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論彼得・薛佛《戀馬狂》中焦慮之意義

On the Meaning of Anxiety in Peter Shaffer's *Equus*

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論文提要內容：

本論文以存在主義心理學來檢視彼得薛佛《戀馬狂》中兩位主角，病人艾倫・斯壯與心理醫生馬汀・戴瑟的內在衝突。本劇所描繪的社會建構了許多教條式的價值並將其灌輸給人們，而這些內化了的社會價值致使人們與內在自我產生衝突，做出違背自己本性的行為並表現出行為與信念上之差異。本劇暗示了，盲目地接受社會價值將使人面臨「焦慮」以及可能隨之而來的認同危機。許多人通常認為「焦慮」對人類之健全有負面影響，然而，「焦慮」在彼得・薛佛的《戀馬狂》中是個人掙扎實現其理想自我的隱喻。雖然兩位主角內化社會價值並因此有了不好的自我形象，本論文認為，他們所經歷的治療過程協助他們處理焦慮，檢視自身信念並且獲得心靈成長，原諒他者，接受自己。

關鍵字：《戀馬狂》、焦慮、存在主義心理學、內在衝突、社會價值、認同危機、理想自我、心靈成長

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Abstract

The present thesis examines the inner conflict of the protagonists in Peter Shaffer's *Equus*, the patient Alan Strang and the psychiatrist Martin Dysart, from the perspective of existential psychology. The play depicts a society that constructs many dogmatic values and instils them within people for the sustainability of the community, and these internalized social values often lead people to come into conflict with their own inner self, acting against their nature and displaying a discrepancy between actions and beliefs. The play implies that accepting social values blindly will result in man's "anxiety" and identity crisis that may come afterwards. "Anxiety" is normally considered by many to influence man's well-being in a negative way; however, "anxiety" for Shaffer in this play is a metaphor of an individual's struggle to fulfill the ideal self. Although Alan and Dysart internalize social values and thus have a poor self-image, I argue that the therapy they go through help them cope with anxiety, examining their own beliefs and achieving spiritual growth through showing self-acceptance and forgiveness of others.

Keywords: *Equus*, anxiety, existential psychology, inner conflict, social value, identity crisis, ideal self, spiritual growth

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The present thesis examines the inner conflict[1] of the protagonists in Peter Shaffer's *Equus*, Alan Strang and Martin Dysart, from the perspective of existential psychology.[2] *Equus* is a well-known play due to its in-depth illustration of its protagonists' mental world, which ends with the revelation of how traumatized its two protagonists have become under the influence of society. Premiered in 1973 and with a movie released on the base of it in 1977, the play challenges the then contemporary society by presenting various issues such as sex, science, religion, core family and so forth. Worldwide attention on the play was renewed after high profile stage productions in 2007 and continues to the present day. The play depicts a society that constructs dogmatic values and instils them within people for the sustainability of the community, and these internalized social values often lead individuals to come into conflict with their inner self,[3] acting against their nature and displaying a discrepancy between actions and beliefs. In the discussion of this thesis, the play also implies that accepting social values blindly will result in man's "anxiety"[4] and identity crisis[5] that may come afterwards.

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[1] An individual may struggle with multiple inner conflicts, but in my thesis I use the phrase in singular form specifically to indicate the two protagonists' situation of coming into constant confrontation with their own inner self shown in the therapy.

[2] Gary R. Vandenbos explains that existential psychology is "a general approach to psychological theory and practice that derives from EXISTENTIALISM. It emphasizes the subjective meaning of human experience, the uniqueness of the individual, and personal responsibility reflected in choice" (238).

[3] *Collins Online Dictionary* defines "inner self" as "a person's true or internal mind, soul or nature." Please see the following web link: <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/inner-self>. In my thesis, I suggest that there are two aspects to look at an individual's sense of self. Every person plays his/her roles in society and present him/herself before other people in a certain way in order to survive and function in the communities they belong to. However, the functioning of society requires every individual to suppress his/her emotions and desires, the qualities belonging to one's "inner self."

[4] "Anxiety" can be seen as either a negative or a positive experience to people's well-being depends on the angle from which people look at it. It not only suggests "an uncomfortable feeling in the mind usually caused by the fear of expectation that something bad will happen" but also indicates "a feeling of worried

Critics in the past often focused on analyzing whether the protagonists' characterization indicates a metaphysical conflict or not, or how their personality is tragically shaped by certain values. This thesis seeks to interpret the play in a new light. It also goes beyond the fixated conclusion offered by critics in the past. The thesis suggests that Alan and Dysart[6] choose to cope with "anxiety" through the help of the therapy and are rewarded by this coping experience. The influence of "anxiety" is normally considered by many as negative; however, "anxiety" for Shaffer in this play is a metaphor of an individual's struggle to fulfill his/her own ideal self.[7] The thesis first argues that the therapy Alan and Dysart go through offers them an opportunity to see their own identity crisis. The thesis further aims to prove that both Alan and Dysart examine their own beliefs and fulfill their own ideal self at the end of the therapy. Their process of self-examination and expression embodies a journey of achieving spiritual growth.

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eagerness" (*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* 49). Except signifying one's fear for bad future, "anxiety" can also be understood as one's desire to achieve something, which is shown in the general definition of it given above.

[5] Definitions of this phrase from different sources can help clarify the protagonists' own situation illustrated in *Equus*. *Oxford Online Dictionary* explains that "identity crisis" is "a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society." *The New American Webster Handy College Dictionary* defines "identity crisis" as "a psychological crisis caused by confusion about ones' goals and role in society" (364); *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* describes a man with "identity crisis" will lack "self-confidence and had no particular purpose in life" (693). In *Equus*, Alan Strang can be said to have been living with identity crisis since he recalls his ambivalent affection for horses in the therapy, and Martin Dysart shows his low "self-confidence" and his sense of lacking a "purpose in life" at the beginning of the play. Given this fact, Alan and Dysart display their own identity crisis—these will be mentioned in "Plot Summary."

[6] Throughout this paper, I will refer to them as in "Alan" and "Dysart" as the way they are mentioned in the play's script.

[7] *Dictionary of Sport and Exercise Science and Medicine by Churchill Livingstone* defines "ideal self" as "a person's conception of how they would likely to be." Please see the following web link: <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/ideal+self>. This phrase can also be understood as in "inner self," which is previously mentioned in footnote number two, but I use them to describe different things. While my usage of the term "inner" intends to suggest the protagonists' symbolical conflict with their own counterpart, meaning "self-image," which is constructed by socials values and will be mentioned in footnote fifteen, I use the phrase "ideal self" to refer to the protagonists' own individuality, the characteristics that make them different from other characters in the play.

1.1 Plot Summary

The story takes place in a hospital, and its scene is staged as a "dissecting theater."[8] Martin Dysart, a depressed psychiatrist, narrates his therapeutic experience with a teenager patient, Alan Strang, who is sent to the hospital for having blinded six horses. The details being recalled will help Dysart himself reexamine the value of his life and lead him to discover the reason behind Alan's enigmatic lunacy.

To begin with, Alan Strang's emotional paradox with horses is uncovered in the therapy. He grows up listening to stories from his mother, among which the biblical one about Jesus Christ's suffering and another one about a proud horse named "Prince" which can talk like a human caught his childhood imagination. Consequently, he has grown increasingly attached to the idea of "animals talking" (*Equus* 30). However, when Alan was enjoying riding a horse the first time in his childhood, his father pulled him off by force. From then on, Alan develops a twisted emotion for horses, which is manifested in the presence of a horse in his imagination, "Equus," who suffers for "sins of the world" (*Equus* 66). Besides his parents, the customers he met at work also ignored his feelings. Out of loneliness, he is used to ride a horse named Nugget from the stable he works at in nights, but he has lied initially in the therapy that he never rode a horse before. However, in a therapy session Alan is hypnotized by the psychiatrist and reveals the fact that he sees "Equus" more as a simple friend. "Equus," taking the shape of a man's body and of a horse's head, becomes his companion and his God.

However, the social mentality in the play is unsympathetic. Hesther Salomon, a

[8] This phrase is used by Peter Shaffer in describing the setting of the play (*Equus* 13). In this footnote I quote Christopher Innces's review of the play to explain the structure of the stage, since I could not locate any written sources with the definition of "dissecting theatre." Innces comments, "Technically [the play] borrows eclectically from the avant garde—a bare stage, part of the audience seated behind the acting area to intensify the response by allowing spectators to observe the reactions of others, and actor seated among the audience, sound effects from speakers placed throughout the auditorium, dream sequences and a scenic structure that cuts across the logic of time and cause and effect following the irrational association of the subconscious, ritual chanting, stylized masks and mythic archetypes" (238). Having a basic understanding of the play's setting as a "dissecting theatre" is important as it symbolically illustrates the protagonists' confrontation with their own inner self.

friend of Dysart and also the magistrate who takes Alan to the hospital, remarks that most of her colleagues would send Alan to prison instead of providing help. She believes that other psychiatrists working with Dysart will feel the same way. For this reason, Dysart visits the Strang family. He learns that Dora and Frank Strang have been living with contradictory values and have instilled them within their son. Dora, for example, believes in the notion of a sacred marriage illustrated in the Bible and indicates that she has "married beneath her" (*Equus* 33). Frank, on the other hand, tends to speak ill of his wife and to interfere his son's privacy. Neither of them have ever seemed to understand their son or clarify to each other their marital problems.

Consequently, the therapy for Alan prompts Dysart to examine the values of his own life. Having mistreated his wife for his own sterility, Dysart has been ashamed of himself. He connects his profession to his unproductive private life, regarding the therapeutic methods he conducts on the patients immoral. As a result, Dysart suffers from a chronical sense of guilt, which is triggered by the coming of Alan and has been manifested by his nightmare, in which he becomes a pagan priest carving up children bodies (*Equus* 24). Disturbed by this nightmare, throughout the play Dysart examines the values he has acquired from society. The play ends with Alan recalling the blinding scene and the scene where he breaks down, and Dysart standing in the symbolical, moral darkness.

1.2 Literature Review

Although *Equus* was an immediate hit when it was first staged in 1973, it has always been a controversial play and it keeps receiving a variety of reviews. Some scholars believe that Peter Shaffer's plotting in the play is problematic. For instance, Neil Timm asserts, "I believe that the Oedipus complex is a psychiatric cliché and is meant to be seen as such. Freudian analysis alone, no matter how extensively it is developed in the play, is meant to be seen as inadequate" (128). Also, Barry B. Witham points out in his review

"The Anger in *Equus*" that "the play's "theatrical fireworks cannot mask its muddled logic and tired philosophy." Albert E. Kalson, on the other hand, argues that the plot of the play seems to guide its two protagonists to implausible "[final] confrontation of doctor and patient" (514). Allen Ellenzweig criticizes the "Freudian grounding" of the play. He concludes that "one can't help wonder if the playwright lacked the courage to [let Alan] travel that road [of sexual intimacy]." These critics accuse Shaffer of having borrowed the idea of Oedipus complex directly from Sigmund Freud, which makes the playwright and the play itself seem uncreative.

Despite many negative reviews, other critics praise Peter Shaffer's treatment of modern psychology in *Equus*. They usually approach an analysis by focusing on the play's theatricality. Christoper G. Busiel states, "by staging the past rather than revealing it through exposition (usually being a process of verbalization), Shaffer takes great advantage of the visual power of the theatre." What Busiel admires in the play is the "novelty" of Shaffer's combining psychology with the play's unique stage design. He remarks that "Shaffer utilizes theatrical techniques to enact powerfully the psychological and religious dimensions of the play." In *Peter Shaffer: Theatre and Drama*, M.K MacMurraugh-Kavanagh also gives credits to the stage design of *Equus*. He states that "the suggestion of a boxing-ring [setting] proves an apt arena for the 'vigorous contest for control of modern man's soul, while the design also recalls [...] the brutalities of ancient ritual and the brutalities of modern psychiatric practice" (111). In this regard, Kavanagh's opinion not only responds to the early critics' comment of the play's unrealistic psychological grounding but also helps to justify Shaffer's creative adaptation of modern psychology in the play.

The metaphysical dimension of the play has caught some reviewers' attention. Russel Vandenbrouke remarks that *Equus* is "a modern myth [which] delicately probe[s] a

psyche formed by a mingling of modern forces and influences, yet reaching beyond to the concerns and problems of men of all ages" (129). He further suggests that the play is a "playground for the imagination" and a "ritual" for Shaffer to "fathom and capture basic truth of man and nature" (130). Vandenbrouke concludes, "[*Equus*] is a finely wrought statement, redolent with meaning, certain to be performed and remembered for generations to come" (133). The theme of human nature illustrated in the play also draws Neil Timm's attention. Timm juxtaposes Oedipus and Alan Strang, crediting Alan as a tragic hero who is "more than a victim of circumstance" (129). On the other hand, Richard H. Palmer states that the thematic concern between "disillusioned character[s] […are] at the mercy of greater forces in Shaffer's world" (33). Fran Heller[9] remarks that the characters in *Equus* are "dull[ed] in a material world." Although the world depicted in the play seems hopeless, Heller's remark that "the story of *Equus* reverberates more loudly than ever" explains the play's unceasing charm to audience and readers.

Another group of scholars have focused on the play's theme of symbolic opposition. For instance, in his thesis "Peter Shaffer's Dramatic Vision of the Failure of Society," Lai Fu Shan analyzes the protagonists' characterization in terms of the opposition between society and the individual. He analyses protagonists' ideas about sex and religion, and concludes that both Alan and Dysart are "victims" (86) and are "defined by society" (87). Chiang Han Yang also explores the same theme of the play in his thesis "Conflicts and Confrontations between Two Cultures." Chiang maintains that "[the] two main heroes respectively represent the loss, no matter religious or marital, spiritual or corporal, of modern men" (2). In short, far from presenting merely the protagonists' damaged well-being, the play also deals with the idea of opposition between society and the individuals.

[9] Please see note 9.

Psychoanalytic theories are also favored by scholars who wish to reconstruct the protagonists' personality in *Equus*. Chang Shu Mei uses Carl Jung's theory of psychological types and comments, "owing to the influence of his culture, man cannot obtain all-sided harmonious development of personality in the histories of societies" (9). In other words, Chang implies the protagonists are victims of society. Su Shao Wen insightfully, on the other hand, applies Lacanian Gaze to analyze the relationship between Alan and the horse, and the relationship between Alan and Dysart. In her detailed analysis, Su considers that "Equus" is only a narcissistic symbol of Alan, saying that "[Alan] loves his own reflection, Equus, an extension of himself. *Equus* is the mirror reflection of his own self" (144). Similarly, she also sees Dysart as unable to get rid of his own spiritual loss in treating Alan. Su sees Dysart as "caught up in the process of analysis that he is no longer capable of making choices in life" (156). Likewise, Alan is also presented in the play dealing with spiritual dilemma. Applying Lacanian Unconscious, Pai Chih Hsin in his study argues that Alan has been displaying to construct his own subjectivity. The conclusion of Pai's study points out that the symbolic chain on Alan's mouth is, in fact, a manipulating power of language which "controls [his] behaviors" and "speaks through [him] to express its opinions of [his] unconscious" (102). Scholars' various interpretations have proved the timeless charm of the play.

1.3 Peter Shaffer: A Humanistic Playwright

Great Britain in the Seventies, during which Peter Shaffer's *Equus* was completed, can be understood as a time of great social change. C. J Gianakaris perceives the general public at this time as caught in a "basic psychic tension" (*Peter Shaffer* 105). An explanation for such a vision is provided by Laurel Forster and Sue Harper in their *British Culture and Society in the 1970s: The Lost Decade*. Forster and Harper wrote:

> The 1970s in Britain was a decade of immense complexity […] There were numerous contradictions which were, socially and politically speaking, born out of concerns about gender, race, class, living conditions and the workplace. It was a decade of great early optimism, which slid into a general sense of decline. (3)

In other words, a sense of nostalgia spreads wide in the society since "[people's] intense feelings were produced by the radical social changes, and such social and emotional trauma is often unsettling to reproduce or recall" (Foster and Harper 2).

As an artist, Peter Shaffer concerns about people in his time. In an interview he bluntly states, "[t]here is a very passionate subject here to me—the way we are pissing on our own culture. We are seeking ways to commit suicide" (*A Casebook* 30). By displaying his concern about his contemporary society, Shaffer advises people to develop spiritual self-awareness. He explains, "[c]ountries go mad as well as people […it] would be disastrous. We live in a tragic world, because a resounding right course like that is purchased by the surrender of things that are very valuable: the individuality of a country" (*A Casebook* 33). Shaffer believes that "[t]here is nothing unique in acknowledging accomplishment by persons of other races or cultures [because we] all live by things achieved by other cultures, at other times" (*A Casebook* 31). Writing plays to talk about "the taboos of the world" (*A Casebook* 30), according to Shaffer himself, is his way to achieve the goal of peace. In his idea, modern society has influenced human existence in a reductive way. He wishes that the British people, collectively represented by the nation itself, could respect the value of other people's individuality and recognize the existence of people from other places.

