between the snake and the centaur.\textsuperscript{4,5}
centaurs were at home in the mountains and were sometimes considered wild nature spirits.

The exception was Cheiron, who was sage and friendly to men, while the rest of the centaurs were anarchic and uncontrollable. Myth tells us that Cheiron was accidentally wounded by Heracles' poisonous arrow. Even though Cheiron was immortal, he accepted Prometheus's offer to take over his immortality and allow him to die because of the extreme and constant pain that he experienced. Dionysus was said to be a pupil of Cheiron, who represented the extreme of culture.

Representing the wild, uncontrollable aspects of nature as well as the extreme of culture, the centaurs are perfect symbols for the dual nature of man. The horse serves well in portraying this image, for as a beast it has a wild and savage side and yet serves man and comes under his dominion. The centaur is a central mythic image in Equus. It is indeed the most important image in the play, pervading the stage with its presence from the opening curtain until Dr. Dysart's last statement, "There is now in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out," referring, of course, to the bit in a horse's mouth. "And now for me it never stops: that voice of Equus out of the cave--'Why Me? . . . Why Me? . . . Account for Me!" (p. 125).
Dysart discovers that Alan takes a horse out of the stables on a regular basis for a midnight ride across the same field with the same stick (Manbit) in his mouth each time. It is a religious ritual rich in the symbolism so inherent in myth. He seeks to become one with the horse, his god symbol, and celebrates his worship with an experience sexual in nature. Since sex is often found as an integral part of primitive religions (e.g., the temple priestess in the worship of Baal and the orgy of the Dionysian revels), this connection is valid to one returning to the primitive, the intuitive, as is Alan. The boy is worshipping and trying to become part of what he worships, and Dysart is jealous. He has never experienced such passion himself, and, even though society labels Alan mentally unfit, Dysart is jealous.

The stage production of *Equus* requires that the audience imagine the field of nettles, the moonlight, the ritual of the ride; but the film production literally shows the boy nude, astride a powerful horse, racing across a field of mist. One reviewer said that the literalism of the film destroyed the mythic image: "Let us not go to the movie *Equus*, where the magic and mystery of life are all explained away in drab, flat literalism." The mistaken notion here is that literalism by its nature has to be drab. Quite often it is
just this, but the mythic elements in *Equus* prevent the drabness from occurring, even in a literal interpretation. Sidney Lumet, the director of the film version, captured the crucial ride in one, uninterrupted shot, a four and one-half minute gallop on a real horse. This centaur image is the climax of Act I and is central to the mythic framework of the play. Shaffer reveals that though the play took on many forms during the two and one-half year period of its creation, "the depiction of the play's central mystery, the erotic ritual of the boy and the horse, and its dramatization . . . the reckless midnight gallop through the mist," remained constant.

Shaffer gives credit to his director, John Dexter, for the many visual effects that make the stage production so effective and create the mythic framework Shaffer desired. It was Dexter who suggested that the actors' heads show through the framework of the horses' heads. Shaffer liked the effect immediately, for it further conveyed his basic mythic concept.

The theatre is, or has to be, an ecstatic and alarming experience. And a beautiful one. That doesn't mean that it's one continuous shout out; it also must have great spaces of tranquility and lyricism in it. And although it sounds pompous or pretentious to say it,
and I hope it doesn't, that's one of the things I tried to do.50

And he did it very well!

An interpretation of Equus is highly dependent on the field of myth, but a thorough knowledge in this field is not necessary to the entertainment offered by the play. It is first and foremost drama, which also happens to be the best vehicle for myth.51 With the advent of logos, nature comes out of the darkness and myth is driven back into the shadows. It becomes suspect, goes underground, but does not disappear. It subsists in the depths and continues to enliven many of the forms of our culture to "eternalize" many a movement of the soul. It inspires poet, novelist, and orator,52 and Peter Shaffer was thus inspired. Equus, as a result of this inspiration, has many mythic qualities and allusions, but it also has a profound effect upon the audience, causing them to identify with verities beyond their consciousness.
NOTES

1 Peter Shaffer, Equus (New York: Avon Books, 1974), p. 72. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited in the text by page number only.


4 Ibid.


10 Ibid.

11 Levin, p. 111.


Ibid., p. 61.

Ibid., p. 67.

Ibid., p. 68.

Chase, p. 18.


Levin, p. 105.

Dardel, p. 33.

Ibid., p. 36.


Ibid., p. 175.

Ibid.


Campbell, p. 141.


Slochower, p. 15.

35 Bidney, p. 20.


38 Ibid.


40 Thompson, p. 172.

41 Progroff, p. 177.


43 Ibid.


46 Ibid., p. 148.


49 Buckley, p. 21.


52 Dardel, p. 49.
CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN EQUUS

The psychological interpretation of myth is new compared to other methods—the historical, the ritualistic, and the religious, to name a few. The main contributors to the psychological method were Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. The foundations of this method were laid by the German Romantics of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, among them Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Schelling, and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. The entire field of psychology is important in Equus, as the play portrays a Freudian psychoanalyst with stress on reliving the trauma, thereby relieving the symptoms. The framework of the play is psychological, with the action taking place on a bare stage representing a psychologist's office. Alan has been recommended for treatment as opposed to sending him to a juvenile home. Psychology plays an important role in the play in all its many manifestations: its ability to help interpret myth, its therapeutic value, and its revelation of the characters.

There has been criticism of the psychological method of interpreting myth (by Robert Graves, for example), but most scholars agree that it has its
value and its place. It is just one of the many ways of acquiring information in this field. Slochower sees a basic affinity between literature and psychoanalysis, literature often being linked with myth or even defined as a form of myth. They both are concerned with human motives, and "both deal with them as expressed in a science to the extent that it can predict human behavior on the basis of primary principles." Style is the final method of communication in both literature and psychoanalysis and is a clue to the "underlying motif behind the multiple 'voices.'"

Freud's contributions to the relationship between myth and dream are invaluable to the field of psychology, but it is Jung whose theories relate most directly to a study of *Equus*. Jung's contribution of the theory of the "collective unconscious" expanded the interpretation of myth. R. D. Laing, another psychologist, has theories concerning the "normal" and all its manifestations which help to interpret *Equus*. The ideas of Jung and Laing are evident in the production, both directly and indirectly. Shaffer admits an indebtedness to Jung as well as tremendous admiration of him; Laing he does not mention, but a reading of Laing's *The Politics of Experience* enlightens one as to the depth of Shaffer's ideas on
normalcy. Shaffer himself had some things to say on this matter in an interview for the *New York Times*.

I think a great deal more self-reliance and tolerance of personal eccentricity would do the American character a great deal of good. . . . But I do think one has the right to be eccentric or different. To be more and more extremely one's self. To discover one's self. To make one's self--one isn't born one's self--and it's a hard job.  

Shaffer, as well as Laing, does not see "being normal" as the goal of mankind. This idea has become a point of controversy (one of many) concerning the play's message. *Equus* has been interpreted as a "defense of insanity as the wellspring of artistic creativity."  

Dr. Sanford Gifford, a psychoanalyst, said that the play "leaves us feeling cheated, that we have been promised some significant glimpse of the truth and left with a bogus or trivial message."  

To Gifford, the false message of the play linked madness and art. One only has to study history and literature to see that the two often go hand in hand. One does not predetermine or even presuppose the other, but men like Vincent Van Gogh, Jonathan Swift, and Friedrich Nietzsche serve as examples of the price men often pay for creativity and art. Shaffer is not as far from the truth as Gifford would have us believe. Freud gathered evidence to the effect that the neurotic and the artist revert to primitive thought more readily
than the "average" person. Here the person with some mental instability is once again compared with the creative.\(^7\)

Shaffer, although expecting the criticism, was nevertheless enraged when his play was criticized as if it were primarily a psychological study instead of drama.\(^8\) Shaffer said, "Any play that utilizes the elements of Greek mythology, the Christian mystery and the lore of psychoanalysis is likely to be scrutinized in a supra-theatrical way."\(^9\) And to Dr. Gifford he replied, "You've got to be pretty defensive about your profession, it seems to me, to make an allegation like that. I want to reassure him that playwrights are at least as serious about their work as he is about his."\(^10\) Jung made a statement about evaluating a work of art that supports Shaffer's comments.

A great work of art is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is always ambiguous. A dream never says "You ought" or "this is the truth." It presents an image in much the same way as nature allows a plant to grow, and it is up to us to draw conclusions.\(^11\)

Jung also says that it is important to let a work of art act upon us as it acted upon the artist. He calls this re-immersion a "state of participation mystique." The individual no longer counts; it is the life of the collective unconscious that counts. Every great work of
art is impersonal and objective since a man's personal career does not explain art. In this respect, Jung's theory is diametrically opposed to Freud's.