Peter Shaffer's life is an exemplar of his philosophical character. C. J. Gianakaris points out, "the protagonists of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus*, and *Amadeus* are all

jealous of rivals whose names begin with the letter 'A'…'A' as in Anthony, Peter Shaffer's *twin*" (*A Casebook* 153; emphasis mine). Similarly, Jules Glenn comments on Shaffer's relationship with his brother Anthony Shaffer as "fraught with *anxiety*" (*A Casebook* 153; emphasis mine). Combating with his "twin" brother is a metaphor of fighting against his mirror self, a separate "rival" whose existence relies on the constant struggle between two sides. Shaffer channels such a metaphysical aspect of his life through the portrayals of the two protagonists in *Equus*, claiming that

> There is in me a continuous *tension* between what I suppose I could loosely call the Apollonian and the Dionysian sides of interpreting life, between say, Dysart and Alan Strang…the inescapable fact that to me a life without a sense of the divine is perfectly meaningless. (qtd. in Walls 314; emphasis mine)

Inner conflict is regarded by Shaffer as the drive for self-improvement. By making analogy between Apollo and Dionysus Shaffer suggests that he and the protagonists are both searching for the meaning of life through exploring their own inner conflict. Such inner conflict has been represented by something his inner divinity, which is also a theme illustrated in *Equus*. Of all his passion to cope with inner conflict, Shaffer is regarded by Gianakaris to be "[a] realist, a philosopher, and a satirist" all at the same time (*A Casebook* 3). Gianakaris comments that "[r]egular theatergoers will recognize elements of all these types in Shaffer" (*A Casebook* 3). Michael Hinden, alternatively, points out the metaphysical aspect in Shaffer's play: "With Shaffer, the ancient question is posed like this: Was *I* (emphasis original) born one or two, different or same? What are the parameters of self, and what does it mean to be separate?" (qtd. in *A Casebook* 159). This theme of searching for an intact sense of self is at the core of the play *Equus*, and it will be the topic of discussion in this thesis.

1.4 A New Perspective: Reading *Equus* through Rollo May

In *Equus*, Martin Dysart and Alan Strang together demonstrate an inspiring courage to explore and cope with inner conflicts. However, their labor is left undiscussed or has been taken as unimportant in many criticisms. Scholars using psychoanalytic theories[10] tend to consider Alan and Dysart as victims of society due to the play's final scene where Alan recalls and performs the blinding. For instance, Rebecca Gavrila claims that the "blinding [scene…] leaves us nowhere to go" (675). Some other critics have noticed the theme of opposition and have tried to analyze the play from a philosophical view. For example, Chiang Han Yan has summarized that the play only "represent[s] the loss […] of modern men" (2). Therefore, I intend to write this thesis to respond to Peter Shaffer's wish in writing the play "to create *a mental world* in which the deed could be made comprehensible" (*Equus* 9; emphasis mine).

For two aspects Rollo May's existential psychology is appropriate to be used in analyzing *Equus*. First, May's belief that inner "tension" signifies spiritual renewal coincides with Peter Shaffer's. May points out, "Apollonianism stands for cultures characterized by reason, harmony, balance, and justice. The symbol for Apollonianism is the circle" (*The Cry of Myth* 218). May adds, "Greek vases show Apollo, presumably at Delphi, grasping Dionysus' hand, […and] the Delphi oracle played by Dionysus was no less important than Apollos's"[11] (*The Courage to Create* 105). May explains that existentialism is "an attitude which accepts man as always becoming, which means potentially in crisis, [and] this does not mean it will be despairing" (*The Discovery of Being* 57). May further notes that the term "existence" means to "portray the human being not as a collection of static substances or mechanism or patterns but rather as emerging and *becoming*" (*The Discovery of Being* 50; emphasis original). Understanding the oracle

[10] Please see "Literature Review" in this chapter.
[11] An idea from the Greek writer Plutarch (Latin name Plutarchus). May quotes Plutarch from the translated version of Robert Flacelière's work *Greek Oracles* (49) published in 1965.

requires an individual to interpret his/her own divinity, to be introspective—this is the "inescapable fact" for Shaffer to obtain the meaning of life.

Second, Rollo May's existential psychology, combining philosophy and psychology, provides a synthesized theoretical framework to analyze the play. May took the advantage of his time staying in hospital for treating tuberculosis in his forties to read through Soren Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Dread* and the works by Sigmund Freud. Illness has refined his soul. After he was fully recovered, May went on to work on his doctoral degree in clinical psychology and combined the ideas of Freud[12] and Kierkegaard[13] into his doctoral thesis, *The Meaning of Anxiety*.[14] Serving as a frame of interpretation, May's psychology is more than an achievement in his academic life.[15] May's psychology is the result of a contemplation in sickness. May's theory is formed by his academic learning and his thoughts about life, coalescing psychology and philosophy befittingly. It seems as if May's following words were responding to Shaffer's observation about the "tragic" dimension of modern people's mental world: he suggests that "the fact that existential psychotherapy places emphasis on these tragic aspects of life does not at all imply it is pessimistic. Quite the contrary, the confronting of genuine tragedy is a highly cathartic experience psychically" (*The Discovery of Being* 34). May continues to praise the tragic

[12] As Rollo May suggests, Sigmund Freud's theory of anxiety focuses on different key concepts throughout his own lifetime, such as "anxiety as repressed libido," "anxiety as the cause of repressions," and the "topology of the psyche…[meaning] his division of the personality into superego, ego, and id" (*The Meaning of Anxiety* 112-127).

[13] Rollo May writes, "Kierkegaard defines freedom as *possibility* (emphasis original)…[He] sees man as the creature who is continually beckoned by possibility, who conceives of possibility, visualize it, and by creative activity carries it into actuality" (*The Meaning of Anxiety* 32). In other words, man has the freedom to choose whether and how to become what he or she likes to be, and anxiety rises when and individual is presented before such "possibilities," because at this moment a person will face inner conflict of which to choose.

[14] Yang Shao Gang (楊韶剛) in his *Xun Zhao Cun Zai De Zhen Di* (尋找存在的真諦) presents a well-researched study about Rollo May's works and points out May's intention to combine these two. Here is the original text in Chinese: "羅洛梅指出，這兩種研究觀點對於解釋人類焦慮的現狀都是明顯必要的，因此想做「整合」…羅洛梅堅持相信，齊克果對焦慮所作的現象學描述和哲學闡述，可以為佛洛依德稱之為焦慮經驗的「無助感」和「無目的」威脅的感覺提供必要的意義和理解。就是說，可以用存在主義哲學來重新解釋佛洛依德的精神分析觀點" (111).

[15] Besides having earned a bachelor degree in English literature, Rollo May used to learn with Alfred Adler, Erich Fromm and Harry Stack Sullivan, etc. He finished the Ph.D. thesis in clinical psychology, *The Meaning of Anxiety*.

sense of human life, saying that "tragedy is inseparably connected with the human being's dignity and grandeur […and] the person's moment of greatest insight" (*The Discovery of Being* 34).

Additionally, Rollo May believes that "the task [of psychology] is to show not only how passions, desires, anxieties change and develop as a result of social process, but also how man's energies thus shaped into specific forms in their turn become productive forces, molding the social process" (*The Meaning of Anxiety* 156). In other words, inner "tension" or the symbolic conflict displayed by the opposition between Apollo and Dionysus, is considered by both May and Peter Shaffer as prerequisite for spiritual growth, the realization of the notion of spiritual "becoming." Although works of psychology by Rollo May have often been criticized for being "unsystematic and retrospective" (Ryckman 351) and "quite imprecise and difficult to test" (Ryckman 350), they are still valuable. Stating that "[b]oth psychoanalysis and existentialism ask fundamental questions about human existence" (341), Richard Ryckman reassures May's contribution.

As to *Equus*, Antonia Pancotan rightly observes that "Alan is not the only character in motion, but Dysart is too. He aims to return to the purity of perception, leaving behind all that is artificial and all the common places of thought by stripping off all social conventionalities" (4). In *Equus*, Alan and Dysart are burdened with this struggle, with anxiety. Rollo May's description of anxiety explains the situation: "Anxiety is the apprehension cued off by a threat to some value which the individual holds essential to his existence" (*The Meaning of Anxiety* 191). By stating "I'm lost. What use, I should be asking, are questions like these to an overworked psychiatrist in a provincial hospital?" (*Equus* 18) at the beginning of the play, Dysart reveals his anxiety with his *identity crisis*. Likewise, Alan's identity crisis will also be conveyed through Dysart's contemplation.

Since terms and concepts of Rollo May's existential psychology are rather abstract and difficult to be used alone in achieving my argument, I will borrow the other two scholars' theories. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque and Ernst Jentsch's study on psychological uncertainty will be used individually in chapters three and four respectively to prove the protagonists' spiritual growth from a different view. Critics have studied the conflict displayed by the relationship between Alan and Dysart, so in this paper I would turn to focus on exploring their own inner conflict. In a therapy, the relationship between the therapist and his patient is important. However, since a therapy involves two individuals with different backgrounds, reaching an effective result requires both sides' devotion.

The influence of "anxiety" is normally considered by many as negative; however, "anxiety" for Peter Shaffer in *Equus* is a metaphor of an individual's struggle to fulfill the ideal self. The present thesis examines the inner conflict of the protagonists in the play, Alan Strang and Martin Dysart, from the perspective of Rollo May's existential psychology. Although Alan and Dysart are influenced by social values and have a poor self-image,[16] this thesis argues that the therapy they go through help them cope with anxiety, examine their beliefs, and achieve spiritual growth through showing self-acceptance and forgiveness of others.

1.5 Chapter Organization

Before embarking on a discussion of the protagonists' coping with anxiety, it is essential to understand how anxiety is represented in this play. In the second chapter "Anxiety, its Signs and Consequence" I will borrow Rollo May's concept of anxiety to analyze the characters in the play. Characters in *Equus* obviously come across inner conflict as there is a discrepancy between their actions and beliefs. The play implies that

[16] *Macmillan English-Chinese Dictionary* defines "self-image" as one's opinions about oneself (1793).

accepting social values blindly will result in man's "anxiety" and identity crisis that may come afterwards. Because May's theory of anxiety is closely related with society's influence on people, I will discuss the representation of anxiety seen on the characters concerning their social roles. While other characters remain passive in the face of a discrepancy between their own actions and beliefs, Alan Strang and Martin Dysart encounter their own identity crisis and display their own anxiety in a very specific way. , The therapy Alan and Dysart go through helps them see their own identity crisis, which proves Rollo May's belief that "anxiety is the possibility of value transformation" (*Psychology and the Human Dilemma* 82). The therapy reveals that both Alan and Dysart are influenced by certain values in the unsympathetic society and have a poor self-image, unable to accept what they themselves have thought or done—this is their identity crisis. Although Alan and Dysart in *Equus* are placed in a world that is permeated with an unsympathetic atmosphere, their sensation of uncertainty about the presence of the image of "Equus" prompts them to examine their own values throughout the therapy.

In the third chapter "Transforming Anxiety I: Emergence of Individuality" I borrow Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque to analyze the scenes in which the protagonists symbolically confront their own inner self and demonstrate the notion of spiritual "becoming." Bakhtin formulates his theory of carnivalesque to explain the phenomenon that people achieve spiritual growth through confrontation. Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque features the notion of two opposing powers[17] confront each other on a "marketplace" (*Rabelais and His World* 81) and thereby achieve spiritual renewal through the act of "degradation" (*Rabelais and His World* 24), overturning power hierarchy between the high and the low in a symbolic way. Ruth Coates observes, "carnival is seen

[17] In his theory of carnivalesque Bakhtin specifically analyses the confrontation between the folk culture and the official culture. Typically the theory of carnivalesque is applied in a social context, but the central concept of subversion of the theory fits my model in this thesis in analyzing the mental world of the protagonists in *Equus*.

by Bakhtin to address a primarily existential state of humankind, and the liberation it brings about is in the first instance a liberation of the spirit" (127). Coates further comments that carnival is "associated with the suffering of the individual who finds himself as a mortal in a cosmos which is subject to the cycle of death and renewal" (130). The stage of *Equus* can be treated as a marketplace in Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque, because the therapy sessions performed on the stage/in the hospital help Alan Strang and Martin Dysart confront and communicate with their own inner self. Whereas the past Dysart being referred to represents his original self, belonging to one side of the power struggle, the narrator Dysart is the hidden self, the opponent of the first one. In addition, the past events narrated by Dysart are performed simultaneously on the other half of the stage, transforming the abstract mental world, along with Alan Strang's, into material reality—this also manifests the act of "degradation." Through the help of the therapy, they not only see their own identity crisis but also express their own ideal self. Through the interpretative framework of Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque, the protagonists' symbolic confrontation with their own inner self on the play's narrative and stage can be better understood, and the notion of "becoming" as a reward of their coping with anxiety will be explained.

Chapter four "Transforming Anxiety II: Integration of the Broken Self" aims to highlight the scenes in which Alan Strang and Martin Dysart embody the notion of spiritual "becoming" by showing insight into life. I apply Ernst Jentsch's study on the phenomenon of psychological "uncertainty" to explain how Alan and Dysart develop understandings of life and perceive the world in a more sympathetic view during the therapy. Jentsch explains that when an individual has gained more "intellectual mastery" of the "environment" (227), he/she will have the sensation of "uncertainty" (218), which signifies a newly developed insight into life. In *Equus*, Alan and Dysart gain insight into

life at the end of the therapy. While “Equus” appears initially as a symbol of passion to both Alan and Dysart, its malicious nature as a manifestation of society’s negative influence on man’s spiritual well-being is revealed as more clues about Alan’s personality have been investigated and put together by Dysart throughout the therapy. Whereas Dysart tries to unveil the mystery of “Equus,” Alan struggles to fight against the scary presence of it in his nightmare. The protagonists’ sensation of uncertainty aroused by encountering the presence of “Equus” as their own inner divinity—half a horse and half a man—plays the role that prompts them to start coping with anxiety, recognizing their own identity crisis and examining the values they are taught to believe in. With the discovery of “Equus” being a manifestation of their own identity crisis, Alan and Dysart achieve spiritual growth in showing self-acceptance and forgiveness of others.

Chapter Two

Anxiety, Signs and Consequence

Søren Kierkegaard in the 19th century and Sigmund Freud in the 20th century have both constructed their own hypothesis on the cause of "anxiety," the manifestation of man's inner conflict. "Anxiety" can thus be seen as an experience shared by people regardless of time and space. People suffering from anxiety may come into conflict with his/her own inner self, and this unsolved inner conflict will lead them to encounter identity crisis. Self-confrontation is difficult but important. As Kierkegaard states: "To venture causes anxiety, but not to venture is to lose one's self," and "to venture in the highest is precisely to be conscious of one's self" (qtd. in Rollo May, *The Meaning* 10). In other words, some people may deny, remain unaware of or passive in the face of self-confrontation, but some choose to cope with anxiety and are rewarded by this experience. In *Equus*, Alan and Dysart belong to the latter type of man.

Like the other characters, Alan and Dysart have internalized social values, but the therapy they go through offers them an opportunity to examine the values they are taught to believe and see their own identity crisis. Throughout the therapy they "venture" to understand and express their own ideal self in coping with anxiety. C. J. Gianakaris considers the therapy "track[s] down the workings of Alan's mind and soul" and "discover[s] an irreconcilable chasm between individual spontaneity and social structures in [Dysart's] own life" (qtd. in *Modern Dramatist* 14). In this chapter, I will discuss the representation of anxiety in *Equus* from Rollo May's perspective of existential psychology.

2.1 Mapping Anxiety

Martin Dysart's psychiatric skills such as hypnotization, dream analysis, free association are all drawn from Freudian psychology, which was introduced to the world in the twentieth century. Freudian psychology is born from the turbulence of the twentieth century, which is described by Rollo May as "a time of *uncertainty*—a time of war, military draft, economic change, with a future of insecurity facing us no matter how we look at it" (*Man's Search for Himself* 17; emphasis original). In *Post War: A History of Europe Since 1945*, Tony Judt particularly points out Europe in the Seventies, the time in which *Equus* was written, was a decade of transition and in which people lost their directions of lives. Judt observes,

> Whereas the Sixties were marked by the naïve, self-congratulatory impulse to believe that everything happening was new—and everything new was significant—the Seventies were an age of cynicism, of lost illusions and reduces expectations. (477)

As a result, Europe in the Seventies was marked with man's loss of faith, either in themselves or in society. Martin Luther King's spirit of racial equality in the Sixties was a beacon for the post-war era, and the Hippie culture characterized the Sixties with individuality. However, the light of humanism of the Sixties descended to people's lack of sympathy shown in the Seventies, which is illustrated in *Equus*. May observes, "[a]n individual's anxiety is conditioned by the fact that he lives in a given culture at a particular point in the historical development" (*The Meaning of Anxiety* 154). *Equus* reflects this concept as it depicts a contemporary society where people lose faith and appear unsympathetic toward each other for they are under the influence of a general sense of powerlessness and the cynical atmosphere in their society.