Shaffer is very serious about his work. He says that "any play must in a sense be autobiographical." Shaffer is not contradicting what Jung says, he is merely stating the obvious fact that some of an author's concerns, personality, and beliefs will show up in a work of art; but the work of art is not just an expression of a man's personal life. It has a life of its own as well. If a child eats the proper food he will grow and develop, his brain developing also. No one will say that the brain is made up entirely of the food he eats. Something else enters the picture, and it is this way with a work of art also.

Freud says that an artist "turns away from reality and transfers all his interest, and all his libido too, on to the creation of his wishes in the life of phantasy from which the way might readily lead to neurosis" (again note the connection between creativity and mental instability). "The art of the dramatist consists in decomposing his inner self into the various characters of the play, embodying his self in each of the characters and his ontogenetic self throughout the phylogenetic forms of the myth."
Jung links the creative urge of the artist with the unconscious.

It makes no difference whether the artist knows work is generated, grows and matures within him, or whether he imagines that it is his own invention. In reality it grows out of him as a child its mother. The creative process has a feminine quality and the creative work arises from the unconscious depths . . . the realm of Mothers.²⁵

Jung has made another startling observation, startling as it applies to Equus. "The physician who heals the wound is himself the bearer of a wound, a classic example being Cheiron."²⁷ The author, Peter Shaffer, is in effect bearing a wound while trying to heal one through this drama. He did have a bad experience with psychoanalysis, and this may be the wound he is trying to cure. Dr. Dysart in the play is also the "bearer of a wound"; whether it is his impotence, sterility, or lack of feeling will be up to the viewer to decide, but he is wounded. Cheiron the centaur was also doomed to eternal pain until he gave up his immortality. Here arises once more the issue of sacrifice. How much can we give up? Hester insists that Alan be cured. Dysart abhors sacrificing individuality, but he does effect a cure. In the language of Laing (and the spirit of Freud), his dilemma as well as Shaffer's is "That the ordinary person is a shriveled, desiccated fragment of what a person can be."²⁸ At this point it is fitting to quote an excerpt from the introduction to
Laing's *Politics of Experience*, thereby helping the reader to understand the many references to Laing in the pages following.

No one can begin to think, feel or act now except from the starting point of his or her own alienation. We shall examine some of its forms in the following pages.

We are all murderers and prostitutes--no matter to what culture, society, class, nation, we belong, no matter how normal, moral, or mature we take ourselves to be.

Humanity is estranged from its authentic possibilities. This basic vision prevents us from taking any unequivocal view of the sanity of common sense, or of the madness of the so-called madman. However, what is required is more than a passionate outcry of outraged humanity.

Our alienation goes to the roots. The realization of this is the essential springboard for any serious reflection on any aspect of present interhuman life. Viewed from different perspectives, construed in different ways and expressed in different idioms, this realization unites men as diverse as Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Tillich and Sartre.

At all events, we are bemused and crazed creatures, strangers to our true selves, to one another, and to the spiritual and material world--mad, even, from an ideal standpoint we can glimpse but not adopt.

We are born into a world where alienation awaits us. We are potentially men, but are in an alienated state, and this state is not simply a natural system. Alienation as our present destiny is achieved only by outrageous violence perpetrated by human beings on human beings.

This book attempts to document some forms of our contemporary violation of ourselves.

Laing's language is subjective and poetic, as is much of Jung's work; the ideas might be branded by some as
"romantic ravings," but the information is pertinent to a study of *Equus*.

*Equus* is a play about alienation in its many forms. Alan is alienated from his family, from society, and from his sense of self. Dysart is alienated from his wife, his profession, and his sense of self. Alan and Dr. Dysart share many of the same symptoms, impotence being one. Both of them seem to be leading sterile lives, but Alan is involved with his own worship experience, whereas Dr. Dysart, being a worshipless man, has only the compensation that he is doing the best he can at his job. Alan's life appears sterile to those around him, but it is full of meaning to him (on an unconscious level). Dr. Dysart's life appears fruitful to those around him, and in reality he feels its sterility.

Alan's sense of alienation is nurtured by his parents. Laing's comment on this kind of estrangement describes Alan's family.

The family's function is to repress Eros; to induce a false consciousness of security; to deny death by avoiding life; to cut off transcendence; to believe in God, not to experience the Void; to create, in short, one-dimensional man; to promote respect, conformity, obedience; to con children out of play; to induce a fear of failure; to promote respect for work; to promote a respect for 'respectability.'

Alan's father hounds him to read books, and his mother reads the Bible to him. His father is afraid of what
Alan might see on the television, calling it a "swiz" or substitute for living. Alan rebels and refuses to read. His mother helps create confusion in his mind as she lets him sneak over to a neighbor's house and watch television behind his father's back, not a very healthy situation for a young man developing his sense of right and wrong. His father values intelligence, but as Laing so aptly phrases the matter,

In practice education has never been an instrument to free the mind and the spirit of man, but to bind them. We think we want creative children, but what do we want them to create? If all through school the young were provoked to question the commandments, the sanctity of revealed religion, the foundations of patriotism, the profit motive, the two-party system, monogamy, the laws of incest, and so on, there would be such creativity that society would not know where to turn.  

Alan is taught to accept answers, not to ask questions.

When he begins treatment with Dr. Dysart, he begins asking questions.

Dysart: Hallo. How are you this morning? 
    Come in: Sit down . . . 
    Do you dream often?

Alan: Do you?

Dysart: It's my job to ask the questions. Yours to answer them.

Alan: Says who?

Dysart: Says me. Do you dream often?

Dysart: Look--Alan.

Alan: I'll answer if you answer. In turns. (p. 42)

Alan continues his saucy behavior throughout the treatment until a question concerning Dysart's personal relationship with his wife enrages him and he sends the boy out.
Brilliant! Absolutely brilliant! The boy's on the run, so he gets defensive. What am I then? . . . Wicked little bastard—he knew exactly what questions to try. . . . Advanced neurotics can be dazzling at that game. They aim unwervingly at your area of maximum vulnerability. (p. 69)

The doctor has been psychoanalyzed by the patient, and it unnerves him. The Laingian impression of doctor learning from patient is evident: "I think, however, that schizoprehnics have more to teach psychiatrists about the inner world than psychiatrists their patients."

In an even more daring statement, Laing goes on to say perhaps we will learn to accord to so-called schizoprehnics who have come back to us, perhaps after years, no less respect than the often no less lost explorers of the Renaissance. If the human race survives, future men will, I suspect, look back on our enlightened epoch as a veritable Age of Darkness. They will presumably be able to savor the irony of this situation with more amusement than we can extract from it. The laugh's on us. They will see that what we call 'schizophrenia' was one of the forms in which, often through quite ordinary people, the light began to break through the cracks in our all-too-closed minds.

Jung has stated that "Man . . . never perceives anything fully or comprehends anything completely. . . . No matter what instruments he uses, at some point he reaches the edge of certainty beyond which conscious knowledge cannot pass."

Both of these men realize the importance of being open-minded. For Jung, just the fact that there are limits on our conscious knowledge is not proof that more, much more, does not exist; for Laing, being willing to
try to see beyond the obvious is proof that more exists.
The proper perspective is important in both cases,

There are forms of alienation that are relatively strange to statistically 'normal' forms of alienation. The 'normally' alienated person by reason of the fact that he acts more or less like everyone else is taken to be sane. Other forms of alienation that are out of step with the prevailing style of alienation are those that are labeled by the 'normal' majority as bad or mad.²⁵

Alan is labeled "bad or mad" by a normal, sane society. Laing would see it as all a matter of what perspective one has. One cannot carry this theory too far in society, as Peter Shaffer recognizes.

He's not pretending that you must allow people to continue in distress. He's not pretending that you must allow people just to do their own thing. If you're Jack the Ripper or a mass murderer, you must be stopped from doing your own thing. There is a higher and more important priority sometimes at work than the individual's doing his own thing. However, that said, he cannot but be aware that in removing the source of the boy's distress and nightmares, and dealing with the violent emotion that has resulted in this disgusting crime, he is also, very likely, removing the main source of the boy's ecstasy, individual passion, and his own glory in being himself. Unlimited passion and violence have no place in society: yet, man should be allowed to be an individual. This is part of the 'endless ambiguity' of the human situation, of the conflict between two different kinds of right.²⁶

Laing makes similar statements in much stronger language. "What we call 'normal' is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action or experience."²⁷ In
fact, Laing's comments, applied to *Equus*, reveal Dysart's
cure as detrimental to Alan.

A man can estrange himself from himself by mystifying
himself and others. He can also have what he does
stolen from him by the agency of others.

If we are stripped of experience we are stripped
of our deeds; and if our deeds are, so to speak, taken out of our hands like toys from the hands of children, we are bereft of our humanity. We cannot be deceived. Men can and do destroy the humanity of other men. . . .

Whereas Laing's statements deal with the practical
nature of curing man's alienation, Carl Jung deals with
the theory behind man's behavior. Jung's theories have
been every bit as controversial as Laing's, although they
have withstood the test of time. In *The Quest for Myth*
Richard Chase says, "The psychoanalysts turn from dreams to myths with a preconceived idea about sexual symbolism; they simply translate this idea into the latent context of myths as if they were nothing but veils drawn over the 'real' meaning." This statement, made in 1941, refers to psychoanalysts under the strong influence of Freud. Jung went on to broaden the very basis of psychology. He gave psychology a new language full of terms like *shadow*, *anima*, *animus*, *archetypes*, *extrovert*, and *introvert*. A former student of Freud's, Jung gradually moved away from his master's view of sexual energy, *libido*, as the basic drive in man. Jung chose a more general approach and said that "psychic energy" was the
motivating force. He preferred to look at the image in the dream for what it was, instead of using "free association" to determine the nature of the repressed wish that it symbolized, according to Freud.

John Freeman's introduction to Man and His Symbols best summarizes Jungian thought.

Jung's thinking has colored the world of modern psychology more than many of those with casual knowledge realize. Such familiar terms, for instance, as 'extrovert,' 'introvert,' and 'archetype' are all Jungian concepts--borrowed and sometimes misused by others. But his overwhelming contribution to psychological understanding is his concept of the unconscious--not (like the 'subconscious' of Freud) merely a sort of glory-hole of repressed desire, but a world that is just as much a vital and real part of the life of an individual as the conscious, 'cogitating' world of the ego, and infinitely wider and richer. The language and the 'people' of the unconscious are symbols and the means of communications dreams.

The term archetype needs more explanation before proceeding to discuss Equus in terms of Jungian psychology. Jung compares the theory of the archetype to that of the "pattern of behavior" used by biologists. It is a term often used, but it stands for "the tendency to form such representations of a motif--representations that can vary a great deal without losing their basic pattern." An archetype is an instinctive trend "as marked as the impulse of birds to build nests, or ants to form colonies." Archetypal forms are not just static patterns. They are "dynamic factors that manifest
themselves in impulses, just as spontaneously as the instinct." But "Pieces of life itself, archetypes are images that are integrally connected to the living individual by the bridge of emotions." Some of the more familiar archetypes include the hero image, the mother image, the father image, and Christ as an archetype of the self. In Equus these archetypes play a very important role.

Jung's interpretation of the unconscious is prevalent throughout Equus. Instead of being a mere repository for repressed desire, the unconscious for Jung becomes so important that it cannot be ignored. It contains the "anima" (the female element in every man) and the "animus" (the male element in every female). Our unconscious communicates through dreams, using symbols. If the communication were liable to rationalization, it would then be on the conscious level. The unconscious speaks in pictures and feelings. Instinct is part of the unconscious. Jung reminds us that in the civilizing process we increasingly divide our consciousness from the deeper instinctive level, thereby causing serious psychic splits that can lead to mental problems. According to Jung, modern man lives in a vast wasteland of boredom, and "the only adventure still worthwhile for modern man lies in the inner realm of the unconscious psyche."
Primitive man was governed by his instinct, quite often taking part in rituals that he did not rationally understand. Alan does just this in Equus. He cannot rationally understand his need to worship Equus; his actions spring from his unconscious. It is up to the psychoanalyst to bring these things to the surface, the conscious level, and examine them. Modern rational descendants of the primitive have learned to control themselves, but at what loss (shades of Laing again)? Dysart feels the loss greatly.

I'll heal the rash on his body. I'll erase the welts cut into his mind by flying manes. When that's done, I'll set him on a nice mini-scooter and send him puttering off into the Normal world where animals are treated properly: made extinct, or put into servitude, or tethered all their lives in dim light, just to feed it! I'll give him the good Normal world where we're tethered beside them--blinking our nights away in a nonstop drench of cathoderay over our shrivelling heads! I'll take away his Field of Ha Ha, and give him Normal places for his ecstasy. . . . With any luck his private parts will come to feel as plastic to him as the products of the factory to which he will almost certainly be sent. Who knows? He may even come to find sex funny. Smirky funny. Bit of grunt funny. Trampled and furtive and entirely in control. Hopefully, he'll feel nothing at his fork but Approved Flash. I doubt, however, with much passion! . . . Passion, you see, can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created. (p. 124)

The unconscious is the psyche that reaches down from the daylight of mentally and morally lucid consciousness into the nervous system that for ages has been known as the "sympathetic". . . . It maintains the balance of life and through the mysterious paths of sympathetic excitation, not
only gives us knowledge of the innermost life of other beings but also has an inner effect upon them.

Alan's unconscious life has become far more important to him than his conscious life. Herein lies his affinity with the primitive state of man. He is controlled by an emotion, possessed by it. The primitive man was afraid of uncontrolled emotions because of the loss of consciousness in this state. Rite and dogma evolved from man's striving toward a consolidation of consciousness. Jung comments on the effect of the loss of consciousness.

The unconscious no sooner touches us than we are it—we become unconscious of ourselves. That is the age-old danger, instinctively known and feared by primitive man, who himself stands so very close to this pleroma. His consciousness is still uncertain, wobbling on its feet. It is still childish, having just emerged from the primal waters. A wave of the unconscious may easily roll over it, and then he forgets who he was and does things that are strange to him. Hence primitives are afraid of uncontrolled emotions, because consciousness breaks down under them and gives way to possession.

The Jungian terms "anima" and "animus" contain both positive and negative aspects. These psychological symbols originate in the unconscious that primitive man so fears. The "anima" is often linked with the dark forces of the unconscious, maternal eros. Its negative manifestations include compulsive interest in erotic fantasy, and it occurs when a man does not sufficiently cultivate his "feeling" relationship, when his "feeling" attitude
toward life has remained infantile. Alan's father fits this category. A self-proclaimed atheist, he relegates religion to "just bad sex" (p. 40), but he is caught by his son in a pornographic movie house. It is Alan's first visit; he is fighting the guilt he already feels when he spots his father entering the movie. Alan, his date Jill, and his father all leave, and the situation becomes very awkward. Alan is forced by Jill to realize that his father is just another human being, just like Alan. Alan later reveals to Dr. Dysart that he actually felt sorry for his father and realized that they were alike in that each had his secret.

Alan finds in Jill a positive projection of his "anima." She leads him to a deeper understanding of his feelings concerning his father. For the son, according to Jung, the "anima" is hidden in the dominating power of the mother, and sometimes she leaves him with a sentimental attachment that lasts throughout life and seriously impairs the fate of the adult."* Alan's mother was a strong influence in his life. She provided him with his religious training as a child, opposing his father's wishes. She also allowed him to reject his father's training and sneak over to a neighbor's house to watch the "forbidden" television. Jung looks first for the cause of infantile neuroses in the mother. One
of the typical effects of the mother-complex on the son is impotence. Jung also stresses the role of the father in this effect. Alan is impotent during his first sexual attempt, initiated by Jill at the stables. This impotence leads to the blinding of the six horses, but Alan's problems stem from more than just his relationship to his parents.

Jung also speaks of the dark aspect of the personality as the "shadow." The shadow is a "tight, narrow door," and beyond that door lies the unconscious—a world of water where all life floats in suspension, "Where I experience the other in myself and the other-than-myself experiences me." The "self" is the entire personality which includes all of the above plus the "ego," which must remain rooted in the conscious. The "self" is often symbolized as an animal, representing our "instinctive nature and its connectedness with one's surroundings." The horse plays such an important role in Equus that to see it not only as an object of worship but also as an extension of Alan's "self" is certainly plausible.

Animal symbolism was very important to the primitive. In fact, when he donned the mask of an animal, he actually became that animal for all practical purposes. He felt that he not only represented but was the totem animal. In the religions of practically every race
animal attributes are ascribed to the supreme gods. Even Christianity makes use of animal symbolism. Christ appears as the Lamb of God or the fish, but the serpent, lion, horse, and other animals appear quite regularly. Alan's mother read to him from the books of Job and Revelation about the horse. This boundless profusion of symbols emphasizes the importance of the symbol and shows how "vital it is for men to integrate into their lives the symbol's psychic content--instinct."^

In man the animal being is the instinctual psyche, and it is dangerous if it is not integrated. An animal is dangerous when it is wounded, and suppressed instincts (the wounded self) can gain control of man and destroy him. Alan is susceptible to this destruction because he has wounded himself psychologically. Dr. Dysart has to do more than just suppress Alan's instincts; he has to completely remove the instinct from his unconscious. Dysart knows the damage that this may do. "When Equus leaves--if he leaves at all--it will be with your intestines in his teeth. And I don't stock replacements" (p. 123).

Jung talks of Christ, the object of worship for many in the Western world, as an archetype of self, thereby giving us another example of man worshipping an extension of self. He also serves as a hero archetype,
one who conquers and is reborn. Jung goes on to explain that Christ is the true image of God, "after whose likeness our inner man is made." Alan began his religious experience worshipping Christ. His mother would read the Bible to him night after night, and stories from Job and Revelation concerning the power of the horse fascinated him.