In *Equus*, Martin Dysart's sense of feeling "lost" at the beginning of the play (*Equus* 18) indicates the disintegration of the totality of his existence. Rollo May believes that an individual's totality of existence is consisted of three dimensions, which he calls "the world of beings of one's own kind, the world of one's fellow men, [and] the world of relationship to oneself" (*The Discovery of Being* 126). The first dimension of existence refers to the material world, for example, lands, mountains, waters, the sky, rocks, our physical bodies and so forth. In this dimension of existence, there are only substances circulate in the natural world. In the second dimension of existence "the world of one's fellow men," the center of our lives lies in the connection with others, namely human's interrelationship. It can be observed in social units from small to big, such as among two people, in a family, in a community and in a country. Society usually requires people to follow certain rules to sustain this dimension of human existence. In the dimension of one's "relationship to oneself," an individual inevitably has to examine the discrepancy between his/her beliefs and actions. Many people choose to avoid such a spiritual confrontation because this experience will cause them anxiety. In *Equus*, the characters are facing this existential dilemma.

Many people align themselves with the majority to avoid the uneasiness caused by coping with anxiety. Rollo May states that "the sources of anxiety are to be found in certain trends in our culture" and it suggests "the pressure toward *conformity*[18] (emphasis mine) which occurs in a world where commercial and mechanical values are apotheosized" (*The Meaning of Anxiety* 5). "Conformity" is used by May to describe an individual who tries to "validates himself [or herself] by fitting into the herd" (*Psychology and the Human Dilemma* 77). In other words, an individual conforming to society "adopts

[18] When an individual is acting with "conformity" he/she may be "behaving in the same way as most other people" (*Collins Cobuild Intermediate Dictionary of American English* 173), agreeing with established rules, customs, etc." (*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* 288) or complying with "standards, rules, or laws" (Oxford Dictionary Online).

entirely the kind of personality offered to him [or her] by cultural patterns," and "he [or she] therefore becomes exactly as all others are and as they expect him [or her] to be" (*The Meaning of Anxiety* 175). May's following words provide a further explanation:

> People today no longer live under the authority of church or moral laws, but under 'anonymous authorities' like public opinion. The authority is the public itself, but this public is merely a collection of many individuals each his radar set adjusted to finding out what the others expect of him. (*Man's Search for Himself* 25)

This notion can be connected to Sigmund Freud's idea that people in modern society tend to judge each other inappropriately. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud points out this phenomenon. Freud observes that people's seeking for "power, success and wealth" indicates that they are using "false standards of measurement" to see the world (11). He argues that "in making any general judgment of this sort, we are in danger of forgetting how variegated the human world and its mental life are" (11). Freud implies that conforming to certain values is a problem for people today; his idea, coincidentally, reflects Peter Shaffer's observation on contemporary England's neglect of other people's individuality.[19] Conforming to social values allow people to feel confident and safe in society. May explains, "if [a person's] self-esteem must rest in the long run on social validations, [he or she has has] not self-esteem, but a more sophisticated form of social conformity"[20] (qtd. in Ewen 223). In *Equus*, characters behave according to mainstream values their social roles represent and judge people by these values. Their beliefs and actions are manipulated by certain values of society, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Consequently, an individual under the influence of anxiety may encounter his/her own

[19] I have already mentioned this in chapter one.
[20] The original text goes like "if your self-esteem…you have not self-esteem."

identity crisis. May compares an individual's life to a baseball game and explains that, avoid to deal with anxiety will make an individual become the bystander in his/her own life: one is unable to hit the ball and hopelessly watches the ball flying by (qtd. in Indick 209). This analogy is a metaphor of someone losing grip of life, signifying an individual's identity crisis. Nevertheless, May suggests that "[a]nxiety is the possibility of value transformation" (*Psychology and the Human Dilemma* 82). In other words, life can change if an individual decides to cope with anxiety, learns to see it clear and does something—this will be my argument in this thesis. I will argue, in *Equus*, the therapy Alan Strang and Martin Dysart go through offers them an opportunity to see their own identity crisis. In order to highlight the two protagonists as people who choose to cope with anxiety and thus fulfill the notion of spiritual "beoming," I will classify the characters in the play into two groups as comparison in the following discussion: the ignorant man and the waking man.

2.2 Man of Anxiety I: The Ignorant Man

Equus depicts a world where people are under the influence of internalized social values but avoid to recognize or remain unware of this reality. Antonia Pancotan believes that *Equus* illustrates "the conflict between the main characters and the mediocrity of social life" (2). The characters such as members of elite and households remain passive in the face of the discrepancy between their actions and the beliefs their social roles represent.

2.2.1 Anxiety of the Public

In *Equus*, members of the elite, such as legislators and doctors, all see Alan Strang as a thorough lunatic but act calm and provide no help. When asking for Martin Dysart's help in the beginning of the play, the magistrate Hesther Salomon emphasizes that her

colleagues have no sympathy for Alan. In Act I, scene 2:

> DYSART: Now look, Hesther. Before you say anything else, I can take no more patients at the moment. I can't even cope with the ones I have.
>
> HESTHER: You must.
>
> DYSART: Why?
>
> HESTHER: Because most people are going to be disguised by the whole thing. Including doctors.
>
> DYSART: May I remind you I share this room with two highly competent psychiatrists?
>
> HESTHER: Bennett and *Thoroughgood*. They'll be as shocked as the public.
>
> DYSART: That's an absolutely unwarrantable statement.
>
> HESTHER: Oh, they'll be cool and exact. And underneath they'll be revolted, and immovably English. Just like my bench. (*Equus* 19; emphasis mine)

These members of elite are educated in institutions and are trained to follow certain codes of conducts. Legislators should carry out justice and doctors are expected by general people to help patients. However, Hesther's account implies that they are narrow-minded and demoralized. Instead of providing help, they choose to stand aside and just want to get Alan out of their sight. They act calm before other people to make themselves look professional and show the least degree of humanity because the public would expect them to react so. These characters can be understood as people who use "false standards of measurement" to judge just as Sigmund Freud has suggested, because they apply a public standard to judge others but not weigh their own attitude and deeds in the same way. The phenomena that they follow a general moral standard to see Alan as insane and to avoid showing any sign of distaste, according to Rollo May, displays "conformity." In addition, the portrayal of these social elite being "immovably English" reflects the playwright's

observation on his contemporary society as a "tragic world" (*A Casebook* 33) as people refuse to recognize the individuality of others. As to these elite, a distinct disparity exists between their actions and the ideals their professions should serve to achieve. Subsequently, the doctor whose name is "Thoroughgood" becomes an ironic existence.

Besides members of elite, customers visiting the shop selling "electrical and kitchenware" (*Equus* 33) where Alan Strang works behave unsympathetically in a similar way. In Act I, scene 17, Alan is working:

> CUSTOMER [1]: I want to buy a hot-plate. I'm told the *Philco* is a good make.
>
> ALAN: I think it is, madam.
>
> CUSTOMER [2]: *Remington* ladies' shavers?
>
> ALAN: I'm not sure, madam.
>
> CUSTOMER [3]: *Robex* tableware?
>
> CUSTOMER [4]: *Croydes*?
>
> CUSTOMER [5]: *Volex*?
>
> CUSTOMER [6]: *Pifco* automatic toothbrushes?
>
> […]
>
> ALAN: *Sorry*![21] (*Equus* 54)

Customers rush in and make request to purchase all at the same time that Alan could not handle it and almost gets enraged. These impatient buyers are unwilling to wait until Alan finishes serving previous customers. Their desire must be fulfilled immediately. Their anxiety is displayed in that they have no patience toward other customers, because as customers, anyone of them would wish to be served first if he/she arrives at the shop earlier than others; in this sense, they should respect and be patient with each other, but

[21] The customers are numbered by me in order to show the quantity of them and illustrate the annoying atmosphere in Alan's working place.

the reality is the opposite. Moreover, purchasing household goods by brands rather than having an actual conversation with Alan displays what Rollo May describes as "conformity" as they all act in the same way, aligning themselves to the values the majority follows.

In short, member of elite and the customers are under the negative influence of anxiety, which can be observed in their unsympathetic attitude toward Alan. They are unaware of the discrepancy existing between their actions and beliefs. Through concealing their own feelings and showing no patience toward each other, these two groups of people can be said to display a broken totality of existence, because other than remaining passive in the face of the gap between their own actions and beliefs, they judge Alan by a collective moral standard and do not recognize Alan's individuality. If we apply Rollo May's concept of anxiety, these characters can be said to have lost genuine connection with others and themselves, demonstrating a broken totality of their own existence.

2.2.2 Anxiety within the Household

While the above mentioned characters display their anxiety through showing a discrepancy between their beliefs and actions in the public, Dora Strang and Frank Strang face the same existential dilemma in the household. They both cling to the values their social roles represent, such as their own career or the parental roles each of them plays in the family. They neither have ever reached a common ground upon raising their child Alan, nor have they seen the year-long problems in their marriage. They both see themselves as unqualified parents but refuse to examine what went wrong in the family. Analyzing Dora and Frank would help understand Alan's anxiety, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.2.2.1 A Father: Frank Strang

First, Frank Strang claims that he is against capitalism but immerses himself in a capitalist ideal. As a man of profession, Frank has been enforcing his ideas upon his family. For example, in Act I, scene 6:

> FRANK: [*To* Alan] I know you think it's none of my beeswax, but it really is you know…Actually, it's a disgrace when you come to think of it. You the son of a printer, and never opening a book! If all the world was like you, I'd be out of a job, if you receive my meaning!
>
> DORA: All the same, times change, Frank.
>
> FRANK [*reasonably*]: They change if you let them change, Dora. Please return that set in the morning.
>
> ALAN [*crying out*]: No!
>
> DORA: Frank! No!
>
> […]
>
> DORA: But, dear, everyone watches television these days!
>
> FRANK: Yes, and what do they watch? Mindless violence! Mindless jokes! Every five minutes some laughing idiot selling you something you don't want, just to bolster up the economic system. [*To* ALAN.] I'm sorry, old chum. (*Equus* 28)

Frank's concern for his son is proven to be an expression of anxiety of losing his job, because he states that he may lose his job if television becomes more popular in society. Such anxiety should be common among his colleagues. In other words, he is judging the value of television in the household from a perspective people work with him may also have. Of course, the family's livelihood depends on him, but it is inconsiderate of him to demand returning the television while his family is enjoying it. Frank leaves no space for

further discussion in the family, and his unwillingness to agree with Dora about the fact that time has changed displays a sense of nostalgia, which is characteristic of Europe in the Seventies.[22] Holding unto the past provides him a way to avoid dealing with the possibility that he may lose his job due to the changes happening in society.

Second, Frank Strang blames his wife for neglecting their son's education while he himself has done nothing to help but being cynical. During the psychiatrist's visit, Frank comments that his wife is responsible for Alan's deviant personality. In Act I, scene 6:

> DORA: I always wanted the boy to ride himself. He'd have so enjoyed it.
>
> DYSART: But surely he did?
>
> DORA: No.
>
> DYSART: Never?
>
> DORA: He didn't care for it. He was most definite about not wanting to.
>
> […]
>
> FRANK: My wife has romantic ideas, if you receive my meaning…she thinks she married beneath her. I daresay she did. I don't understand these things myself…
>
> DYSART: Mr. Strang, I'm fascinated by the fact that Alan wouldn't ride.
>
> FRAK: Yes, well that's him. He's always been a weird lad, I have to be honest. Can you imagine spending your week-ends like that—just cleaning out stalls—with all the things that he could have been doing in the way of Further Education?...He's never really tried. His mother indulged him. She doesn't care if he can hardly write his own name, and she a school teacher that was. Just as long as he's happy, she says… (*Equus* 33)

Frank, obviously, does not care to understand Alan. Calling Alan "a weird lad" is the

[22] See "Mapping Anxiety" in this chapter, page 18.

easiest way for Frank to avoid the responsibility as a father whenever anything bad happens. Additionally, Frank is troubled with his low self-esteem in his marriage with Dora because he then attributes Alan's strange personality to Dora's careless education and indulgence. It seems that Frank himself has the idea about what way to educate Alan is more effective, but in this conversation he reveals himself to be a person who only criticizes and has done nothing to help sharing the burden of raising their only child.

Third, Frank Strang also enforces his ideas to intervene his family's spiritual well-being. In the midst of the conversation with the psychiatrist Frank claims:

> FRANK: I'm an atheist, and I don't mind admitting it. If you want my opinion, it's the Bible that's responsible for all this.
>
> DYSART: Why?
>
> FRANK: Well, look at it yourself. A boy spends night after night having this stuff read into him; an innocent a tortured to death—thorns driven into his head-nails into his hands—a spear jammed through his ribs. It can mark anyone for life, that kind of thing. I'm not joking. The boy was absolutely fascinated by all that. He was always mooning over religious pictures. I mean real kinky ones, if you receive my meaning. I had to put a stop to it once or twice! [...] [*Pause*.] Bloody religion-it's our only real problem in this house, but it's insuperable; I don't mind admitting it.
>
> […]
>
> FRANK: Call it what you like. All that stuff to me is just bad sex.
>
> DORA: And what has that go to do with Alan?
>
> FRANK: Everything! [...] [*Seriously*.] Everything, Dora! (*Equus* 34)

Expressing in an exaggerated way makes Frank himself appear very imprecise when discussing his son's problems in this conversation with the psychiatrist. On the other hand,

by criticizing the Bible's negative influence on Alan, Frank again implies that Dora alone should be blamed, showing his unwillingness to take responsibility of the paternal role while he is making judgements from the position as the master in the house. As Frank connects Alan's fascination for biblical stories to the idea of religion as a "bad sex," he is indicating that his life with Dora is unsuccessful, because he is also saying that Dora believes in the idea of "romantic" sex written in the Bible and that her way of education, an ideal also drawn from the Bible, is the source of Alan's deviant behavior.

Consequently, Frank shows a discrepancy between his own actions and beliefs as he is caught watching a porn by his son while he has been protesting against watching television for self-entertainment in the family. Close to the end of the play a scene reveals that Frank has been ignorant about the influence social values have on him and that he loses connection with his own inner self. One night Frank is watching a porn in a theater and has bumped into son with a girlfriend. Then he makes a long excuse to explain. In Act II, scene 30:

> FRANK: [*stiffly*] I'd like you to know something. Both of you. I came here tonight to see the Manager. He asked me to call on him for business purposes. I happen to be a printer, Miss. A picture house needs posters. That's entirely why I'm here. To discuss posters. While I was waiting I happened to glance in, that's all. I can only say I'm going to complain to the council. I had no idea they showed films like this. I'm certainly going to refuse my services. (*Equus* 94)

Astonished by Alan's presence, Frank manages to react seriously as if nothing has happened. Obviously, inside his mind he feels ashamed as he was the one telling Alan to read more and not to watch media nonsense. Given this fact, Frank embarrasses himself as he shows up watching a porn to entertain himself before his son. Unlike the arrogant

person Frank normally appears to be, Frank demonstrates a sense of nervousness and a lack of confidence in this situation. Note that in this scene Alan does not ask him to explain anything. In other words, Frank's nervousness may result from his sense of being an unqualified paternal model, because he knows that he has been lying—he is aware of his self-contradiction. If we apply Rollo May's concept of anxiety, Frank can be said to have lost spiritual connection with his family and with himself, demonstrating his damaged totality of existence. As a man of profession, a husband, and a father, Frank is conditioned by the values these roles represent, namely the capitalistic ideas and the paternal authority. He is under the influence of anxiety.

2.2.2.2 A Mother: Dora Strang

Similar to her cynical husband, Dora Strang shows her own identity crisis as she emphasizes that she has dutifully fulfilled her maternal roles as a mother and a wife in the family, but shows a hysterical sense of guilt and experiences emotional breakdown. Her unawareness of her own inner conflict can be observed in several scenes. First, while the psychiatrist is paying a visit, Dora experiences an emotional breakdown because she believes that Alan is a symbol of love but she cannot see him in this way now. In Act I, scene 7:

> DORA: I told him the biological facts. But I also told him what I believed. That sex is not just a biological matter, but spiritual as well. That if God willed, he would fall in love one day. That his task was to prepare himself for the most important happening of his life. And after that, if he was lucky, he might come to know a higher love still …I simply…don't understand…*Alan*!...
>
> [*She breaks down in sobs.*]
>
> *Her husband gets up and goes to her.*]

FRANK [*embarrassed*]: There now. There now, Dora. Come on!