In fact, Alan is more fascinated with the Biblical accounts of horses than with the story of Christ. As a child he had a picture of Christ hanging up in his room, but later he transferred his worship to the horse.

The picture in his bedroom of the horse, it is later revealed, took the place of this picture of Christ wearing chains and a crown of thorns. Alan cried for several days after his father tore down the picture and was satisfied only when he found something to replace it. His symbol for worship had been removed; and, as is true with many symbols, it had come to be
the reality it represented. Alan must have felt that his object of worship had been forcibly removed, but he did accept the substitute his father gave him. He put the picture of the horse over his bed in the exact place the picture of Christ had occupied. No one in his family was aware of the impact of the transfer, but his father did discover him in the act of worship before the horse picture and chose not to do or say anything about it. His father had repressed all religious yearnings in himself, thereby creating a psychological problem symptomized, perhaps, through his visits to pornographic movie houses. The act of worship that Alan was engaging in was full of ritual, even there in his bedroom. He had a string bit in his mouth, and after reciting a long litany of "begats" he began a masochistic beating of himself, while at the same time pulling on the reins of the bit in his mouth.

Alan: (kneeling) And Legwus begat Neckwus. And Neckwus begat Fleckwus, the King of Spit. And Fleckwus spoke out of his Chinkle-chanke.

Alan raises his head and extends his hands up in glory.

Alan: And he said 'Behold--I give you Equus, my only begotten son!' (p. 58)

Shaffer is indeed a thorough student of Jungian psychology. Primitive man, according to Jung, takes part in ritual and worships even though he does not
rationally understand why he does so. Alan's worship is instinctual, arising from the unconscious, which is also connected with the primitive Dionysiac rituals. During these rituals the participant was carried away, whether through emotion or intoxication, and entered into the ritual wholeheartedly. Alan also takes part in his ritual wholeheartedly, experiencing the release in an instinctual manner. Jung's comments on Christ can be transferred to the horse, since Alan made the substitution in his own mind, and the symbol for worship is the true image of God, "after whose likeness our inner man is made."54

The symbols, the magic, the power, the dream are all-important elements in myth and are likewise important in a study of psychology and its relationship to literature. The fields of myth and psychology are inexorably linked, both dealing with the mind and soul of man. Each mythographer has his set of terms and theories. Each psychologist has developed a unique approach. Both fields are full of speculation, rational and irrational logic, theories concerning the basic nature of all things. Myth is one of the fields that psychologists study. Psychology is one of the methods mythographers use. Rather than view all the various theories with confused disgust, let us instead use what we can from
both fields. There is much left to discover, as both Jung and Laing have reminded us. The play *Equus* is one man's attempt to delve into both fields. Shaffer calls his play an "investigation, not a solution." If it inspires audiences to investigate their own psyches, it will have accomplished its purpose. Investigation of the inner world is full of hope and promise, whereas investigation of the outer world often leads to pessimism when man discovers that the "rational" mind cannot solve all the mysteries. We need the vision of myth and the wisdom of psychology.

The secret of great art and its effect upon us is in the "unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the language of its present work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life." *Equus* returns us to these deep springs, thereby fulfilling Jung's definition of great art. And as Jung so aptly describes the human dilemma,

The sad truth is that man's real life consists of a complex of inexorable opposites—day and night, birth and death, happiness and misery, good and evil. We are not even sure that one will prevail against the other, that good will overcome evil, or joy defeat pain. Life is a battleground. It always has been, and always will be; and if it were not so, existence would come to an end.
NOTES


3Ibid., p. 28.

"Tom Buckley, '"'Write Me' Said the Play to Peter Shaffer,"' New York Times Magazine, 13 April 1975, pp. 24-25.

4Ibid., p. 20.


Buckley, p. 24.

8Ibid., p. 23.

Ibid., p. 24.


10Ibid., p. 105.


15 Ibid., p. 328.
16 Jung, XV, 103.
17 Ibid., p. 104.
19 Ibid., Introduction.
20 Ibid., p. 41.
21 Ibid., p. 45.
22 Ibid., p. 75.
23 Ibid., p. 90.
25 Laing, p. 12.
27 Laing, p. 11.
28 Ibid., p. 13.
30 Jung, V, 135.
31 Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 12.
32 Jung, V, 88.
33 Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 67.
34 Ibid., p. 65.
35 Ibid., p. 76.
36 Ibid., p. 96.
37 Ibid., p. 177.
Ibid., p. 52.

Ibid., p. 212.

Jung, IX, pt. 1, 19.

Ibid., p. 22.

Ibid.

Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 177.

Jung, IX, pt. 1, 29.

Ibid., p. 85.

Ibid., p. 22.

Jung, IX, pt. 2, ix.

Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 207.

Ibid., pp. 238-39.

Ibid.

Jung, IX, pt. 2, 37.

Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 72.

Jung, IX, pt. 2, 38.

Ibid.


Jung, XV, 82.

Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 85.
CHAPTER III

NIETZSCHEAN IDEAS IN EQUUS

When studying the poet-philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, one must use the eclectic method suitable for the study of myth and psychology. Nietzsche does not conform to a closed, ordered system. Just as one definition of myth will not satisfy everyone, so one approach to Nietzsche gives rise to controversy. He is a philosopher dealing with life and existence. His ideas grow out of a passionate personal experience, and he cannot be understood by means of logical formulas. Nietzsche's contribution to this study of Equus is found in his work The Birth of Tragedy.

First published in 1872, The Birth of Tragedy "anticipates, by sheer intuition . . . what Frazer, Gilbert Murray and Jane Harrison were later to establish quite irrefragably: the ritual origin of Greek tragedy, as well as the interdependence of myth and ritual in all primitive cultures. But the work is equally prophetic of Freud, if we consider its deep psychological aspects. . . . "¹

The book stresses the importance of Dionysus in Greek culture and relates the symbolic Dionysus to German culture in 1872. Nietzsche's remarks are still applicable to any culture today, in spite of the controversy they engender.
Dionysus is the god of chaos and destruction, but he is also a god of fertility and productivity. Many interpretations of his origin have arisen, the most popular one beginning with the story of Zeus and Semele, a mortal. Semele, after being persuaded to do so by a jealous Hera, insists on seeing Zeus in all his glory. As she dies in the splendor, Zeus absorbs their unborn son. He later bursts forth from Zeus's thigh and roams upon the earth, teaching people how to cultivate and grow the vine. He is adored by women, who worship him in "frenzied orgiastic rites" wherever he goes.² Many different figures and legends have mingled to make the myth of Dionysus. According to Will Durant, he "began as a goddess of fertility, became a god of intoxication, and ended as a son of god dying to save mankind."³ Zagreus is another of his names. Zagreus was born to Zeus by Persephone (according to some accounts, Demeter), his daughter. He was the favorite of his father and sat at his right hand. A jealous Hera had the Titans kill him. His form changed to a goat and then to a bull, but he was eventually killed, torn apart, and boiled. Athena saved the heart and Zeus gave it to Semele, who, impregnated with it, gave to the god a second birth under the name Dionysus.⁴
This tale is interpreted as a vegetation myth. Zagreus, the vine, child of Zeus and Demeter (or Persephone), is cut to give it new life. The juice of the grape is boiled to make wine. Each year under nourishing rains the vine is reborn.\(^5\) Constant in all the stories of Dionysus is the concept of rebirth. He embodies the life of nature as it comes and goes.\(^6\) The details of the various stories, interpreted psychologically, serve as the heart of the drama Equus. The birth from Zeus's thigh is interpreted as a birth which frees man from the umbilical cord, frees the possibilities in man.\(^7\) Alan Strang has experienced such a birth; Dysart longs for it.

The ritual of Dionysian worship, which, according to Nietzsche's interpretation of a theory going back to Aristotle, serves as the origin of tragedy, arises from the mourning for Dionysus's death and the joyful celebration at his resurrection. In the spring the Greek women went to the hills for several days of drinking wine in order to meet their god. They marched in wild procession. At the center of the ceremony was a goat or bull, and, after tearing the victim to pieces in commemoration of Dionysus's dismemberment, they would eat the flesh and drink the blood. They and their god became one.\(^8\)

Alan's worship is symbolically Dionysian. He ritually becomes one with his god Equus, who finds form
in the horse. His ritual is sexual in nature as were
the Dionysiac orgiastic rites. He loses himself, goes
into a state of "ecstasy" to be one with his god. The
Dionysiac revelers, through intoxication of the
spirit and the flesh, also through "ecstasy" met their
god. The Dionysian has been interpreted by Nietzsche
as passionate and spontaneous; Alan's behavior in Equus
is Dionysian. The audience does not have to simply infer
this idea, for Dr. Dysart mentions sarcastically how he
pats his reproductive statue of Dionysus for good luck
every morning while outside his window a boy is sucking
sweat off his god's neck in an attempt to become one
with his god. Dysart lets us know early in the play
that he is jealous of his patient--jealous of the passion
his patient is capable of feeling, a Dionysian passion,
an abandonment civilized man has forgotten.

In The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche stresses the
Dionysian Rausch or ecstasy in Greek drama. Rose
Pfeffer defines it as "the psychology of the orgiastic
as an overflowing feeling of life and power where even
pain has the effect of stimulus." It combines connota-
tions referring to states of alcoholic intoxication
leading to "orgiastic abandoned experience in impassioned
dancing, sexual intercourse, and the performance of
ancient religious rites. Nietzsche uses the word Rausch
to describe the ecstasy of the artist and the feeling of superabundance connected with the creative act." Peter Shaffer exemplifies this overflow as he writes the play *Equus*, and his main character Alan is the epitome of Dionysian Rausch. In an interview for the *New York Times* Shaffer relates that as he wrote the scene in which Alan rides the horse in a ritualistic worship of his god he almost felt himself being carried away. "I was very excited. . . . It gave me a feeling of chaos inside. I found it very difficult to write. I experimented with onomatopoeia, with keeping the frenzy verbal; but there must be a moment when the visual takes over." 

In Nietzsche's time the ancient Greek culture stood for all that was serene and orderly. Apollo, exemplifying all that was Classical Greece, stood for harmony and reason. As the personification of the sun he became the life-giving power. His arrows (rays) could heal or consume. Symbolizing youth and beauty, the Apollonian personality is moderate and self-effacing, not aggressive or boastful. From its opposition to the Dionysian comes art. "In Greek mythopoesis as a whole, 'Dionysus' and 'Apollo' interacted in dialectic rhythm." Harmony of mind or spirit is likewise won by strain and strife. 

Interpreted psychologically, this interaction represents the dual nature of man, the conflict between
reason and passion, body and soul, mind and spirit. If reason is the rudder of the boat, the guiding force, then passion is the sail and catches the force that impels. A delicate balance must be achieved in each person's life. Without a sail the ship will not move, but without the rudder of reason guiding it, the ship will run aground or lose her way. The Greeks knew that the violent forces just beneath the surface of consciousness must be controlled, and the control came through the harmony offered by Apollo, reason and judgment. Edith Hamilton phrases the reasons for the contrast as follows:

Arrogance, insolent self-assertion, was of all qualities most detested by the Greeks. Sophrosune was the exact opposite. It had its nature, as Aristotle would say, in the excellent and it meant accepting the bounds excellence laid down for human nature, restraining impulses to unrestricted freedom, shunning excess, obeying the inner laws of harmony and proportion. This was the virtue the Greeks esteemed beyond all others not because they were moderate lovers of the golden mean, but because their spontaneity and ever-changing variety and ardent energy of life had to have the strong control of a disciplined spirit or end in senseless violence.¹⁵

Harry Slochower says,

This suggests that the Greeks needed Apollonian form to control the rage of their Dionysianism, that their stress on law was to meet the threat of disorder and unrestraint. Greek tragedy arose, not out of the Apollonian, but out of the ancient Dionysiac cult. Where Apollo was associated with light and with the aristocratic and patriarchial Olympus, Dionysus derived from the dark Chthonic underground and from the democratic matriarchy.¹⁶
The bond with matriarchy relates to Jung's conception of the unconscious as representing dark, intuitive female forces. The orgiastic rites of the Dionysiac religion imply the need for an initiate to "abandon himself to his animal nature and thereby experience the full fertilizing power of the Earth Mother." Alan's mother, while trying to indoctrinate her son with Christianity, becomes one of the forces that encourage him in his Dionysian worship. She is not the only influential force. As she relates to Dr. Dysart,

You come to us and say "Who forbids television? Who does what behind whose back?"--as if we're criminals. We've done nothing wrong. We loved Alan. . . . 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 to this, you wouldn't find why he did this terrible thing--because that's him: not just all of our things added up. (p. 90)

Dr. Dysart has said the same thing in the form of a question:

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 them apart again. But why at the start they were even 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 doing 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! . . . ." (p. 88)

Dysart can find many of the reasons for Alan's behavior, but the initial thrust is elusive. Why must Alan worship as he does, and why did he choose the horse to incarnate his god? Shaffer does not answer these questions for us, because there is yet another Dionysian element in the play, the ability to experience abandonment without rationally understanding why. The play on stage takes on the quality of a vision and has the capacity of carrying the audience away in a Dionysian frenzy. One reviewer commented that the play "builds rhythmically to a point and then a plateau of ecstasy and, finally, to a feeling in the audience that it has had contact with secret places of beauty and glory."

The Dionysian personality is one that must enjoy extraordinary experience. He often seeks escape by means of drunkenness, excesses, frenzy, licentiousness, and violence. The dream or vision plays an important role in his personality, which is symbolic of individualism. William Blake captured the essence of Dionysianism when he said that "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom."

Some men need a touch of Dionysian frenzy, others a touch of Apollonian control. A full initiate embraces both powers.
Nietzsche, after thoroughly contrasting Dionysus to Apollo, recognizes that within each good is a dualistic nature. Apollo's rays can heal or consume. "Dionysus is the cause of madness and the liberator from madness." "The smile of this Dionysus has given birth to Olympian gods, his tears have given birth to men." Equus is both Apollonian and Dionysian. It fulfills the Greek ideal of harmony. The entrance to Apollo's temple at Delphi bore the inscriptions "Nothing in excess" and "Know thyself." The second inscription pointed to "man's need to recognize the tendency of one or the other of his powers to overreach itself." Equus portrays a man, Dysart, who feels that he is walking exactly the Greek road of moderation. But when he comes face to face with the fervent passion of Dionysus, he yearns for it. He will not sacrifice his way of moderation to be destroyed by excess, but he longs to feel the ecstasy of Dionysus.

Dysart is feeling the bit of reason (Apollo) in his mouth as he reflects on Alan's Dionysian rapture. 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. The only thing I know for sure is this: a horse's head is finally unknowable to me. (p. 22)
He realizes the authenticity of Alan's experience, while at the same time he realizes that he can share no part of it.

And while I sit there, baiting a poor unimaginative woman with the word, that freaky boy tries to conjure 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. (p. 95)

Nietzsche interprets this Dionysian suffering in a positive way. "Suffering under the sign of Dionysus becomes a creative experience, a feeling of life and strength."25 According to Nietzsche there are two types of pessimism:

Is pessimism inevitably a sign of decadence, warped, weakened instincts, as it was once with the ancient Hindus, as it is now with us modern Europeans? Or is there such a thing as a strong pessimism? A penchant of the mind for what is hard, terrible, evil, dubious in existence, arising from a plethora of health, plenitude of being? Could it be, perhaps—that the very feeling of superabundance created its own kind of suffering: a temerity of penetration, hankering for the enemy (the worthwhile enemy) so as to prove its strength, to experience at last what it means to fear something?26

The strong pessimism is a quality in an individual who has the courage to stand alone and self-reliant. The play Equus calls upon its audience to do just this. No answers have been provided. The child is cured, but even that is not presented as a triumph. Dysart still feels "reined in." He resents the fact that he had to cure the boy. There seems to be no way out of the major
dilemma presented by the play. Nietzsche's interpretation of the Dionysian man gives the audience an answer. In his very failure and despair the Dionysian man fulfills himself, recognizing that "it is out of the deepest depth that the highest must come to know the heights." 27

Nietzsche lists the characteristics of Dionysian art. It forces the viewer to look for the "delight of existence" behind the phenomena, not in the phenomena. It makes the viewer aware of the temporary nature of all things; everything will face a "painful dissolution." It leads the viewer to "gaze into the horror of individual existence, yet without being turned to stone by the vision." 28 Equus is a form of Dionysian art. The audience delights not so much in what they view upon the stage, but in the many implications evident throughout the play. Nietzsche says that through Dionysian art "we become, ourselves, the primal Being, and we experience its insatiable hunger for existence. Now we see the struggle, the pain, the destruction of appearances, as necessary, because of the constant proliferation of forms pushing into life, because of the extravagant fecundity of the world will." 29

Nietzsche relates the Dionysian with music and the Apollonian to the plastic arts. Music transports the listener into other realms. Tragedy had its origins in the musical and choral worship of Dionysus. Nietzsche
feels that "music alone allows us to understand the de-
light felt at the annihilation of the individual." 30
"The hero, the highest manifestation of the will, is
destroyed, and we assent, since he too is merely a
phenomenon, and the eternal life of the will remains
unaffected." 31

Equus, with part of the audience and all of the
actors sitting on stage in a semi-circle behind the
main area of action, uses the Greek idea of a chorus
and even relies on music of a sort. The horses stomp,
paw, and hum symbolically at certain times in the play.
This "horse noise" in no way resembles the realistic
neighing of a literal horse; rather it is reminiscent
of the early dithyrambic chant of Dionysian ritual. This
is one example of an indirect reference to Dionysus.
Directly, Dysart speaks of his statue of Dionysus, a
good-luck symbol; it ironically stands in a house
plagued by many forms of sterility. Dysart recognizes
the irony of paying lip service to Dionysus, while
living a rigid, fully ordered life in deference to
Apollo.