DORA [*with sudden desperation*]: All right—laugh! Laugh, as usual!

FRANK [*kindly*]: No one's laughing, Dora.

[*She glares at him. He puts his arms round her shoulders.*]

No one's laughing, are they Doctor? (*Equus* 35)

Although Dora knows the "biological truth" about sexuality, her repeated usage of "if" and "might" in explaining this issue to her son indicates that she is not sure that these spiritual teachings she believes in will be fulfilled someday. According to Dora, Alan should have been the beautiful result of "the most important happening," namely the marriage with her husband, but she cannot see it in this way at the moment because of Alan's current situation. In such a hard time her faith appears vulnerable. Her shaken faith is manifested in her hysterical illusion that people are mocking at her.

Second, Dora perceives that the psychiatrist has been judging her as an unqualified mother by collective social values while she herself has been fulfilling her maternal role by practicing these values in the family. When she visits her son in the hospital, she becomes emotional again as Alan looks back at her with an unfriendly "stare" (*Equus* 77). She then "slaps" Alan, an action that draws Martin Dysart' attention. Dora and Dysart argue over Alan in Act II, scene 23:

DYSART: I must ask you never to come here again.

DORA: Do you think I want to? Do you think I want to?

[…]

DYSART: […] He's at a most delicate stage of treatment. He's totally exposed. Ashamed. Everything you can imagine!

DORA [*exploding*]: *And me? What about me? ...What do you think I am? ...* I'm a parent, of course—so it doesn't count. That's a dirty word in here,

isn't it, 'parent'?

DYSART: You know that's not true.

DORA: Oh, I know. I know, all right! I've heard it all my life. It's *our* fault. Whatever happens: *we* did it. Alan's just a little victim. He's really done nothing at all! [*Savagely.*] What do you have to do in this world to get any sympathy—blind animals?

DYSART: Sit down, Mrs. Strang.

DORA [*ignoring him: more and more urgently*]: Look, Doctor: you don't have to live with this. Alan is one patient to you: one out of many. He's my son. I lie awake every night thinking about it. Frank lies there beside me. I can hear him. Neither of us sleep all night. You come to us and say, who forbids television? Who does what behind whose back?—as if we're criminals. Let me tell you something. We're not criminal. We've done nothing wrong. We loved Alan. We gave him the best love we could. (*Equus* 78)

The feeling of being an unqualified mother haunts Dora, but she denies this feeling. Dora is upset about the fact that society always sees children's trouble as their parents' fault. However, since she has been following society's standard to play the role of a good mother, she cannot figure out why Alan would have committed the crime of blinding animals. Obviously, she believes in the notion that parents influence children, but she denies her influence on Alan now only because she does not want to confront her inner voice saying that she is an unqualified mother. In other words, Dora has internalized this social values yet remains unaware of the effect. Perceiving Dysart's previous visit and even simply the presence of him as an attack on her own value of existence as the maternal figure helps her avoid censoring herself. Similar to Frank's situation, a

discrepancy between Dora's beliefs and actions in fulfilling her maternal roles exists.

Third, Dora appears to be convinced of the good she and Frank have done for their son yet criticizes the way Frank did it.

> Dora: […] My husband is a good man. He's an upright man, religion or no religion. He cares for his home, for the world, and for his boy. Alan had love and care and treats, and as much fun as any boy in the world. I know about loveless homes: I was a teacher. Our home wasn't loveless. I know about privacy too—not invading a child's privacy. All right, Frank may be at fault here—he digs into him too much – but nothing in excess. He's not a bully … [*Gravely.*] (*Equus* 78)

Undoubtedly, Dora loves her son very much, but she has been influenced by the social values her roles as a teacher, a mother and a wife traditionally represent. She grabs her own definition about "love" tightly by claiming she and Frank, as parents, have loved Alan in the best way. Yet in the second half of this conversation she starts to criticize Frank. Her changing attitude makes all what she has said become like a big excuse. Dora, in fact, cannot convince herself of the ideals she adores. Whether her marriage with Frank is spiritually fruitful is therefore questionable, because they tend to complain about each other instead of discuss and solve issues together. Her efforts to maintain her image as a caring mother and a loveing wife end in vain, because she has avoided to recognize her own inner voice.

Dora Strang's inner conflict is further displayed when she claims that she has been playing her maternal role in the family by society's standards but refuses to admit her influence of doing so on her son. After she finishes pleading for Dysart's fair judgment, Dora continues to defend for herself:

> Dora: […] 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. Do you understand what I'm saying? I want you to understand, because I lie awake and awake thinking it out, and I want you to know that I deny it absolutely what he's doing now, staring at me, attacking me for what he's done, for what he is! [*Pause: calmer*.] You've got your words, and I've got mine. You call it a complex, I suppose. But if you knew God, Doctor, You would know about the Devil. You'd know that Devil isn't made by what Mummy says and daddy says. The Devil's there. It's an old-fashioned word, but a true thing […] I only know he was my little Alan, and then the Devil came. (*Equus* 78)

Dora shows her strong religious fervor and her trust in moral distinction, the values she has acquired from social communities, such as schools or churches. Except citing the experience from her background as a teacher, she also resorts to religious terminology in order to exonerate her own sense of guilt. She argues that Alan's violence has been triggered by his inner "[d]evil."

By far, as I have shown, Dora loves her son very much but she cannot see her self-contradiction: she also agrees that what she has done for Alan were not all appropriate. If we apply Rollo May's concept of anxiety, Dora can be said to have shown two damaged dimensions of her existential totality, namely the spiritual connection with her family and with herself. As a mother, a wife, and a teacher, the values these roles represent, namely maternal warmth and virtues, have influenced Dora significantly, but she does not realize that she is facing an existential dilemma just like Frank Strang.

2.3 Man of Anxiety II: the Waking Man

As previously discussed, most characters in *Equus* avoid the uneasiness of dealing with anxiety by conforming to certain social values. Elite people, the consumer public, and a married couple in the core family are people of this sort. A significant gap between their beliefs and actions exists. In contrast to this, the therapy Alan Strang and Martin Dysart go through offers them an opportunity to see their own identity crisis. They are both portrayed as people who resort to religious passion to fulfill their own ideal self when coping with anxiety.

As Peter Shaffer has suggested, searching for an inner divinity is essential to his own existence—the protagonists' in *Equus* display the same spirit through their ways of coping with anxiety. Through Dysart's therapeutic skills, Alan's paradoxical affection for horses, particularly "Equus," is revealed, and Dysart himself has been prompted to examine his life through contemplating the ambivalent image of "Equus." In the following part I will discuss the representation of "Equus" and the two protagonists' own identity crisis.

2.3.1 Alan Strang

As I have previously examined, Alan Strang has been caught between his father's demanding behavior and his mother's constant attempts to instill her religious ideas within him. The values Alan grows up with in this domestic atmosphere construct his anxiety, which is displayed in his action of blinding horses, an act for which he is sent to the hospital. He has developed an ambivalent affection for horses, and the ambivalent emotion toward horses is already present in his childhood due to an early experience with a horse in real life. Relating his experience to that of the horse in a symbolic, religious way consequently becomes his way of dealing with anxiety.

Alan displays his anxiety with a nightmare during the therapy. In Act I, scene 8, he

appears to be terrified by something in his dream and moves uncomfortably in his hospital bed.

> [*A strange noise begins.* ALAN *begins to murmur from his bed. He is having a bad nightmare, moving his hands and body as if frantically straining to tug something back.*
>
> … *the boy's cries increase.*]
>
> ALAN: Ek!...Ek!...*Ek!*...
>
> [*Cries of* Ek […] *fill the theatre, from all around* […and] *the boy gives a terrible cry—*
>
> EK! (*Equus* 35)

Peter Shaffer suggests the effect of the "noise" in this play is to "herald or illustrate the presence of Equus the God" (*Equus* 16). In this sense, this scene implies that "Equus" is not something delightful as its presence causes Alan pain, which has been manifested by Alan's straining his body and crying when having a nightmare. The following scene explains that the sounds "Ek" Alan gives out indicates the presence of "Equus." In Act I, scene 14, Dysart learns that "Ek" is referring to "Equus." Frank Strang once appears at the hospital during the therapy to see Dysart, giving further information about his son.

> FRANK: It was late. I'd gone upstairs to fetch something. The boy had been in bed for hours, or so I thought. […] As I came along the passage I saw the door of his bedroom was ajar. I'm sure he didn't know it was. From inside I heard the sound of this chanting […] Like the Bible. One of those lists his mother's always reading to him. […] Those Begats. So-and-so begat, you know. Genealogy.
>
> […]
>
> [ALAN *raises his head and extends his hands up in glory.*]

ALAN: And he said ‘Behold—I give you Equus, my only begotten son!’

[…]

DYSART [*suddenly understanding: almost* ‘*aside*’]: Ek…Ek… (*Equus* 50-51)

The stage direction shows Alan is engaged in a ritualistic activity which he has kept as a secret. The way Alan imitates the biblical God speaking and mistakes the horse “Equus” for Jesus is a clear sign of his twisted affection for horses. This religious connection can be traced back to his childhood to the influence of listening to stories told by his mother

The psychiatrist visits the Strang family and discovers that Alan has developed an ambivalent emotion toward horses since childhood. This fact is revealed in Act I, scene 7, when Dora Strang explains to the psychiatrist about how Alan has formed his interest in horses.

DORA: […] He loves animals! Especially horses.

DYSART: Especially?

DORA: Yes. He even has a photograph of one up in his bedroom. A beautiful whit one, *looking over a gate* (emphasis mine). His father gave it to him a few years ago, and he’s never taken it down […] And when he was seven or eight, I used to have to read him the same book over and over, all *about* a horse.

DYSART: Really?

DORA: Yes; it was called Prince, and no one could ride him.

[…]

DORA: He loved the idea of animal talking.

DYSART: Did he?

ALAN: *Say it! Say it!* […] *Use his voice!*

DORA [*'proud' voice*]: 'Because I am faithful!'

[ALAN *giggles*.]

'My name is Prince, and I'm a Prince among horses! Only my young Master can ride me! Anyone else—I'll *throw off!*'

[ALAN *giggles louder*.] (*Equus* 30)

The horse "looking over a gate" indicates it has been raised by human and kept as their possession in a stable. On the contrary, the humanized horse named "Prince" acts according to its/his own will. In other words, to Alan, the idea about the image of "Prince" from Dora's story is inconsistent with the one shown on the photo given to him by Frank. While the former displays freedom and wilderness, the latter illustrates human confinement, which will be manifested by "Equus" later on as Alan perceives it "in chain" (*Equus* 66). As parents, Dora and Frank seem to have ignored that the information they gave have led their son to a paradoxical idea about the image of horses.

Certain biblical stories told by Dora Strang intensify Alan's ambivalent affection for horses. Dora continues the conversation with the psychiatrist. In Act I, scene7:

DYSART: …Can you remember anything else like that you may have told him about horses?

DORA: Well, not really. They're in the Bible, of course. 'He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha.'

DYSART: Ha, ha?

DORA: The Book of Job. Such a noble passage. You know—[*Quoting*.] 'hast thou given the horse strength?'

ALAN [*responding*]: 'Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?' (*Equus* 31)

This biblical story about the horse to which Dora is referring is drawn from The Book of Job (39:19-25), where Job, suffering from both physical and spiritual pain, humbly asks

God to explain his misery.[23] In answering Job, God tells Job to behold the beauty and power of horses, which is an evidence of godly will, and blames Job for small faith. In this biblical context, the horse is created alone with several other animals by God's will.[24] On the contrary, the horses are used by Dora's family for entertainment. Dora further mentions her family interest in horse riding to Martin Dysart.

> DORA: […] We've always been a horse family. At least my side of it was. My grandfather used to ride every morning…all dressed up in bowler hat and jodhpurs! He used to look splendid. Indulging in equitation, he called. […]
>
> ALAN [*trying the word*]: Equitation…
>
> DORA: I remember I told him that came from *equus* (emphasis original), the Latin word for horse. Alan was fascinated by that word, I know. I suppose because he'd never come across one with two 'u's together before. […]
>
> DORA: […] We saw an awful lot of Westerns on the television. He [Alan] couldn't have enough of those…Westerns are harmless enough, surely? (*Equus* 32)

Given the fact that Dora has told Alan biblical stories about the power and beauty of horses, her family interest in riding horses become ironic. In Book of Job, the passage Dora is particularly fond of, Job understands the power and beauty of the horse as representing God's almighty power and then repents before God, yet Dora is unaware that her family have been exploiting horses for self-entertainment. Ignoring this fact leads her to construct an ambivalent idea about the image of horses for Alan, which is shown in

[23] Job is a righteous and faithful man, but he is given sickness and tested by God. Upon hearing Job's pleading for justice in both physical and spiritual pain, God responds to him with questions that whether Job considers himself qualified to have doubt about life, for Job is ignorant of the godly wonders of the world.
[24] The animals mentioned by God includes: lion, raven, goat, calve, ass, unicorn, peacock, horse, hawk, eagle, hippos, alligators, etc. (Job 38-41)

Alan's showing interest in the double "u" of the word "equus," because horse are both friends and slaves of men. Alan can be said to have been drawn by the uncertainty the word represents, which can be explained by his fascination about the "Westerns" on the television, namely the cowboy figures. Alan has learned about two opposing ideas about the image of horses in the family: one is about horses narrated in the Bible, symbolizing power and wilderness, and the other one is about those who are used by Dora's family for "equitation," who are under human control and appear powerless just as the horse in the picture "looking over a gate" (*Equus* 30).

Consequently, a disappointing early experience with a real horse in life deepens Alan's ambivalent perception toward the idea about the image of horses. While Alan was enjoying riding a horse the first time with a horseman on a beach in childhood, his father pulled him off by force. In Act I, scene 10, Alan describes this experience to Dysart.

> DORA: Alan, come down here!
>
> […]
>
> FRANK: Alan. You heard what your mother said.
>
> ALAN: No.
>
> FRANK: Come down at one. Right this moment.
>
> ALAN: No.
>
> FRANK [*in a fury*]: I said—this moment!
>
> [*He pulls* ALAN *from the horseman's shoulders. The boy shrieks, and falls to the ground*.]
>
> […]
>
> DORA: He's grazed his knee. Frank—the boy's hurt.
>
> ALAN: I'm not! I'm not! (*Equus* 41)

Deprived of his childish happiness by his parents, in this scene, Alan appears extremely

upset and denies his pain. However, after Frank has driven the horseman away, Alan, who is sitting on the beach and is covered by sand, starts to perceive the whole situation in a funny way. Alan continues to recall this experience to the psychiatrist:

> FRANK [*shouting after the* HORSEMAN]: Hooligan! Filthy hooligan!
>
> ALAN: I wanted to laugh!
>
> FRANK: Upper-class rig-raff!...trample on ordinary people!
>
> […]
>
> DORA [*amused*]: Look at you. You're covered [with sand]!
>
> […]
>
> ALAN: And that's all I remember. (*Equus* 42)

While his father continues to scold the rider and does not turn to care for him, Alan suddenly burst into laughter. This abrupt emotional transition can be understood as his way to cope with the traumatized feeling of being ignored by his parents, since his laughter can caught their attention. Dora has then stopped taking care of Alan's hurt feeling and starts responding to the situation in a less serious way just as Alan does. Dora's illogical response sets an example for Alan and further intensifies Alan's ambivalent emotions toward horses, because Alan has connected his own experience to the horse stories he has known of since then. While he was on the horse back, he is the cowboy; once when he fell of, he reminds himself of the reality that horses are suffering from human control and perceives himself in the similar situation—I will analyze this connection in the following discussions. At the end of this recollection Alan appears calm and does not perceive this situation funny at the present moment in the therapy.