By referring to these two extremes, in no way
do I wish to imply that the question of reason versus
passion can be resolved simply by choice. The answer
is a matter of degree. The Greeks saw the need for
harmony between the Apollonian and the Dionysian; Nietzsche viewed this tension as the wellspring of tragedy. Peter Shaffer says, "I'm fascinated by the endless ambiguity of the human situation, of the conflict between two different kinds of right." He sees the play as a truly tragic situation because there is no clear solution. "It's not a conflict between leaving a boy as he is and not leaving a boy as he is. It's a conflict in having not to leave him as he is and, at the same time, possibly to eviscerate him."

Walter Kerr sees the tension as integral to the myth slowly disclosing itself on stage.

Over-all, it is the image that stands, and is complete. The boy with his dangerous creativity, fills one half of it, forever driven, forever blocked. The doctor fills the other, feverishly unwilling to do what he must do, doing it—only to block himself. The two fit together at unpredictable angles, like differently colored pieces in a stained-glass window, but they fit and use up all the space that there is. Any move either makes destroys the other, locked horns, both right, no escape. The play is perfectly proportioned to its mutual pain.

The Greeks would have viewed the play as perfect harmony. Nietzsche would have called it tragedy, the perfect blending of Apollo and Dionysus.

Nietzsche reminds us that the synthesis in which negation and affirmation, suffering and joy are reconciled is not final or static. Dionysus (and the play Equus) remains "the great ambivalent one, forever
changing, forever struggling, and yet forever giving structure and form."\textsuperscript{35} Alan is the Dionysian and harks back to a time "when infliction of pain was experienced as joy while a sense of supreme triumph elicited cries of anguish from the heart."\textsuperscript{36}

The audience identifies with Alan in his moment of high passion, and as he collapses it becomes the doctor again, "feeling not relief for exorcism but a sense of loss. . . . Equus is more than a high-class melodrama. It is a cry for the power of irrationality. Or an echo."\textsuperscript{37}

This power of irrationality is related to the interpretation of Dionysus given by Nietzsche and by later psychologists. This Dionysian power is related to the dark, intuitive forces of the unconscious, which in turn are maternal. Alan's worship as a Dionysian reveler is derived from his unconscious and related to the maternal spirit. All these elements make Equus appear from a distance as a richly woven tapestry, but from a closer perspective the multitudinous colors and textures catch our eye. Perspective is important when viewing any work of art, but Equus demands a rational acceptance of its ideas as well as a passionate participation in its ritual.
NOTES


4 Jobes, p. 447.

5 Durant, p. 187.

6 Jobes, p. 447.

7 Ibid.

8 Durant, p. 200.

9 Defined in The Life of Greece (p. 187) as "going out of their souls" to meet and be one with Dionysus.


13 Jobes, p. 110.

14 Slochower, p. 73.


16 Slochower, p. 72.


22. Pfeffer, p. 49.


25. Pfeffer, p. 50.


27. Ibid., p. 6.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.


31. Ibid., p. 102.


33. Ibid., p. 192.


35. Pfeffer, p. 31.

37 Gerald Weales, rev. of Equus, by Peter Shaffer, Commonweal, 25 April 1975, p. 79.
CHAPTER IV

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE HORSE IN EQUUS

The horse is a powerful psychological symbol with strong Dionysian overtones. Freud has interpreted it as a sexual image; Jung has related it to the archetypal unconscious. The horse is servile, yet wild and uncontrollable at times. Jung says that this aspect of the horse symbolizes "uncontrollable instinctive drives that can erupt from the unconscious," an important indirect reference to the connection in the play between the horse, instinct, and the unconscious. Jung also speculates on the horse as a symbol for the mother. It expresses the magic side of men—"the mother within us," intuitive understanding.

The horse is also a symbol of deity in Equus. Central to the tension in the play is the horse and the god thus personified. "I keep thinking about the horse: Not the boy: the horse and what he may be trying to do" (p. 21). The horse is the image of a particular god whom everyone conceives in his or her own unconscious and unfulfilled fantasy. "Equus is a polymorphic symbol of the projections into the ultimate which are respectively
favored by Frank Strang, Dora Strang, the youth and of course the psychiatrist Martin Dysart." 3

Jung views the horse symbolically as a beast of burden closely related to the mother archetype. 4 As a beast of burden it carries mankind and serves him, but there is also a hidden strength. The mother image is a serving and nourishing image, as well as a destructive one. The mother is in fact the child's horse, apparent in the primitive custom of carrying the child on the back or riding it on the hip. 5

Mircea Eliade sees the horse as an animal associated with burial rites in chthonian cults. 6 This association leads to Dionysus and back to Alan as a true Dionysian spirit. Merten Stienon considers the horse an "ancient symbol of the cyclic movement of the world of phenomena." 7 One of Poseidon's symbols is the horse, and as he rushes upward from out of the waves we see horses that "symbolize the cosmic forces that surge out of . . . the blind forces of primigenial chaos." 8 It is generally agreed by scholars that one important element of horse symbolism is intense desire and instinct.

As an animal lower than man, the horse represents the lower part of the body and the animal instincts that arise from there. Along with its sexual connotations, the horse is also a dynamic and vehicular power. It
has the power to carry one away (like a surge of instinct, a surge from the unconscious). The horse often panics in strange situations, and Jung compares this tendency to a similar one in all instinctive creatures who lack higher consciousness.\(^9\) Alan Strang is just such an instinctive creature.

The eye of the horse is symbolically important in this play. Alan feels that he is constantly being watched by his god.

**Dysart:** The Lord thy God is a Jealous God. He sees you. He sees you forever and ever, Alan. He sees you! . . . He sees you!

**Alan:** (in terror) Eyes! . . . White eyes--never closed! Eyes like flames--coming--coming! . . . God seest! God seest! . . . NO! (p. 121)

He blinds the horses in desperation, trying to escape from an all-seeing god. "Then I see his eyes. They are rolling!" (p. 120). Earlier in the play, during his midnight ritualistic ride, he says, "His eyes shine. They can see in the dark . . . Eyes!--" (p. 81). A horse has peripheral vision and sees things happening in a large area to each side of him. There is an area directly in front of a horse that is a blind spot. It is up to the rider to spot the obstacles right in front of a horse, which can spot a gopher hole yards away but cannot see what is directly in front of him. Instinct is often referred to as "blind." The horse is quite
literally blind to a particular area. This relationship indirectly plays a part in the symbolism of the horse in Equus. Alan is not only following instinct; he is following "blind" instinct.

Alan is fascinated with eyes. The picture of a horse in his bedroom shows the horse from a head-on perspective. Alan's mother comments that it appears to be all eyes.

Dysart: Could you describe that photograph of the horse in a little more detail for me? I presume it's still in his bedroom?
Dora: Oh, yes. It's a most remarkable picture, really. You very rarely see a horse taken from that angle--absolutely head on. That's what makes it so interesting.
Dora: Well, it's most extraordinary. It comes out all eyes.

Dysart: Staring straight at you?
Dora: Yes, that's right... (p. 52)

Jill, Alan's friend at the stables, notices Alan staring into the horse's eyes and says that eyes fascinate her also.

Jill: There was an article in the paper last week saying what points about boys fascinate girls. They said Number One is bottoms. I think it's eyes every time... They fascinate you too, don't they?

Alan: Me?
Jill: I saw you staring into Nugget's eyes yesterday for ages. I spied on you through the door!

Jill: I love horses' eyes. The way you can see yourself in them. D'you find them sexy? (p. 103)

Direct reference to sex is made here, and Shaffer indirectly refers to the sexual appeal of horses in other scenes. Alan comments that the horse is a very naked
creature. "The horse isn't dressed. It's the most naked thing you ever saw! More than a dog or a cat or anything" (p. 56). He admits to Dr. Dysart that he finds riding a horse sexy. He had refused to answer Dysart's question about his first ride on the beach, but he later returned a tape that began "It was sexy... That's what you want to know, isn't it? All right: it was... 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" (p. 55). Sex is often viewed as animalistic, and animals appear in dreams as the embodiment of unleashed sexual vitality.¹⁰

Psychologists have often commented that the "horse mania" so prevalent among young girls is sexually based. In 1962 Thomas Gladwin expounded a theory of the "equine subconscious" replacing the more common term "latency." He describes a time in the cradle of civilization when horses were men's companions from infancy to old age. Hard times finally forced man to kill and eat the horses, creating a crushing burden of guilt on man. In girls the guilt manifests itself in horse-madness. They actually submerge themselves in a horse ego. The crisis manifests itself in boys also, on whom the guilt rests most heavily because the horses in nomadic days had been the primary responsibility of the boys. Gladwin
compares the guilt of these boys with the Freudian concept of Oedipal guilt, calling it "equine guilt." He says this guilt manifests itself during a period of latency and in normal cases disappears with the onset of puberty. Boys are fascinated at this time with the glamor of cowboys, wearing the uniform--hat, boots, and jeans--but do not show an interest in riding the horse at this time.\textsuperscript{11}

This theory relates at least indirectly to Alan's dilemma. His first experience with a horse took place when he was about twelve years old. Under hypnosis Alan reveals that the horse spoke to him on the beach. He also said that the ride was "sexy." A psychiatrist who analyzed \textit{Equus} says that the central character was "possibly inspired by Freud's famous case history, labeled 'Little Hans,' of a patient whose horse-phobia represented fears of his father's sexual prohibitions."\textsuperscript{12} Dr. Gifford, the psychiatrist, also thinks that the symbolism of the horse is fully exploited to represent virility and sexual freedom as well as servitude.