The disappointing early experience of riding a horse has activated Alan's childhood imagination that he further relates his experience with those of horses in a particular symbolic way, which is revealed in the following therapy. Influenced by the ideas about

the image of horses he received in the family and his failed experience of riding a horse, Alan has started to construct an ambivalent affection toward horses and relates his experience to that of a symbolic horse, "Equus." In Act I, scene 19, Dysart hypnotizes Alan and asks him to recall how he has felt back then on the beach:

> DYSART: […] Now I want you to think back in time. You are on that beach […] Above you, staring down at you, is that great horse's head, and the cream dropping from it. Can you see that?
>
> ALAN: Yes
>
> DYSART: You ask him a question. 'Does the chain hurt?"
>
> ALAN: Yes.
>
> […]
>
> DYSART: And he says?
>
> ALAN: 'It never comes out. They have me in chains.'
>
> DYSART: Like Jesus?
>
> ALAN: Yes!
>
> DYSART: Only his name isn't Jesus, is it?
>
> ALAN: No.
>
> DYSART: What is it?
>
> […]
>
> ALAN: Equus.
>
> […]
>
> DYSART: Why is Equus in chains?
>
> ALAN: For the sins of the world.
>
> DYSART: What does he say to you?
>
> ALAN: 'I see you.' 'I will save you.' (*Equus* 66)

When Alan met a horse the first time, he enjoyed the riding. However, as he recalls this experience in the therapy, he perceives the situation in a symbolical, religious manner, mistaking the real horse for "Equus." Such an analogy is a combination of his traumatic early experience with the real horse and the ideas about the image of horses he received at home. Perceiving that the horse is "chain[ed]" and that he himself is in the same situation explains that Alan feels traumatized back then on the beach. In the present therapy, he understands that he was "looking over the gate," just like the horse in the photo given to him by Frank. Because of the failed childhood experience, Alan has stopped admiring the stories of horse-riding but started perceiving himself as a horse suffering from human control and connecting his situation to that of Jesus Christ's suffering.

The symbolic connection between "Equus" and Jesus Christ in Alan's mind can be further explained by other biblical metaphors he himself reveals in the therapy. The following scene is subsequent to the previous one.

DYSART: And now what? ...What do you do now?

ALAN: Touch him [Equus]!

DYSART: Where?

ALAN [*in wonder*]: All over. Everywhere. […]

DYSART: Go on!...Then?

[*Pause.*]

ALAN: Give sugar.

DYSART: A lump of sugar?

[ALAN *returns to* NUGGET.]

ALAN: His Last Supper.

DYSART: Last of what?

ALAN: Ha ha.

[…]

[ALAN, *lying before* NUGGET, *stretches out on the square. He grasps the top of the thin metal pole embedded in the wood. He whisper's his God's name ceremonially.*]

ALAN: Equus!...Equus!...Equus! (*Equus* 71)

In this scene, Alan is expressing his feelings through using biblical metaphors as he gives "Equus" a "sugar" as its/his "Last Supper." In the bible, Jesus, who was born "for the sins of the world," took his "Passover" supper (Matthew 26:19) before he was captured by the Romans and forced into carrying the cross to Gogotha, where he is crucified (Mark 15:20). Following this logic, "Ha ha" would be symbolic of Gogotha for it is the destination to which "Equus" will carry Alan after having the sugar as the "Last Supper." However, after the above scene, Alan starts to add labor unto "Equus."

DYSART: Do it. Mount him [Equus].

[…]

ALAN: Hurts!

DYSART: Hurts?

ALAN: Knives in his skin! Little knives—all inside my legs.

[NUGGET *mimes restiveness*.]

ALAN: Stay, Equus. No one said Go!...That's it. He's good. Equus the Godslave, Faithful and True. Into my hands he [Equus] commands himself … [*He punches* NUGGET.] (*Equus* 72)

By saying that "Equus" is "faithful and true," Alan is making an analogy between "Equus" and "Prince," which is the prideful horse appears in the stories told by his mother. Moreover, by putting "sandals" on the horse (*Equus* 69), Alan is connecting his own situation with that of "Equus" and Jesus Christ, who serves as the spiritual king of the

Jews. Alan's calling the horse "slave" can be interpreted as his desire for power and freedom, because by doing so he can compensate his sense of powerlessness throughout his life.

Since the place of "Ha Ha" can be seen as paralleled to Golgotha, together with his worshipping for the godly "Equus," Alan Strang's portrayal as a horse rider, concerning biblical elements, can be explained by the characterization of two different centurions in the Bible. In the Bible, Jesus is tortured by the centurion in the Roman Court and forced to wear a "crown of thorns" (Matthew 27:29; John 19:2). A crown is supposed to be a symbol of grace, but the crown of thorns means to humiliate Jesus. Obviously, Alan is empathetic with the pain of "Equus" for he feels the "knives" under its skin. With the previous discussion that Alan is connecting his own suffering (or the suffering of "Equus") with that of Jesus Christ, Alan's pain can be seen as a metaphor paralleled to that off Jesus, who suffers from the pain of wearing the crown of thorns. However, the analogy between "Equus" and Jesus made by Alan becomes paradoxical to himself when he appears to put "Equus" at his own command. While the centurion in Capernaum treats Jesus with respect and faith,[25] the centurion in the roman court has scourged Jesus. In *Equus*, Alan has also done hurt to "Equus" by punching it, just as the centurion in the Roman court who lays stripes on Jesus; however, his ability to feel the pain of "Equus" endows him with the former centurion's humanitarian mentality. Alan displays his own identity crisis in this scene, because he wishes to befriend with "Equus" but instead he puts "Equus" into slavery, which is also a situation he himself is in.

[25] While Jesus is preaching in Capernaum, a centurion comes to him. The centurion begs for a miracle for one of his sick servants and shows faith in Jesus. "Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed" (Matthew 8:7-9). This event is also scripted in Luck. "Now when he had ended all his saying in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant" (Luck 7:1-3).

Consequently, the early disappointing experience of riding a horse and the education Alan received at home together have influenced his spiritual well-being in a negative way, resulting in the presence of "Equus." Nevertheless, recalling this early traumatic experience or horse riding and his fantastic interaction with "Equus" in the therapy helps Alan review his own ambivalent affection for horses because in the therapy he becomes the observer of his own memory, which allows him to see his own identity crisis developed since childhood.

2.3.2 Martin Dysart

The therapy with Alan Strang also offers Martin Dysart an opportunity to see his own identity crisis. Similar to Alan, Dysart displays his own anxiety also through identifying himself with the image of a horse, seeking intimacy and a new life. In Act I, scene I, Dysart:

> DYSART: 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 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? Not to remain reined up forever in those particular genetic strings? Is it possible, at certain moments we cannot imagine, a horse can add its sufferings together—the non-stop jerks and jabs that are its daily life—and turn them into grief? What use is grief to a horse? (*Equus* 17)

Note that it was not until after the early disappointing experience that Alan started to experience the presence of "Equus." Dysart is the therapist, the listener; he is not the

client. It is impossible for Dysart to have seen the horse Alan met on the beach and the horse "Nugget" Alan used to ride at nights, nor could he experience the presence of "Equus." When Dysart claims that he could see the horse "kissing" Alan, it becomes understandable that he is perceiving himself in a similar situation. He is drawn to the intimacy between Alan and the horse because he himself desires for the same thing. He sees the horse grieving because he himself is grieving for himself—this point can be explained by the scene where Dysart displays his anxiety in contemplating his life as a man of profession. In Act I, scene I:

> DYSART: You see, I'm lost. What use, I should be asking, are questions like these to an overworked psychiatrist in a provincial hospital? They're worse than useless; they are, in fact, subversive.
>
> [*He enters the square. The light grows brighter*.]
>
> The thing is, I'm desperate. You see, I'm wearing that horse's head myself. That's the feeling. All reined up in old language and old assumptions, straining to jump clean-hoofed on to a whole new track of being I only suspect is there. I can't see it, because my educated, average head is being held at the wrong angle. I can't jump because the bit forbids it, and my own basic force—my horse power, if you like—is too little. The only thing I know for sure is this: a horse's head is finally unknowable to me. Yet I handle children's head—which I must presume to be more complicated, at least in the area of my chief concern. (*Equus* 18)

Through admitting his sense of desperation, Dysart perceives himself as the "grieving" horse. His self-assessment of having "overworked" explains the metaphor he uses, since he is neither able to "jump" and nor able to become "a new track of being"; his awareness of working in a "provincial hospital" implies a diminished sense of self-importance. By

using the phrase “my educated, average head,” Dysart is suggesting that the values he acquired from society have hindered his spiritual well-being. As a result, treating patients becomes a depressive experience.

After the first meeting with Alan, Dysart further displays his anxiety with a nightmare that has a symbolical connotation paralleled to his present life as a depressed psychiatrist. In this nightmare he becomes a pagan priest killing children, and such a vision reflects metaphorically his career in reality as a psychiatrist “handl[ing] children’s head.” In Act I, scene5:

> DYSART: That night, I had this very explicit dream. In it I’m a chief priest in Homeric Greece…I’m standing by a thick sound stone and holding a sharp knife. In fact, I’m officiating at some immensely important ritual sacrifice… I’m top as chief priest. It’s this unique talent for carving that has got me where I am. The only thing is, unknown to them, I’ve started to feel distinctly nauseous. And with each victim, it’s getting worse. My face is going green behind the mask. Of course, I redouble my efforts to look professional—cutting and snipping for all I’m worth: mainly because I know that if ever those two assistants so much as glimpse my distress—and the implied doubt that this repetitive and smelly work is doing any social good at all—I will be the next across the stone. And then, of course—the damn mask begins to slip. [T]he damn mask begins to slip. The priests both turn and look at it-it slips some more—they see the green sweat running down my face—their gold pop-eyes suddenly fill up with blood—they tear the knife out of my hand…and I wake up. (*Equus* 24-25)

The two assistant priests who are about to murder Dysart when he shows incompetency reminds him of the two colleagues Dysart has mentioned before: Bennett and

Thoroughgood. Dysart's colleagues, as social elite, are unsympathetic toward Alan. In other words, Dysart's nervousness in the dream will reveal to his assistants/colleagues that he does not follow the same bloody rituals as they do. The difference between Dysart and these people lies in the fact that Dysart has turned his conscience against himself, contemplating if his work is "doing any social good at all" while the others only see Alan as a criminal and wait to see him show incompetence in his profession. Occupying the position of a highest priest, which can also be seen as doctor in the ancient times, Dysart becomes aware of the moral cruelty behind his job. The nausea and the sliding mask both imply his "desire" to symbolically break free from the convention of society, namely his profession, his "average head," a hypocritical "mask." The presence of such a desire can readily be understood as Dysart's initial stage of integrating his broken totality of existence, because in *Equus* he is confessing to the audience/readers rather than keeping it as a shameful secret to himself. The importance of this is that Dysart recalls his nightmare and ponders at it after the therapy with Alan is completed. In other words, the therapy also offers him an opportunity to see his own identity crisis.

In short, characters like consumers, members of elite and of the household remain passive in the face of a discrepancy between their beliefs and actions, but Alan and Dysart decide to cope with anxiety and thereby see their own identity crisis. In the next chapters I will discuss the two protagonists' coping with anxiety and how their devotion to this experience embodies what Rollo May calls spiritual "becoming" from two different views.

Chapter Three

Transforming Anxiety I: Emergence of the Ideal Self

In the previous chapter I have examined the representation of anxiety of the characters in Peter Shaffer's *Equus*. During the therapy, Alan Strang and Martin Dysart have seen their own inner conflict through displaying a strange religious passion and a nightmare that reflects their own inner conflict. The therapy helps them become aware of their own anxiety, just as Rollo May has suggested that "[t]he distinctive quality of human anxiety arises from the fact that man is the valuing animal, the being who interpret his life and world in terms of symbols and meaning, and identifies these with his existence as a self" (*Psychology and the Human Dilemma* 72). The protagonists' religious behavior illustrates this mechanism of self-evaluation and of fulfilling the ideal self.

Since the therapy in which the protagonists reveal their own inner conflict is carried out on the play's stage, the stage can thus be seen as where they confront their own inner self. Martin Dysart begins and ends his narrative with a deep contemplation. In this regard, the play's narrative, as Dysart's reflection, can be understood as a manifestation of Dysart's identity crisis, exemplifying May's belief: "Anxiety is the possibility of value transformation" (*Psychology and the Human Dilemma* 82). The introspective nature of the play's narrative reflects Dysart's mental world with his strong desire to fulfill the ideal self. Similarly, Alan's ideal self has been conveyed through Dysart's reflection. Both Alan and Dysart examine their beliefs and show their own ideal self at certain moments in the therapy. In this chapter, I will borrow Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque to explain how the protagonists symbolically confront their own inner self and demonstrate the notion of spiritual "becoming" in coping with anxiety.

3.1 Mapping Carnivalesque

Mikhail Bakhtin formulates his theory of carnivalesque to explain the phenomena that people achieve spiritual renewal through confronting another power. Ronald Knowles notes that Bakhtin believes in the "pluralism of thought and culture" and the concept of "unfinalizability," which indicates "the open-endedness of things—as if all forms of life were part of a huge, ongoing 'dialogue'" (3). Typically, Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque is applied to analyze a social situation, but its central idea of "dialogue," of renewal fits my model of analysis in this thesis. As I have discussed in chapter two, in *Equus,* the therapy Alan and Dysart go through offers them an opportunity to start examining their own values. The protagonists' identity crisis displayed through the help of the therapy can be served as evidence of Bakhtin's belief mentioned above: Alan and Dysart are having a "dialogue" with their own double self, the self that is not accepted by the society they live in and by themselves. Subsequently, the portrayal of Alan and Dysart is "in motion." Antonia Pancotan rightly remarks, "Alan is not the only character in motion, but Dysart is too. He aims to return to the purity of perception, leaving behind all that is artificial and all the common places of thought by stripping off all social conventionalities" (4). The therapy, therefore becomes a way for Alan and Dysart to communicate with their own inner self.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque can be used to explain such a spiritual confrontation in two aspects. First, the stage of *Equus* can be treated as a marketplace in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque, because the therapy sessions performed on it help Alan and Dysart express their own ideal self, the self that has previously been rejected by themselves. Kimball King observes, "[t]he central stage functions subtextually as an arena in which a vigorous contest for control of modern man's soul is fought out" (105). In other words, the stage plays an important role in manifesting the protagonists'

spirit of challenging dogmatic social values. It then works in a similar sense as the "marketplace" does in Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque. Bakhtin suggests that the marketplace "oppose[s] the protective timeless stability, the unchanging established order and ideology, and stresse[s] the element of change and renewal" (*Rabelais and His World 81*). By recalling their experience and reexamining their values, Alan and Dysart confront their own inner self in the therapy, on the stage setting which can be seen as a "marketplace." This confrontation can thus be understood as their means to challenge the "stability" and "ideology" of society. As M. K. MacMurraugh-Kavanagh has rightly observed, "Shaffer indicates the presence in Dysart of the Dionysian impulses as embodied in Alan and brings the psychiatrist into confrontation with his own consciousness" (115). In this sense, the therapy sessions between Alan and Dysart performed on the stage lead Alan and Dysart to spiritual growth.

Furthermore, the situation that the protagonists' own inner self rising against the dogmatic values they acquired from society illustrates the act of "degradation" in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque. Bakhtin suggests that to "degrade" means to

> [D]ig a bodily grave for a new birth [and] it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. (*Rabelais* and *His World* 24)

Because the therapy helps the protagonist examine their own inner conflict, it can also be seen as a "bodily grave" or the "lower stratum" of their physical existence, because Alan and Dysart become able to express their feelings. The therapy uncovers the protagonists' disappointment about society they used to bury in mind. The symbolic function of the therapy/stage in challenging social values thus can be linked to Kimball King's comment

that the play "picks up one of Shaffer's central concerns, the ongoing struggle between conformity and individuality," and "the problem [in the play] is to reconcile the conflicting demands of individual will and society's requirements" (105).

Ronald Knowles states that at the heart of Bakhtin's idea of carnival are "the antinomies of life and death […and the idea of] *regenerative becoming* (emphasis mine)" (4). In the therapy, the protagonists' own poor self-image in the public—depressed and hurt—will die out. In return, they are given a chance to be reborn in a spiritual sense. The therapy helps them not only see their own identity crisis but also reexamine the values that create their anxiety. The spirit of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque, therefore, corresponds with Rollo May's notion of "becoming." It will be applied to analyze the scenes where Alan and Dysart confront and communicate with their own inner self.

3.2 Narrative Structure as a Circle of Spiritual Renewal

The play's narrative manifests Martin Dysart's determination to solve his own identity crisis. First, the scenes are interwoven by Dysart's monologues. In the beginning of both Act I, II, and also in the last scene, Dysart narrates from the center of the stage, which has a dark background. The darkness that surrounds Dysart could be seen as his spiritual dismay. Moreover, the play's narrative begins with where it ends. As readers go through the play and contemplate what has happened in the therapy, it becomes clear that it is the unsettling ending of the therapy prompts Dysart to examine his personal values. He might be reflecting his own life over and over again.

Martin Dysart's monologues together form a circle of reflection. In Act I, scene 1, the stage is lit up by Martin Dysart's "cigarette," symbolizing the light within his spiritual darkness (*Equus* 17). However, in Act II, the stage directions indicates the light comes on as Dysart "enters the stage" (*Equus* 75), striking the audience's vision in a subtler, symbolic way. When Dysart speaks from the center of the stage with this lighting effect,

we are hearing his inner voice, emerging from a vast spiritual hollow. According to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque, two opposite powers meeting on the "marketplace" could, by the act of "degradation," blur the boundary between two sides and lead these two sides to a spiritual renewal. In *Equus*, Dysart's double selves can be regarded as two sides confronting each other on the stage, a symbolic "marketplace." In his monologues, Dysart reveals himself not as the proud doctor he appears publicly but as a guilt-driven, depressed man. His social self has thus been "degraded" into the depressed man on stage.

The story is unveiled with Dysart's speech of indecision.

> *Darkness.*
>
> *Silence.*
>
> […]
>
> *The flame of cigarette lighter jumps in the dark…*MARTIN DYSART, *smoking.*
>
> DYSART: 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 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? Not to remain reined up forever in those particular genetic strings? Is it possible, at certain moments we cannot imagine, a horse can add its sufferings together—the non-stop jerks and jabs that are its daily life—and turn them into grief? What use is grief to a horse?

(*Equus* 17)

Obviously, Dysart recalls his experience with Alan sometime after the therapy was completed. However, the image of the horse draws his attention: the animal appears to have human emotions. As I have mentioned in chapter two, following this scene, Dysart further claims that he is "wearing the horse's head" (*Equus* 18). By connecting his own depressed current situation to the image of the horse, Dysart metaphorically "degrades" his own human form as a proud doctor, who is under the influence of demoralizing social values, into the horse of human emotion, grieving its/his own existence.

In the middle of his reflection, after he has learned about the reason behind Alan Strang's ambivalent affection for horses, Martin Dysart questions even more the value of his own existence. He initiates his reflection with the same words used in Act I:

> DYSART: With one particular horse, called Nugget, he embraces. He showed me how he stands with it afterwards in the night, one hand on its chest, one on its neck, like a frozen tango dancer, inhaling its cold sweet breath. 'Have you noticed', he said, 'about horses: how they'll stand one hoof on its end, like those girls in the ballet?'…Now he's [Alan] gone off to rest, leaving me alone with Equus. I can hear the creature's voice. It's calling me out of the black cave of Psyche. I shove in my dim little torch, and there he stands—waiting for me. He raises his matted head. He opens his great square teeth, and says—[Mocking] 'Why?...Why Me?...Why—ultimately—Me?...Do you really imagine you can account for me? Totally, infallibly, inevitably account for me?...Poor Doctor Dysart!'" (*Equus* 75)

This monologue appears after Dysart has hypnotized Alan and learned about Alan's extreme intimacy with a horse, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Dysart begins

with the same statement used as he starts telling the story. In this scene mentioned above, the image of "Equus" becomes clearer to Dysart: it is more than just a psychotic creation of his patient, it is the voice that is calling him from his own "black cave of Psyche." Understanding the reason behind Alan's fascination about horses and "Equus" does not relief Dysart from doubting himself as a qualified psychiatrist in a moral sense but drives him into a deeper spiritual darkness. The "torch" Dysart holds still illuminates the face of "Equus" as a figure that is vague and perplexes him as it did when he begins to tell the story. The inner conflict displayed by his intention to interpret the existence of "Equus" remains unresolved in the middle of his reflection.

Peter Shaffer has purposefully made the representation of the horses as alienating figures. In the preface of the play Shaffer writes:

> THE actors wear track-suits of chestnut velvet. On their feet are light strutted hooved, about four inches high, set on metal horse-shoes. […] On their heads are tough masks made of alternating bands of silver wire and leather; their eyes are outlined by leather blinkers. The actors' own heads are seen beneath them: no attempt should be made to conceal them. Any literalism which could suggest the cozy familiarity of a domestic animal—or worse, a pantomime horse-should be avoided. The actors should never crouch on all fours, or even bend forward. They must always—except on the one occasion where Nugget is ridden-stand upright, as if the body of the horse extended invisibly, through the use of legs, knees, neck, face, and the turn of the head which can move the mask above it through all the gestures of equine wariness and pride. (*Equus* 15)

The appearance of the horse actors serves to introduce a special sense of a man's alienation from his/herself to the audience/readers. By dressing the actors in horse form

and forbidding them to perform in an animalistic manner, Shaffer presents an image of the human soul troubled with symbolic confinement. While the masks made of wires signify a cage for the actual actors behind it, the "leather," which is taken from animals, implies human's cruelty to his/her own kind. In this case, the perpetrator and the victims are the same. The horses'/actors' moves display an emotional paradox as the stage directions points out their gestures demonstrate both "wariness" and "pride." When he states that he is "wear[ing] the horse's head" at the beginning of Act I (*Equus* 18), Dysart is expressing his own emotional paradox, an existential dilemma resembling that of the horse actors. As I have mentioned, in the end of Act I, Dysart recalls the moment where he learned about the reason of Alan mysterious fascination for horses. However, this recollection does not solve the questions he addresses the audience/readers as he starts to tell the story, because in Act II he cannot stop questioning. He turns his focus of doubts from the ambivalent image of the horse back to himself.

Even at the end of his reflection Dysart still cannot stop questioning the values of his own existence. In Act II, scene 35, the final scene of the play, after the therapy as completed, Dysart seems to have become fully aware of his own existential crisis:

> DYSART: […] And now for me it never stops: that voice of Equus out of the cave─ 'Why Me?...Why Me?...Account for Me!'…All right—I surrender! I say it!...In an ultimate sense I cannot know what I do in this place—yet I do ultimate things. Essentially I cannot know what I do—yet I do essential things. Irreversible, terminal things. I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking at heads! […] 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. (*Equus* 109).

After the therapy with Alan is completed, Dysart understands that the cause of Alan's enigmatic lunacy. However, because he was led to examine the dogmatic values he acquired from society, the realization that his profession is nothing but an immoral business has put him into a deeper sense of despair. Although he has finally retrieved his own "horse power," the enigmatic essence of life he sees in Alan and envies, he is still asking: "*What dark is this?*" C. J. Gianakaris observes that in *Equus* "there is a deft balance between the outer narrative framework and the enacted interior scenes," and that "the play's conclusion suggests that there are indeed non-rational universal forces of great urgency that shape our lives" (King 92). In this sense, the play's narrative can be seen as Dysart's means to communicate with his inner self, because the end of his journey of self-examination raises more questions: the patient's anguish is removed by his hand, but he himself can never spiritually rest.

3.3 The Presence of the Ideal Self

C. J. Gianakaris notes that the play's stage formed with "a railed boxing ring," which is set as a "dissecting theater," symbolically "entails the battle between the powers of orderly society and the chaotic impulse of instinctual religious worship" (*A Casebook* 13). Furthermore, he comments that "[b]eneath the social dimension […] lies Shaffer's pre-eminent subject: our external search for a deity who can lend meaning to our mortal existence" (qtd in. *Modern Dramatists* 105). In *Equus*, religious fervor becomes a tool for Alan and Dysart to "lend meaning [to their] mortal existence." As I have mentioned in chapter one, the search for "divinity" is considered by Peter Shaffer as essential to himself, and the protagonists use it to relocate their own shattered self in the "orderly society" in a similar sense. Respectively, Alan and Dysart momentarily reveal their own ideal self at some moments during the therapy. The nightmares they experience in fact are

rich in symbols and imply a spiritual transformation.

3.3.1 Alan Strang

In contrast to his uncooperative attitude shown at the beginning of the therapy, Alan decides to record his thoughts on tape, a therapeutic method suggested by the psychiatrist. In Act I, scene 13, Alan reveals his admiration for the beauty of horses and expresses discontent with his parents.

> ALAN: It was always the same, after that. Every time I heard one clop by, I had to run and see. Up a country lane or anywhere. They sort of *pulled* (emphasis mine) me. I couldn't take my eyes off them. […] I can't remember when it started. Mum reading to me about Prince who no one could ride, except one boy. Or the white horse in Revelations. 'He that sat upon him was called Faithfull and True. His eyes were as flames of fire, and he had a name written that no man knew but himself'…Words like reins Stirrup. […] Years, I never told anyone. Mum wouldn't understand. She likes 'Equitation'. Bowler hats and jodhpurs! 'My grandfather dressed for the horse,' she says. What does that mean? The horse isn't dressed. It's the most naked thing you ever saw! More than a dog or a cat or anything. Even the most broken down old nag has got its *life*! To put a bowler on it is *filthy*!...Putting them through their paces! Bloody gymkhanas!...No one understands!...Except cowboys. They do. 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!...No one ever says to cowboys 'Receive my meaning'! They wouldn't dare. Or 'God' all the time. [*Mimicking his mother.*] 'God sees you, Alan. God's got eyes everywhere— (*Equus* 49)

The feeling of being "pull[ed]" by unnamed forces reminds readers of Alan's struggle to

pull something back when he is having a nightmare, in which he is experiencing the presence of "Equus" (*Equus* 35), as I have discussed in chapter two. The construction of the analogy between "Equus" and himself made by Alan can be understood as Alan's hardship of living in the shadow of other people's opinions. He has been waiting to be saved. Alan implies that he has disagreed with what his parents have said for a long time. Consequently, Alan turns to admire the "cowboy," whose character is symbolic of spiritual freedom. If we apply Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carvivalesque, Alan's confession made when he is alone (on the stage, the "marketplace") in the hospital here can be seen as a confrontation with his inner self. Although he is speaking from his bed in the hospital, Alan appears not as a timid young man but assertive and confident, criticizing the values he received in the family. Because these values play a significant role in shaping his personality, Alan "degrades" not only the values his parents firmly believe in but also his identity as an amiable and submissive young man.

Alan's desired ideal self is fully conveyed in the scene where he conducts a "ceremony" (*Equus* 72) to ride with Nugget, a horse from the stable he works at and is perceived by him as "Equus." The riding scene presented here follows the scene discussed in chapter two, where Alan is hypnotized by the psychiatrist and reveals his strange religious fantasy by connecting his own situation to that of "Equus" and Jesus Christ. In Act I, scene 21:

> [ALAN, *lying before* NUGGET, *stretches out on the square. He grasps the top of the thin metal pole embedded in the wood. He whispers his God's name ceremonially*.]
>
> ALAN: Equus!...Equus!...Equus!
>
> [*He pulls the pole upright. The actor playing* NUGGET *leans forward and grabs it. At the same instant all the other horses lean forward*

around the circle, each placing a gloved hand on the rail. ALAN *rises and walks right back to the upstage corner. Left.*]

Take me!

[*He runs and jumps high on to* NUGGET*'s back.*]

[…]

[NUGGET *mimes restiveness.*]

ALAN: Stay, Equus. No one said Go!...That's it. He's good. Equus the Godslave, Faithful and True. Into my hands he commands himself […] [*He punches* NUGGET.] Stop it!...He wants to go so badly. (*Equus* 72)

"Lean[ing] forward" and stretching out a hand, the horse actors move as if they were welcoming an emperor, making this scene "ceremonial." With the horse actors' movement aside, Alan is performing a ritual and endowing himself with the symbolic power of a god in this scene. By mounting "Equus," calling it "Godslave," claiming that it is at his command and punching it, Alan presents himself as the powerful, almighty God. This symbolic analogy between "Equus" and God is explained in my discussion in chapter two, where I have analyzed that Alan has come to relate his personal experience to that of a horse in a symbolic, religious way. As shown in the scene given above, the "ceremonial" mounting helps Alan fulfill his ideal self as a cowboy free from worldly confinements. In this regard, Alan's horse riding serves as his way of coping with anxiety for he is revealing his own ideal self through such a symbolic act.

This ritual performed by Alan to empower his own self-image as a powerless boy in front of people in reality is carried on by the horse actors referred to by Peter Shaffer as "chorus" (*Equus* 13). In Act I, scene 21:

ALAN [*ritually*]: Equus—son of Fleckwus—son of Neckwus—*Walk.*

[*A hum from the CHORUS.*[26]

Very slowly the horses standing on the circle begin to turn the square by gently pushing the wooden rail. ALAN and his mount start to revolve. The effect, immediately, is of a statue being slowly turned round on a plinth. During the ride however the speed increases, and the light decreases until it is only a fierce spotlight on horse and rider, with the overspill glinting on the other masks leaning in towards them.] (*Equus* 73)

The horse actors are preparing and presenting Alan in a godly image as the rider of "Equus" here. Their turning the stage around elaborates the scene of Alan's symbolic riding that comes afterwards. Since the movement of Alan's riding is carried out on a fixed point in the middle of the stage as if "a statue being slowly turned round on a plinth" (note that this movement continues in later scenes), it looks as if Alan is exhibiting his rider identity on the stage with pride and confidence. J. A. Cudden explains that the chorus in the play "introduces [and] serve[s] as a commentator on the action" (133). In this respect, the effect of an accelerated speed of riding made by the horse actors serves to emphasize Alan's rider identity of power and freedom. The lighting range being narrowed down to a focus upon the rider with his horse thus becomes the result of the horse actors' movement, a "comment" on Alan's action here. The "overspill[ing]" of the light on the horse actors' masks, therefore, reflects the glory emanated from the vigorous cowboy master and his horse.

The riding scene also implies Alan's detestation of worldly values, as those displayed by his parents and the unsympathetic customers he met at work. Elsewhere in Act I, scene 21, he responds from the perspective of a cowboy as a godly rider to the

[26] The playwright notes (or instructs) that the actors together function as a chorus. Peter Shaffer writes: "Reference are made in the text to the Equus Noise. I have in mind a choric effect, made by all the actor sitting round upstage, and composed of humming, thumping, and stamping – though never of neighing or whinnying. This Noise heralds or illustrates the presence of Equus the God" (*Equus* 16).

doctor's hypnotizing instructions.

ALAN: Here we go. The King rides out on Equus, mightiest of horses. Only I can ride him. He lets me turn this way and that. His neck comes out of my body. It lifts in the dark. Equus, my Godslave!...Now the King commands you. Tonight, we ride against them all.

DYSART: Who's all?

ALAN: My foes and His.

DYSART: Who are your foes?

ALAN: The Host of Hoover. The Hosts of Philco. The Hosts of Pifco. The House of Remington and all its tribe!

DYSART: Who are His foes?

ALAN: The Hosts of Jodhpur. The Host of Bowler and Gymkhana. All those who show him off for their vanity. Tie rosettes on his head for their vanity. Come on! Come on, Equus. Let's get them!...*Trot!*

[…]

Cowboys are watching! Take off their stetsons. They know who we are. They're admiring us! Bowing low unto us! Come on now—show them!

[…]

And Equus the mighty rose against All!

His enemies scatter, his enemies fall!

[…]

Trample them, trample them,

TURN! (*Equus* 73)

Again, Alan asserts his own powerful status by claiming himself to be the "King" and "Equus" to be his "Godslave." Alan's analogy between himself and a divinity can be

better understood when an explanation of who his imaginary "foes" are is provided. As discussed in chapter two, "Hoover," "Philco," "Pifco" and "Remington" are the brand names of appliances customers wanted to buy; "Jodhpur," "Bowler" and "Gymkhana" are equipment human put on horses for practicing horsemanship. Doyle W. Walls comments that these "foes" represent "the unessential [and] separate human beings from the elemental forces of nature." Referred to by Alan as "foes," the former ones represent man's need for immediate material satisfaction, and the latter ones manifest man's exploitation of animals, namely horses. Humans exploit horses only to entertain themselves. If we apply Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque, Alan is "degrad[ing]" the superior status of his customers whom he has served, and his parents, who have dominated his developmental stage of personality as he grows up. Alan's strong attempt to work with "Equus" to go "against" and "trample" their "foes" on the one hand reflects his sympathy; on the other hand it suggests the detrimental influence of the values he acquired from society.

At the point of Alan's emotional climax, he displays a strong want of unity with "Equus." Close to the end of Act I, scene 21:

> ALAN: … [*The Equus noise increases in volume.*]
>
> [*Shouting.*] WEE!...WAA!...WONDERFUL!...
>
> I'm stiff! Stiff in the wind!
>
> […]
>
> Feel me on you! *On* you! *On* you! *On* you!
>
> I want to be *in* you!
>
> I want to BE you forever and ever!-
>
> Now!—
>
> *Equus, I love you!*

Now!—

Bear me away!

Make us One Person!