Alan does not experience "horse-phobia," but his relationship with his father is fraught with anxiety centered in religion and sex. Concerning religion, his father even makes the comment that "All that stuff to me was just bad sex" (p. 40). When his father
catches Alan worshipping beneath the picture of the horse in his room, he just coughs and goes away. He cannot talk to Alan about such things. "I can't speak of things like that, Doctor. It's not in my nature" (p. 59). When Dysart asks him how informed his son is on sexual matters, Mr. Strang replies, "I don't know" (p. 40). Mrs. Strang speaks up and tells the doctor that she has told Alan about the biological facts as well as the spiritual implications of love and sex. Psychologically, his relationship with his parents is partly manifested in his relationship to horses, for his god Equus does not reside in any one particular horse but in horses in general.

In describing his first ride on a horse, Alan inadvertently comments on the virility and sexual freedom they represent. "All that power going any way you wanted . . . His sides were all warm, and the smell . . . Then suddenly I was on the ground, where Dad pulled me. I could have bashed him . . . " (p. 55). He recognizes immediately the servitude inherent in the horse, "all that power." He says that only cowboys can understand them, a symbol of virility and freedom. "I wish I was a cowboy. They're free. They just swing up and then it's miles of grass . . . I bet all cowboys are orphans! . . . I bet they are" (p. 56).
The next scene in the play shows Alan kneeling in his room before the photograph of a horse. He chants a list of "begats" and ends with "Behold--I give you Equus, my only begotten son" (p. 58). The picture of the horse took the place of a lurid picture of Christ in chains, enduring torture. It had been torn down by Alan's father. The rest of Alan's ritual is Dionysian as he puts a string bit in his mouth and commences to beat himself. In this scene the horse is an important religious symbol, Alan's object of complete worship.

The horse's head is associated with Demeter, and scholars have found evidence of horse sacrifices in antiquity. This relationship with Demeter implies that the horse is also a fertility symbol. In this play the horse is the only meaningful part of Alan's life, keeping it from being completely sterile. In a sense the horse is a fertility symbol for Alan, whose life at home is barren.

Jung has the greatest contribution to make on the subject of horse symbolism. He, along with Freud, views the rhythm of riding as having more than explicit sexual significance. In German, fifteen times as many expressions for a horse are derived from the idea of movement as from any other single attribute except its sexuality. The consideration of movement leads to the
idea of riding, and in every language riding is one of the most common euphemisms for coitus—the analogy in position and movement between rider and horse and man and woman being sufficiently evident. In the play Equus the rhythm of Alan's ride is the climax of Act I. It is an act both sexual and religions in nature.

And Equus the Mighty rose against All!
His enemies scatter, his enemies fall!
Turn!
Trample them, trample them,
Trample them, trample them,
TURN!
TURN!!
TURN!!!

Feel me on you! On you! On you!
I want to be in you!
I want to BE you forever and ever!—
Equus, I love you!
Now!—
Bear me away!
Make us One Person!
(He rides Equus frantically.)
One Person! One Person! One Person! One Person!
Ha-HA! . . . Ha-HA! . . . Ha-HA!
(The trumpet turns to great cries.)
HAAAAA! (p. 85)

The language as well as the content of this scene suggest a definite rhythm, the rhythm of riding a horse—or of sexual union.

Through this ride Alan seeks to transcend both himself and time. The horse is a symbol of transcendence which will "bear" Alan away. The transcendence is evident even in the sentence structure and choice of words. Alan
wants to be "on" the horse, "in" the horse, and ultimately he wants to "be" the horse. He transcends his own limitations through the psychological symbol of the horse, becoming one with his god, one with infinity.

In *Symbols of Transformation* Jung comments on the many symbolic interpretations of the horse. Legend attributes properties to the horse which psychologically belong to the unconscious of man: they are sometimes clairvoyant, pathfinding horses who show the way when the wanderer is lost. They prophesy evil and see ghosts. All these things are typical manifestations of the unconscious. The horse, as a symbol of the animal component in man, has numerous connections with the devil. The devil, like the nightmare, rides the sleeper. Horses also signify wind and fire, libido symbols. The centaurs are, among other things, wind-gods, and the fiery horses of Helios represent the importance of the shining appearance of the horse. They also represent the four elements. Jung interprets the "cradle of the horse as the sea; i.e., the libido is in the 'mother,' dying and rising again in the unconscious."

All of the above interpretations relate indirectly or directly to Shaffer's use of the horse in *Equus*. Being an ardent admirer of Jung, Shaffer may well have been aware of these theories, although whether he was or
not makes no difference in appreciating the play. The rich symbolism of the horse adds an element to the play upon which its ultimate meaning hinges. The boy seeks transcendence. He yearns for something infinite, and the horse becomes his spiritual vehicle. Dr. Dysart also wonders about the horse; and in the end he sees Equus, dark within the cave, saying "Account for me" (p. 125). And the audience has to account for the god Equus in the form of a horse.
NOTES


5 Jung, V, 251.

6 Cirlot, p. 144.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Jung, V, 250.


15 Jung, V, 277.
16 Ibid., p. 278.
CHAPTER V

THE YEARNING FOR TRANSCENDENCE IN EQUUS

With one particular horse, called Nugget, he embraces. The animal digs its sweaty brow into his cheek, and they stand in the dark for an hour--like a necking couple. And of all the nonsensical things--I keep thinking about the horse! Not the boy: the horse, and what it may be trying to do. I keep seeing that huge head kissing him with its chained mouth. Nudging through the metal some desire absolutely irrelevant to filling its belly or propagating its own kind. What desire could that be? Not to stay a horse any longer? (p. 21)

The first scene in Equus shows Dr. Dysart wondering what a horse could possibly desire when it nudges a person. This question sets the tone for one very important aspect of the play, the romantic irony evident throughout the play. It begins with something yearning to go beyond itself, and it ends with Dr. Dysart still seeking some kind of transcendence. "I need--more desperately than my children need me--a way of seeing in the dark" (p. 125).

The term for this longing and its solution, romantic irony, has its origins in the writings of the early German Romanticists. Immanuel Kant and Johann Fichte were influential in inspiring Friedrich Schiller, who in turn inspired Friedrich Schlegel to implement a theory of romantic irony. Schiller has been called the spiritual
grandfather of Romanticism, but Schlegel actually formulated a theory which bridged the gap left by Schiller. In "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry" Schiller, attempting to draw up guidelines separating modern writing from classical literature, devised a list of qualities applicable to each type of writing. Some of the contrasts can be represented in tabular form.

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<tr>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Sentimental</th>
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<td>being</td>
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*Equus* fulfills the characteristics set for the sentimental, the last four items under *Sentimental* specifically pertaining to the striving for transcendence which is the main thrust of the play.

Schiller's theory divided the naive (simple, Greek) from the sentimental (modern, romantic). By 1794 Fichte had converted the Kantian conception of the "moral ideal as an endless pursuit of a forever unattainable goal into a metaphysical principle and had represented the very nature of all existence as an infinite and insatiable striving of the Absolute Ego." The finite was superseded by the infinite in philosophy, and "being" was superseded by "becoming." Activity itself became more important
than "becoming," and a mood of endless longing replaced that of quietude and collectedness of mind. Schlegel's concept of irony arose from an attempt to reconcile the claims of the objectivity of the "naive" from the subjectivity of the "sentimental" into a view incorporating the inherent ambivalence in the human psyche: even as we conceive the ideal, it is counteracted by the sense of reality and human limitations. Only thus, says Schlegel, can man have a full understanding of human nature—which must incorporate at one and the same time an awareness of man's aspirations and his limitations.

According to Schiller, the infinite is mirrored in two different ways in simple and sentimental poetry. Through irony Schlegel bridged the gap between man and infinity, and thereby German Romanticism was born.

There is a lack of agreement among scholars concerning the definition of Romanticism as well as the origin of the word as a literary term. Arthur Lovejoy says that Schlegel is indebted to Schiller for his concept of Romanticism, while an earlier critic says that Schlegel used the word in an essay on Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre; thus its origins stem from the word "roman," meaning story or tale. In spite of the controversy spawned by the uncertain origins of the very word "romantic," there is general agreement as to some of its
characteristics and of its indebtedness to these German writers. English literature from approximately 1798 to 1832 has been labeled romantic. American literature has had a romantic period, and elements of Romanticism can be found in every period of literature. Some few of these elements are 1. interest in the past, the primitive, supernatural, and myth; 2. love of nature; 3. stress on the individual and freedom; 4. a sense of rebellion; and 5. a longing for infinity.