[*He rides EQUUS frantically.*]

One Person! One Person! One Person! One Person! (*Equus* 74)

Alan's passion for the horse he rides, which he has mistaken for as "Equus," has a sexual connotation that corresponds with the concept about sex his mother has taught him. As I have mentioned in chapter two, his mother once told him that sex is a sacred thing. Coupled with the story about a faithful horse "Prince" also told by Dora, the riding becomes a leeway for Alan to channel his own emotion. His desire to become a "cowboy" or a godly master of the sacred horse "Equus/Prince" has been symbolically realized as he claims that his "name" is "stiff in the wind." Although the word "stiff" indicates inflexibility of body movement, it has a connotation of sexual pleasure, manifesting Alan's happiness of spiritual union with "Equus." He is in "love" with "Equus," the god he worships. Ernst Cassirer has once said that "in all human activities and in all forms of human culture we find a 'unity' of the manifold […] religion and myth give us a unity of feeling […it represents] the awareness of the universality and fundamental identity of life" (39). Riding "Equus" is a vicarious experience for Alan to fulfill his dream of becoming a cowboy, his ideal self, because people in reality often ignore his needs, but when he rides he can reunite with his inner divinity "Equus" and becomes his own master. Riding "Equus," a god he worships enables Alan to communicate with his own inner self. The lonely Alan manipulated by and hurt by dogmatic social values is then accompanied by the "cowboy" Alan, which is manifested in his riding of "Equus." Michael Hinden remarks that Alan's situation can be understood as man's search for his/her ideal self, and

this notion is illustrated in this riding scene.[27]

3.3.2 Martin Dysart

Dysart is forced to examine his own belief after he has learned more about Alan as the therapy moves forward, and his changing attitude on seeing things is displayed mainly in his conversations with Hesther Salomon. In contrast to his own depression shown as the therapy begins, in the middle of the therapy Dysart displays his religious passion. In Act I, scene 18, he confesses to Hesther.

> DYSART: I wish there was one person in my life I could show. One instinctive, absolutely unbrisk person I could take to Greece, and stand in front of certain shrines and sacred streams and say 'Look! Life is only comprehensible through a thousand local Gods. And not just the old dead ones with names like Zeus—no, but living Geniuses of Place and Person! And not just Greece but modern England! Spirits of certain trees, certain curves of brick wall, certain chip shops, if you like, and slate roofs—just as of certain frowns in people and slouches'…I'd say to them -'Worship as many as you can see—and more will appear!'" (*Equus* 62)

"Brisk" means quick, and the usage of it indicates that the affection between Dysart and his wife was shortly lived in the past and irreversible. In other words, Dysart is complaining that he could not find a soul mate who is able to enjoy a close relationship with him. He suggests that this mate will have to be able to admire the relics of an ancient civilization, such as Greece, because it is a way to grasp the meaning of life. Dysart's idea responds to Ernst Cassirer's notion that through "religion and myth" people can achieve spiritual unity. The assertion that he wants a soul mate who could "worship" natural

[27] Hidden writes: "Was *I* [emphasis original] born one or two, different or same? What are the parameters of self, and what does it mean to be separate?" (*A Casebook* 159). This quote is mentioned in chapter one in the section "A New Perspective: Reading *Equus* through Rollo May."

wonders like him explains Dysart's innate compassion for the happenings in the world, just as Alan has done thorough worshipping 'Equus." Additionally, he becomes energetic in this scene. Although Dysart is speaking with Hesther Salomon, the way he talks looks like he is giving a monologue, because the content and tone are non-interactive. In other words, Dysart is expressing his ideal self in this scene and wishes for Hesther's recognition. If we apply Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque, Dysart here is "degrad[ing]" the values he was taught to believe in his professional learning: be scientific and not to be superstitious.

When Dysart begins to recall the therapy with Alan in Act I, scene 1, he implies it is his "educated mind" that has prompted him to recall the therapy and connects his own situation to that of "Equus." Signifying inborn spiritual fertility, his "horse power" is damaged by the values society instilled within him. By asserting that life can "only" be understood in respecting "[p]lace and [p]erson," Dysart is criticizing indirectly people's unsympathetic reaction to Alan's case. In contrast to his teasing tone with Hesther Salomon at the beginning of the therapy, saying "May I remind you I share this room with two highly competent psychiatrists" (*Equus* 19), Dysart appears to agree with her in this scene given above for he is calling people in "England" to try to understand the individuality of people from other places. Dysart proposes that they should expand their love to include nature, such as "trees," "brick wall," "roofs" and so forth. By giving this speech of confession on stage, Dysart has rejected the dogmatic values he acquired from society and thereby expressed his own ideal self.

Dysart's nightmare is rich in symbols, manifesting his ideal self. As already discussed in chapter two, Dysart has a particular dream after he accepted Alan as his patient. In Act I, scene 5:

[DYSART *stands in the middle of the square and addresses the*

audience. He is agitated.]

DYSART: That night, I had this very explicit dream. In it I'm a chief priest in Homeric Greece […] I'm standing by a thick round stone and holding a sharp knife […] officiating at some immensely important ritual sacrifice, on which depends the fate of the crops or of a military expedition. The sacrifice is a herd of children: about 500 boys and girls. I can see them stretching away in a long queue, right across the plain of Argos. I know it's Argos because of the red soil. On either side of me stand two assistant priests […] As each child steps forward, they grab it from behind and throw it over the stone. Then, with a surgical skill which amazes even me, I fit in the knife and slice elegantly down to the navel, just like a seamstress following a pattern. I part the flaps, sever the inner tubes, yank them out and throw them hot and steaming on to the floor. The other two then study the pattern they make, as if they were reading hieroglyphics. […] (*Equus* 25)

According to Mark A. Stevens, Homeric Greece was a historical time in which people were influenced by mythological spirits. Stevens notes that Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* "provided the basis of Greek education and culture in the classical age and formed the backbone of humanistic education down to the Roman empire and the spread of Christianity" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Encyclopedia* 761). In this sense, the number "five hundred" and the theme of sacrifice in Dysart's dream can thus be seen as alluded to the Christian myth in which Jesus resurrects from death and shows himself in front of five hundred people.[28] The number firstly appears in Genesis where Noah

[28] "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the day according to the scriptures, And that he was seen of Cephas, than of the twelve. After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present" (Corinthians 15:3-6).

becomes the father of three sons when he reaches the age of five hundred.[29] These two scenes are demonstrations of God's compassion as Jesus is sent by God and presents himself to people fearing death. As to Noah, God intends to destroy mankind for moral degradation by a flood but spares Noah's life, for Noah is "a just man and perfect in his generations" (Genesis 6:9).[30] Although the "carving" appears cruel, Dysart's cruel action in the dream has the same sympathetic connotation, because through sacrificing he can pray for a bounty harvest for the livelihood of more people. While Dysart appears depressed about his career and marriage in reality, in his dream he becomes a priest with prophetic power. If we apply Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carvivalesque, the "marketplace," where Dysart recalls his dream in which he becomes a priest, can been seen as Dysart's act of degradation. He not only "degrade[s]" his social role as a psychiatrist, a believer of science into a pagan priest but also communicates with his inner self, his ideal self of prolific spirituality. Although the children are sacrificed and end up dead in his dream, their body organs taken out by Dysart carry productive meanings in the form of "hieroglyphics." The "surgical skill" that Dysart considers morally destructive in reality becomes a symbol of spiritual productivity in his dream.

In short, Alan and Dysart have examined their own beliefs and expressed their own ideal self through the help of the therapy. Melanie Kage remarks, "[b]y their actions, [Alan and Dysart] both reveal and realize themselves, and their identity is shown and shaped" (11). Metaphorically speaking, if we apply Rollo May's concept of anxiety, both Alan and Dysart cope with anxiety and thereby returned to the "ball game" of life, becoming the player to hit the ball themselves. In communicating with their inner self and expressing their own ideal self, they embody May's notion of spiritual "becoming."

[29] "And Noah was five hundred years old: and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (Genesis 5:32).
[30] "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (Genesis 6:5-6).

Chapter Four

Transforming Anxiety II: Integration of the Broken Self

In the previous chapter, I have shown that the therapy leads Alan Strang and Martin Dysart both to examining values they used to believe, and that the broken totality of their existence, subsequently, has been partially repaired, because they are given a chance to communicate with their own inner self and express their own ideal self. With the discovery of "Equus" being a symbol of their own identity crisis, which is caused by internalized dogmatic social values, Alan and Dysart achieve spiritual growth through showing self-acceptance and forgiveness of others at the end of the therapy. By applying Ernst Jentsch's study on human's psychological "uncertainty," chapter four aims to analyze the scenes in which Alan and Dysart fulfill the notion of "becoming" as they learn to see clear the reason behind their own anxiety.

4.1 Mapping Uncertainty

In his "Psychology of the Uncanny," Ernst Jentsch explains, "[w]hen one deliberately removes such a problem from the usual way of looking at it—for the activity of understanding is accustomed to remain insensitive to such enigmas, as a consequence of the power of the habitual—that a particular feeling of uncertainty quite often presents itself" (218). At the beginning stage of the therapy, "Equus" is revealed as the god Alan worships and Dysart admires. As the protagonists' inner divinity, "Equus" represents the "habitual," the values they are taught to believe. However, as discussed in chapter two, the ambivalent image of "Equus" perplexes Alan and Dysart uncomfortably. It actually is the "enigma" that causes them great anxiety. Nevertheless, Dysart's therapeutic skills are

effective, because they have helped Alan reexamine his own ambivalent affection for horses. Additionally, Dysart's "doubts" about his own profession and private life revealed in Act I, scene I (*Equus* 18) are also resolved in the end of the play.

In his study, Ernst Jentsch concludes: "The human desire for the intellectual mastery of one's environment is a strong one. Intellectual certainty provides psychical shelter in the struggle for existence" (227). As I have shown in chapter three, Alan and Dysart resort to religious passion to fulfill their own ideal self. In other words, such passion provides a "psychical shelter" for their shattered totality of existence. Peter Shaffer once states, "[u]ncertainty within myself is something I prize... I rather believe my totem animal to be the Chameleon" (qtd. in Parvu 86). A chameleon changes its color to adapt itself into nature whenever it is aware of a pressing danger, even when the feeling is ambiguous. However, it will change back to its original color as the danger is away. In this regard, a chameleon remains as what it is but has become more experienced with the world in which it survives. Similarly, Alan and Dysart are struggling to deal with their own identity crisis, the danger of losing their own totality of existence. The sensation of uncertainty they hold toward "Equus," which is symbolic of their identity crisis, propels them to continue the uncomfortable journey of self-examination. An individual's desire to understand him/herself, as Jentsch suggests, is human nature.

In the following analysis, I will see the therapy as the "environment," namely the representation of the protagonists' mental world in which they strive to comprehend themselves throughout the therapy. I will focus on scenes where Alan and Dysart perceive themselves and others in a new light as the result of coping with anxiety.

4.1.1 Alan Strang

As demonstrated in chapter two, the therapy reveals that Alan has developed an ambivalent affection for horses from listening to the story about a special horse named

"Prince" told by his mother. His perception of the image of the horse is then muddled by the picture given to him by his father, on which there is a horse "looking over a gate." Also, in chapter three I have analyzed the scene where Alan displays an admiration for the wild beauty of horses and his detestation of his parents' hypocrisy. Based on these preconditions, close to the end of the therapy, through which Alan is guided by the psychiatrist's therapeutic instructions, Alan discloses his sympathy for his father and the truth of the blinding. In chapter two I have shown the scene where Frank Strang bumps into Alan in a theater of pornography. Out of embarrassment, he leaves. In Act II, scene 31, Alan confesses to Dysart how he feels about his father then:

> ALAN [*to* DYSART]: I kept seeing him, just as he drove off. Scared of me…And me scared of him…I kept thinking - all those airs he puts on! ... 'Receive my meaning. Improve your mind!'…All those nights he said he's be in late. 'Keep my supper hot, Dora!' 'Your poor father: he works so hard!'…Bugger! Old bugger!...Filthy old bugger!
>
> [*He stops, clenching his fists.*] (*Equus* 95)
>
> […]
>
> ALAN [*to* DYSART]: …I kept look at all the people in the street. They were mostly men coming out of pubs. I suddenly thought—they all do it! All of them!...They're not just Dads—they're people with pricks!...And Dad—she's not just Dad either. He's a man with a prick too. You know, I'd never thought about it. (*Equus* 96)

Discovering that his father has been a liar makes Alan angry. He firstly points out that Frank has been lying to Dora, and then compares Frank with other stranger men he sees on the streets. Alan realizes that his father is not special, because there are other men behaving in the same way, looking for sexual encounters at night. Angry at this fact, Alan

accuses his father as a “buggar” and as someone with a “prick,” implying Frank is just an animal driven by biological needs as many other men. Nevertheless, Alan shows sympathy immediately afterwards:

> ALAN [to DYSART]: Sorry. I mean for him. Poor old sod, that's what I felt—he's just like me! He hates ladies and gents just like me! Posh things-and la-di-da. He goes off by himself at night, and does his own secret thing which no one know about, just like me! (*Equus* 97)

Through observation and analysis, Alan further learns about his father’s dilemma. The importance of this observation is that Alan started this analysis before he began the therapy, and it is in this present moment of the therapy, under Martin Dysart’s therapeutic guidance that Alan feels free to reveal this secret. Applying Ernst Jentsch’s study on human’s psychological uncertainty, this moment in the therapy can be seen as Alan’s “intellectual mastery” of his own life is increased. Whether Alan has had this insight that night with his father is not known, but the event he used to conceal and to be ashamed of is retold by him with a sympathetic tone. Alan’s ambiguous feeling of being pulled by an unnamed force (*Equus* 35), can thus be related to this discovery in a symbolic way. Both Alan and Frank internalized dogmatic values of society and have been manipulated by them, just like “Equus” has been “chained” and controlled by man.

After his father went away, Alan goes with his girlfriend to the stable he works at. There they are ready to intercourse; however, just as they have both taken off their clothes, the sound of “Equus” rings and disturbs Alan significantly. He pleads to be left alone, asking her to leave (*Equus* 103). The blinding that comes afterward is recalled and performed by Alan in the therapy, in Act II, scene 34:

> ALAN [*in terror*]: Eyes!...White eyes—never closed! Eyes like flames—coming—coming!...God seest! God seest!...NO!...

[*Pause. He steadies himself. The stage begins to blacken*.]

[*Quieter.*] No more. No more, Equus.

[*He gets up. He goes to the bench. He takes up the invisible pick. He moves slowly upstage towards* NUGGET, *concealing the weapon behind his naked back, in the growing darkness. He stretches out his hand and fondles* NUGGET*'s mask.*]

[*Gently*.] Equus…Noble Equus…Faithful and

True…God-slave…Thou-God-Seest-NOTHING!

[*He stabs out* NUGGET*'s eyes. The horse stamps in agony. A great screaming begins to fill the theatre, growing ever louder.* ALAN *dashes at the other two horses and blinds them too, stabbing over the rails. Their metal hooves join in the stamping.*

Relentlessly, as this happens, three more horses appear in cones of light: not naturalistic animals like the first three, but dreadful creatures out of nightmare. Their eyes flare—their nostrils flare—their mouths flare. They are archetypal images—judging, punishing, pitiless. They do not halt at the rail, but invade the square. As they trample at him, *the boy leaps desperately at them* […]

[…]

ALAN: Find me!...Find me!...Find me!...

KILL ME!...KILL ME!... (*Equus* 106)

In this scene, Alan resists the calling of "Equus" and the feeling of being watched by someone he used to consider a friend. The "growing darkness" that appears when Alan is about to blind "Equus" indicates his increasing anxiety. However, this time his anxiety does not come from confronting his enemies, the unsympathetic customers and his

parents. This time, his anxiety comes from confronting his own inner divinity, “Equus.” Blinding the horse-god “Equus” equals blinding himself in a symbolic way, because he has already become an entity with “Equus” through the ritualistic riding at night. At this moment of the therapy, on the stage, which is symbolic of Alan’s mental world, the horses show up and reveal their fearful nature. This transformation of the representation of the horses implies Alan has realized “Equus” is not a friend but an enemy. The horses are shadows of “Equus” and they “trample” Alan.

Subsequently, this new knowledge that comes after his sympathy for Frank motivates Alan to fight. Blinding the horses can be seen as Alan’s inner self fighting against his social self, the sensitive, timid and hurt young man. Since the stage can be seen as an arena of his psyche, this fight can be seen as if his immune system starts working and killing the virus intruding his spiritual world, namely “Equus” and its shadows. According to Ernst Jentsch, the sensation of uncertainty appears when one perceives something in a new light other than seeing it in “the usual way.” In other words, the increase of one’s “intellectual mastery” of his/her surrounding world is manifested by a sensation of uncertainty. In this scene Alan learns to see the malicious nature of “Equus”—the society’s manipulative mechanism. This realization poses a new sense of “uncertainty” to himself: shouting “Find Me!...KILL ME!” Alan realizes he has internalized certain social values, which helped forming “Equus” in his own spiritual world. At this moment of emotional climax, Alan is no longer spiritually “pulled” by the shadows of nameless horses. More precisely, at the present moment of therapy, he understands that he and “Equus” are inseparable. He has to “kill” himself in order to eliminate “Equus.” By blinding the horses, Alan has symbolically destroyed his own poor self-image, the part of him that is constructed through internalizing social values but has previously become unaccepted by himself.

4.1.2 Martin Dysart

Martin Dysart appears unaware of his own identity crisis in the former half of the therapy. This is shown in Act I, which ends with where Alan Strang recalls and performs the riding event at night. First, Dysart appears arrogant when he decides to take Alan Strang into his hospital. In Act I, scene 2:

> DYSART [*to audience*]: What did I expect of him? Very little, I promise you. One more dented little face. Once more adolescent freak. The usual unusual. One great thing about being in the adjustment business: you're never short of customers. (*Equus* 21)

Dysart's assumption implies his tendency to look down on his patients, because he believes Alan is just another case of insanity in modern society. His claim that his profession is a good "business" is more cynical, because as a doctor he is supposed to help his patients with sincerity. In Act I, scene 18, Dysart speaks about his wife also in a cynical manner. Speaking to Hesther Saloman, he blames his wife for their unproductive marriage:

> DYSART: […] We suited each other admirably. I see us in our wedding photo: Doctor and Doctor MacBrisk. We were brisk in our wooing, brisk in our wedding, brisk in our disappointment. We turned from each other briskly into our separate surgeries; and now there's damn all…we didn't go in for [children]. Instead, she sits beside out salmon-pink, glazed brick fireplace, and knits things for orphans in a home she helps with…You get the picture. She's turned into a Shrink. The familiar domestic monster. Margaret Dysart: the Shrink's Shrink. (*Equus* 61)

This scene recalls an earlier one, in which Dysart is referring to his desire of finding an "unbrisk" soul mate, which I have mentioned in chapter three. Dysart holds that his wife

Magaret is responsible for their shortly lived mutual affection and that she distracted her attention from intimacy by working on something else. Furthermore, Dysart is being bitter by calling his wife a “monster,” and his usage of the phrase “shrink” indicates his intention to debase his wife to comfort himself.

However, after having understood Alan Strang’s desire to be free in the end of Act I, Martin Dysart’s attitude changes. The following scene follows the scene where Dysart is quarreling with Dora Strang, who visits Alan in the hospital but ends up unhappily at the beginning of Act II (scene 22). Dysart reveals his sympathy for Alan as he is having another conversation with Hesther Salomon after he has learned about the reason behind Alan’s strange affection for horses. In Act II, scene 25:

> DYSART: Poor bloody fool.
>
> […]
>
> DYSART [quietly]: Can you think of anything worse one can do to anybody than take away their worship.
>
> […]
>
> HESTHER: Worship isn't destructive, Martin. I know that.
>
> DYSART: I don't. I only know it's the true core of his life. What else has he got? Think about him. He can hardly read. He knows no physics or engineering to make the world real for him. No paintings to show him how others have enjoyed it. No music except television jingles. No history except tales from a desperate mother. No friends. Not one kid to give him a joke, or make him know himself more moderately. He's a modern citizen for whom society doesn't exist. He lives one hour every three weeks—howling in a mist. And after the service kneels to a slave who stands over him obviously and unthrowably his master. With my body I

thee worship!...Many men have less vital[ity] with their wives! (*Equus* 81)

He learns that Alan has been raised in a family rather closed from outside world, and that Alan has no friends but television programs as companion. Dysart's description of Dora appears also sympathetic, because currently he perceives her as a "desperate" mother in need of help. After having made Alan to recall and perform the riding scene in the therapy, Dysart's attitude toward Alan has changed. He understands that Alan was ignored by his family and by society, and that "Equus" is only a symbol of Alan's twisted emotional response to the world as a traumatized young man.

The understanding of Alan's suffering further prompts Martin Dysart to confess his own sense of guilt about his unproductive private life. The conversation given above continues into this following scene, where Dysart turns the subject of conversation to talking about his chronical sense of guilt in the relationship with his wife. In Act II, scene 25:

> DYSART: Without worship you shrink, it's as brutal as that…I shrank my *own* (emphasis original) life. No one can do it for you. I settled for being pallid and provincial, out of my own eternal timidity. The old story of bluster, and do bugger—all…I imply that we can't have children; but actually, it's only me. I had myself tested behind her back. The lowest sperm count you could find. And I never told her. That's all I need—her sympathy mixed with resentment…I tell everyone Margaret's the puritan, I'm the pagan…And while I sit there, baiting a poor unimaginative woman with the word, that freaky boy tries to conjure the reality! (*Equus* 82)

A new self-understanding is being formed within Dysart as he discloses that he has been treating his wife unfairly and living with lies. In other words, he himself is the person putting himself into years of nameless anxiety, which is epitomized by his curiosity about

the ambivalent image of “Equus.” With the discovery that “Equus” represents certain dogmatic values that Alan has internalized, Dysart finally realizes that his own religious passion, including his profession ambition, is nothing but a disguise of his own “timidity.” This is why he behaves cynically to the arrival of Alan at the beginning, because looking down upon his patients can help him alleviate his low self-esteem. If we apply Ernst Jentsch’s terms, developing sympathy for Alan can be seen as that the Dysart has gain more “intellectual mastery” of his own existence, since he has made a confession and comes to understand the reason behind his own year-long nameless anxiety. At the end of the therapy, Dysart has helped his patient and reviewed the lack of life he used to avoid thinking about.

With an increasing understanding about the reason behind his own anxiety, Dysart is able to accept his friend’s advice, taking on the fatherly role for his patient, Alan. After confessing his sense of guilt, the conversation between Dysart and Hesther Salomon continues. In Act II, scene 25:

> HESTHER: That stare of [Alan’s]. Have you thought it might not be accusing you at all?
>
> DYSART: What then?
>
> HESTHER: Claiming you.
>
> DYSART: For what?
>
> HESTHER [*mischievously*]: A new God.
>
> [*Pause.*]
>
> DYSART: Too conventional, for him. Finding a religion in Psychiatry is really for very ordinary patients.
>
> [*She laughs.*]
>
> HESTHER: Maybe he just wants a new Dad. Or is that too conventional

too?...Since you're questioning your profession anyway, perhaps you ought to try it and see.

DYSART [*amused*]: I'll talk to you.

Hesther: Goodbye. (*Equus* 83)

Throughout the therapy, Dysart is troubled by the expression in Alan's eyes. He keeps Alan's "stare" as a strong accusation about the immoral deeds he did. As discussed so far, the feeling of being accused results from Dysart's own sense of guilt of having mistreated his wife and patients to hide his low self-esteem. Dysart used to defend himself whenever he had a conversation with Hesther; however, in this scene he stops arguing with her and becomes readily "amused" by her idea. Instead of acting cynically as he did throughout the therapy, Dysart becomes friendlier and is able to see Alan's need.

Having decided to take on the fatherly role, Dysart persuades Alan to tell him about and perform the original blinding scene in order to help relieve Alan's anxiety. As mentioned previously, Alan has revealed his sympathy for his father and his anger toward "Equus." In Act II, scene 35:

DYSART: [*crying out*]: *All right! I'll take it away!* He'll be delivered from madness. *What then?* He'll feel himself acceptable! *What then?* Do you think feelings like his can be simply attached, like plasters? Stuck on to other objects we select? *Look at him!*...My desire might be to make this boy an ardent husband—a caring citizen—a worshipper of abstract and unifying God. My achievement, however, is more likely to make a ghost!...I'll heal the rash on his body. I'll erase the welts cut into his mind by flying manes…Hopefully, he'll feel nothing at his fork but Approved Flesh. I doubt, however, with much passion!...Passion, you see, can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created. (*Equus* 107-108)

Dysart is fighting with his inner self. He still values Alan's spiritual creativity a lot. However, with the acceptance of himself being a fatherly figure the patient may be looking for, Dysart puts himself into a new dilemma. Logically, by the end of the therapy Dysart should have understood that curing a patient with a surgery will intensifies his sense of guilt, but he knows it is the only way to help Alan. Because Alan is very special in his ability in relating real life experiences in a particular symbolic way, only a more destructive therapeutic method may help stop the work of his imagination, from which "Equus," the symbol of Alan's fighting for spiritual freedom, is born. The second half of this final scene illustrates Dysart's fully grown self-awareness:

> DYSART: […] And now for me it never stops: that voice of Equus out of the cave—'Why Me?...Why Me?...Account for Me!...All right—I surrender! I say it!...In an ultimate sense I cannot know what I do in this place—yet I do ultimate things. Essentially I cannot know what I do—yet I do essential things. Irreversible, terminal things. I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking at heads! (*Equus* 108)
>
> […]
>
> 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. (*Equus* 109)

Dysart is connecting his own situation to that of Alan's by symbolically holding a "pick" in the darkness. The awareness that he is wearing the "chain" like "Equus" indicates that he understands his own identity crisis better now than before. While Dysart is perplexed by the vague image of intimacy between the horse and the boy as he starts to recall the happenings in the therapy, at the end of his reflection he learns that he himself is also

someone in need of help like his patient. Although Dysart has solved the mystery of "Equus," he is faced with a new "uncertainty." This sensation of uncertainty is not from pondering the enigmatic intimacy between the boy and the horse but from his newly developed self-awareness—he is the God, the boy, and the horse. He is all of them.

In short, Alan has been putting up with his parents' misunderstanding and the ignorance of society, because revealing the truth of his blinding act is too cruel to his family. Telling the truth explains his own misery, but the disclosure of it will prove that his parents' lives are as tragic as his; his anxiety lies in that he wanted to stay as a good boy for his parents, but he is driven by his innate desire to fulfill his own ideal self. Dysart, on the other hand, leaps into a deeper moral darkness at the end of the therapy; however, this time he does so voluntarily. Although he is in a dilemma similar to Alan's, troubled by the anxiety of the sense of necessity to fulfill his social roles and his own ideal self, out of fatherly love, he conducts the surgery to remove "Equus" from Alan's mental world. Their courageous coping with anxiety in the therapy can be seen as prove of Ernst Jentsch's assertion that "struggle[ing] for existence" (227) is the nature of man. At the end of the therapy, Alan and Dysart achieve spiritual growth in showing self-acceptance and forgiveness of others.

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Chapter 5

Conclusion

> The story of true heroics is always the story of sacrificial blood. The greatest values and character in life are not blown randomly across our path by wayward winds, for great souls experience great sorrow.
>
> —L. B. Cowman, *Streams in the Desert* (414)

"Anxiety" is an experience shared by people regardless of time and space, and it has significantly influenced the characters in Peter Shaffer's *Equus*. Many studies in the past have focused on explaining the tragic dimension of the characters' existence in *Equus* by using a variety of literary approaches. However, this thesis examines the inner conflict of the play's protagonists, Alan Strang and Martin Dysart, from the perspective of existential psychology. Basically, existential psychology values people's struggle in coping with anxiety. By analyzing the protagonists' efforts in coping with anxiety, this thesis is written to respond to the playwright's call that he "had to create a mental world in which [Alan's] deed could be made comprehensible" (*Equus* 9). My analysis in the thesis shows that Dysart's reflection not only explains Alan's hardship but also helps Dysart to understand himself.

At the heart of *Equus* is the issue of man's determination to cope with anxiety. By depicting a world full of anxiety, the play implies that accepting social values blindly will result in an individual's identity crisis. Characters in the play, whether member of elite or ordinary households, have difficulties recognizing the disparity between their actions and beliefs. Legislators and psychiatrists, for example, are greatly disturbed by and refuse to

accept Alan Strang's case, disguising themselves to show calmness and temporary sympathy. Dora and Frank Strang behave in the same hypocritical way. While Frank attempts to compensate his low self-esteem by criticizing his family, Dora embraces religious ideals she is not wholeheartedly convinced of, devoting herself to fulfilling the role of a caring mother and a loving wife. They both cannot or are willing to see that they indeed love but may have been educating Alan in an appropriate way. These characters are proven to be under the influence of anxiety without recognizing the reality.

During the therapy, Alan and Dysart review the values they are taught to believe in. Alan recalls his childhood and shows to himself that how longly his life has been, and Dysart examines the code of conducts he used to follow but feels guilty about. As a result, the therapy Alan and Dysart go through offers them an opportunity to see their own identity crisis. This crisis motivates them to examine their own beliefs and express their own ideal self. Additionally, the play's narrative can be seen as framed by Dysart's self-examination: recalling the past and speaking from the center of the stage, Dysart questions the dogmatic values he acquired from society. In other words, his social self is confronting his inner self on stage. While Dysart expresses his inner creativity by revealing his fervor in worshipping pagan gods after he pondered his profession and private life, Alan's desire to become cowboy freed from worldly restraints has also been conveyed through Dysart's reflection. In this regard, they confront and face their own traumatize inner self in therapy, reflecting what Rollo May says: "Self-confrontation […] involves accepting the hatred of the past" (*Psychology and the Human Dilemma* 33). The play's theme of metaphysical opposition illustrated is not only the one between the patient and the psychiatrist, but also one of which these two protagonists' own inner self rising against the values that are permeated in the society they live in. Their inner struggle lead eventually to spiritual "becoming."

At the end of the therapy, Alan Strang and Martin Dysart repair the broken connection with their own inner self through showing self-acceptance and forgiveness of others. Alan reveals the fact that he had the impulse to blind the horses, the shadow of "Equus" after he had realized his father's hypocrisy. Alan was driven mad by the voice of "Equus" in the original blinding scene; however, at the present moment in the therapy he is able to explain the reason behind the blinding, showing acceptance of what he has done. Alan has found that "Equus" is never a friend but a disguised form of manipulative social values that has been influencing his father for a long time. Alan's blinding "Equus" can thus be seen as a reaction done out of sympathizing his father, and the confession of this realization means forgiveness. On the other hand, Dysart becomes able to confess that he has been mistreating his wife out of selfishness and decides to take on the fatherly role for and relieve the pain of Alan even though he knows that he will then fall into a deeper sense of moral darkness. Dysart's confession and sacrifice of moral conscience explains that he accepts his roles as a terrible husband and an immoral psychiatrist.

The ending of *Equus* is, as many critics have remarked, tragic, because "Equus" still haunts Alan Strang until the final stage of the therapy, and Martin Dysart could not relieve himself from the sense of guilt when he decides to cure Alan in his own way. However, Alan and Dysart choose their own tragedy; they show courage in sympathizing others and embracing further inner conflict. Alan has found a form of freedom through the blinding, the freedom he had originally projected onto the cowboy figure of his dreams. Dysart has retrieved a form of spiritual creativity through playing the fatherly role for and helping Alan, the creativity he has been craving for from worshipping the figures of ancient pagan divinity and from "Equus." At the end of his recollection, Dysart learns that he himself is in a similar spiritual dilemma like his patient. The play's final scene proves that Alan and Dysart have repaired their own disintegrated totality of existence, embodying the notion

of spiritual “becoming.”

Hence, the play vividly depicts the protagonists’ unfailing courage before the tragic dimension of their own existence. Although characters such as Dora and Frank Strang appear to remain passive in the face of the discrepancy between their beliefs and actions, Alan finds out that they are also victims. Dora and Frank are just two of the many people who are suffering from the influence of mainstream social values. To gain an insight into life—as Alan and Dysart do—an individual has to have a spiritual capacity to endure sorrow and loneliness; however, it is unfair to ask every person to be as courageous as they are. To some extent, Alan and Dysart are very lucky in that they meet each other; their ways to achieve spiritual growth are tied together. Rollo May believes that the purpose of a therapy is not to “free the patient from anxiety” but to help him/her meet anxiety “more constructively” (*Psychology and the Human Dilemma* 81). Based on this statement, I argue that Alan and Dysart have dealt with anxiety constructively through the help of therapy. At the end of the therapy, they sacrifice themselves to carry out symbolic justice for their loved ones, fulfilling their own ideal self. They are heroes in modern society, because they choose to cope with anxiety, to stay with it, and therefore become gentler toward other people and themselves. By self-devotion, they embody the notion of “becoming” as a reward of coping with anxiety. They are heroes for themselves.

Equus, undoubtedly, will continue to inspire us whenever we read it or watch a performance of it. The play implies that the want of genuine intimacy with people and with one’s inner self is human nature, and that devoting oneself for the need of others is the highest value of existence that we, as human, can and should try hard to achieve. Reading or watching this play also helps us contemplate the meaning of our own existence. Bearing these illuminations in mind, this thesis is written to encourage readers and audience to cope with anxiety, because coping with it alone is already a rewarding

experience. Moreover, we may learn to sympathize with Alan Strang and Martin Dysart and to extend our sympathy toward the other characters in the play. We may also learn to be sympathetic toward people we meet in real life. I wish that we, as audience or readers, can learn to deal with anxiety more "constructively," just as Rollo May has said (*Psychology and the Human Dilemma* 81). We should not only live with anxiety, but also take courageous actions when we confront the ups and downs with a magnitude similar to those of Alan and Dysart throughout our lives.

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