Equus contains many concepts similar to those of Schiller and Schlegel, as well as other concepts inherent in Romanticism. Schiller is attracted to the absolute power manifested in the apparent wildness and chaos of nature, a power that is both destructive and constructive. Power and its manifestations are the key element in Schiller's concept of freedom. This same power is found in Nietzsche's description of strong pessimism. In fact, Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy is romantic in that he glorifies the individual and freedom. This strong affirmation of life is felt throughout Equus in spite of the pessimism (which Nietzsche would label romantic and weak) evident in the last scene. Dr. Dysart has not found a way out of the dark.

Throughout the play we, the audience, are identifying with both Alan and Dr. Dysart. "As we sit engrossed by
the unraveling of self-awareness in both physician and patient, we discover that we, too, long for what Bergson called 'le dépassement de soi,' the going beyond oneself." Nietzsche, Schiller, Schlegel, Fichte, and Kant, to name a few, all theorized on the idea of some kind of transcendence. This "longing" appears in other cultures and manifests itself in many ways. When one attempts to systemize, one risks the destruction of the original idea. But systems and theories make discussion of ideas possible.

Schiller's system of categorizing the sentimental artists is helpful in a discussion of Equus. The audience is not satisfied at the end of the play. No sense of completion is evident. Minds have been enlarged, and the work of the playwright continues even after leaving the theatre. Schiller said that this was one of the major effects of the sentimental poet: "The sentimental poet leaves his audience dissatisfied with nature, with the real, with the determinate and limited, because he has, by means of the infinite, 'enlarged our mind beyond its natural manner so that nothing it finds in the world of sense can fill its capacity.'" Sentimental poetry is characterized by longing, while the naive poetry is characterized by a sense of completion.

Schiller also says that the sentimental poet is oriented always towards the ideal.
Here in sentimental consciousness we feel only a vivid aspiration to produce in us this harmony of which we had in the other case the consciousness and reality; to make ourselves a single and sane totality; to realize in ourselves the idea of humanity as a complete expression.  

Orientation towards the ideal, a longing for infinity, and an insatiability of desire are romantic characteristics. The term romantic has come to have confusing and diverse connotations due to the "equivocality of its fundamental notion of infinity." Schiller and Schlegel diverged over the ambiguous nature of the term, each man arriving at his own conception of "infinity."

The five different concepts of infinity listed by Arthur Lovejoy are 1. a moral idea or passion too lofty, or too many-sided, or too exacting ever to be fully realized as the inspiration of art; 2. a yearning after some mysterious, vague, or remote ideal whose allurement lies in its indefinability and its transcendence of all ordinary experience; 3. an insatiable craving for novelty and art; 4. insatiability as the conscious ideal and glorification of this ideal as the theme of the artist; and 5. the infinite variety and inexhaustible interestingness of life. Lovejoy relates number one to Schiller and number five to Schlegel. He points out that although Schlegel is indebted to Schiller for his definition of romanticism, they do not even agree on that one important concept, the nature of infinity.
Both men had previously denigrated the modern writers for the very qualities they ended up praising. Both ended by granting the moderns superiority, but Schiller's "sentimental" poet did not directly equate with Schlegel's "romantic" one. For Schiller, Homer as well as Shakespeare, Molière, and Goethe were "natural" (naive) poets, not "sentimental" ones. For Schlegel, Shakespeare was the very core of romantic poetry. There is significant divergence between the two notions sentimentalisch and romantisch. It is generally agreed that the word romantic was launched upon its tempestuous career through nineteenth-century criticism and philosophy by Friedrich Schlegel. Lovejoy gives a convincing argument that Schiller is responsible for Schlegel's choice and use of that particular word. Lovejoy also adds that Schlegel's natural temperament and his admiration for Shakespeare were influential.

An important aspect of infinity is religious experience. Theologians, as well as philosophers, psychologists, and critics, have found in Equus a vast accumulation of statements on church doctrine, the nature of the Trinity being one. Samuel Terrien in The Christian Century recognizes that "the boy is looking for a mystical unity with infinity" through his relationship with the horse. He interprets the midnight ride as similar to the
experience of a medieval mystic who tries to lose himself within Christ. This "infinity" goes beyond the definitions given by Schiller and Schlegel; it relates more to Nietzsche's interpretation of Dionysian ecstasy. It is an insatiable longing to become one with something that will ultimately destroy its pursuer—a prominent theme in such romantic poems as Shelley's "Alastor" and Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci."

Schlegel's concept of romantic irony relates to Shaffer's purpose in Equus. "Irony is the poetic power that enables the artist first to create a determinate work embodying a representation of the infinite and then to transcend it as an inadequate and fragmentary exposition of infinite becoming." To Schlegel, irony simultaneously implies affirmation and negation. There is joy and enthusiasm in the possession of an object (or goal), but at the same time there is a "self-distancing" from it and a toning down of the joy. "The result is that the audience hovers between the two forms, and it is in this hovering that the longed for harmony is hopefully attained." Equus does not achieve this harmony; it falls short of the goal.

One theologian interprets this shortcoming as a failure to get past the crucifixion of Christ. He feels that Shaffer needs a "resurrection" in the play
but forgives him his theological ambiguity, for he is after all the playwright.

The basic flaw of Equus results from the playwright's flirtation with the intrinsic demands of Judaism and Christianity. The play is a study of the starvation for transcendence, but Shaffer does not wish to say how to cure this hunger. He has succeeded in exhibiting the vacuum or the perversity of human existence when it lacks a dynamic trust in God, but he has failed to show the kind of trust in the kind of God that can deliver us from the enslavement of self. Theological ambiguity, however, should be the privilege of an artist.2

Terrien also says that Equus alerts us to the danger of misunderstanding the Trinity and seeing God the Father as only a symbol of paternal tyranny, God the Son as an androgynous youth playing at the extension of consciousness, and God the Spirit as an overwhelming, intoxicating vision.23

Shaffer's stated intentions in the play are otherwise. He does not even feel that Christianity is the issue. "I'm not sure that I intended it to be exclusively concerned with Christianity." He does say that the play is concerned with a search for a religious experience in the sense of transcendence. Shaffer does not believe that Christ was the only figure invested with godhead, his concept of religion being much broader. "I think religious belief is something one has to discover for oneself, to make for oneself... You make it, it is something to create for yourself and I think
religion is something you create yourself. You just don't receive a set of principles, then say—that makes me a Christian.

Dysart repeats some of Shaffer's comments in the play. Hester, the compassionate judge, tries to convince Dysart that he is doing the right thing in spite of his doubts. She tells him that he can take away Alan's pain, and Dysart questions the desirability of that action.

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.

Don't you see? That's the Accusation! That's what his stare has been saying to me all the time. 'At least I galloped! When did you?' . . . I'm jealous, Hester. Jealous of Alan Strang. (p. 24)

Just as Shaffer says that one makes his own religion, so Dysart applies this same principle to pain. The fact that Alan has "galloped" is the Dionysian element of which Dysart is jealous. The Dionysian galloping compares to the yearning for infinity, which is a tenet central to the romantic position of Schlegel. The irony of the situation is evident to the audience as well as to Dysart. If they identify with Alan they are condoning passion
for its own sake, which often leads to destruction. If they identify with Dysart, they condone the destruction of the individual Alan Strang. Schlegel's concept of romantic irony, which becomes a hovering between the two possibilities, seems to solve the dilemma. But Shaffer introduces another element in the closing speech spoken by Dysart: how to account for the "darkness" and what to do about the chain in our mouths.

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)

The darkness relates to the Jungian concept of the unconscious. The chain is the limitation on man so abhorred by Nietzsche, Schiller, and Schlegel.

The play Equus, like the previously mentioned fields of psychology and myth, runs the risk of narrow interpretation. It is a broad, rich work, full of varied implications, numerous allusions, and inspiring ideas. Just as Schlegel seeks to fuse the finite and the infinite into an organic whole, so the many diverse elements in Equus must be fused by the audience into one all-embracing unity.
NOTES

1Leonard P. Wessell, Jr., "Schiller and the Genesis of German Romanticism," Studies in Romanticism, 10 (Summer 1971), 190.

2All references to this work will be from secondary sources because a translation of the primary source was not available at the time this paper was written.


5Ibid.


7For an elaboration on these various theories see Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enscoe, eds., Romanticism: Points of View, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975).

8See Chapter III, p. 61 of this paper.


11Ibid., p. 188.


14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., p. 140.


18 Terrien, pp. 473-74.

19 See Chapter III, pp. 55-56 of this paper.


22 Terrien, p. 475.


24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.
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