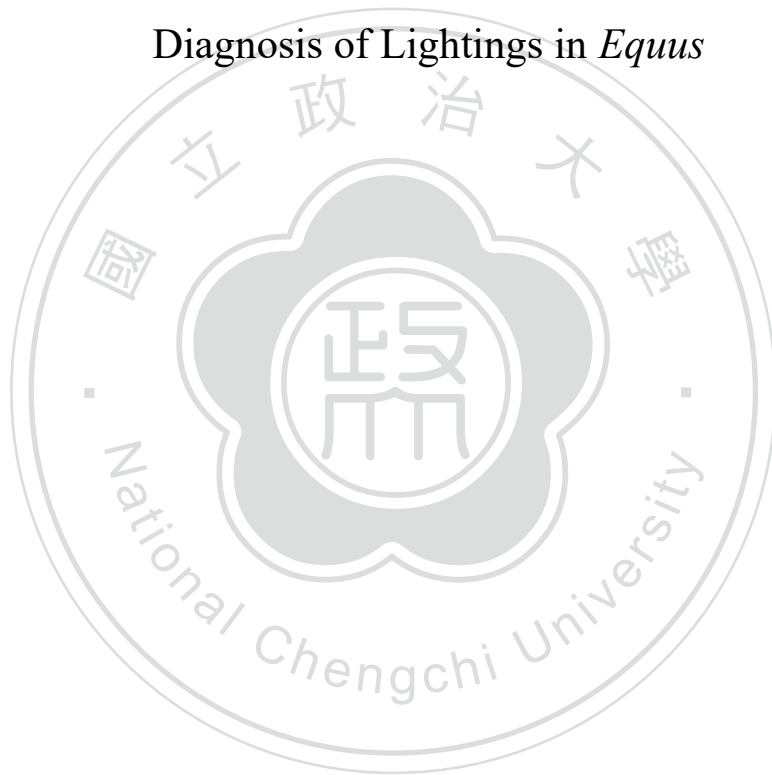


國立政治大學英國語文學系

碩士學位論文

《戀馬狂》中的燈光診斷

Diagnosis of Lightings in *Equus*



指導教授：姜翠芬 博士

研究生：趙育萱 撰

中華民國 110 年 6 月

Diagnosis of Lightings in *Equus*

A Master Thesis

Presented to

Department of English

National Chengchi University



In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

by  
Chao, Yu-Hsuan  
June 2021

## Acknowledgement

It is an incredibly long journey for me. Until now, I still cannot believe that I am so close to get my master degree. I have never forgotten the reason why I decided to study for a master degree in literature. English and literature truly bring me joy and open up a whole new world to me. Nevertheless, English was not my major in university. I had studied really hard to get myself in this master's program and to meet the extra credit requirements. Moreover, I often worked on my paper until midnight and could not get much sleep, for I worked full-time during the days. I am proud that I have come through all the difficulties and struggles.

First of all, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my advisor, Professor Jiang Tsui-Fen, who really inspired and enlightened me with her extensive knowledge. I truly appreciate her kindness and all the help she gave me when I was working on my paper. I am also thankful for having Professor Chen Ying-I and Professor Shih Yi-Chin as my defense committee members. They were both very kind and gave me a lot of useful suggestions.

Secondly, I would like to thank my family and friends for always being there for me. They were the ones that kept telling me not to give up or to lose confidence in myself. Even though I spent much more time on my master degree than other people, they still gave me endless support. Without their company, I would not able to

overcome all the ups and downs in these four years. I especially want to thank my best friend from the university, Joyce. She has been the one that I turn to whenever I am overwhelmed with pressure and depression since we met in NCKU. She is also the friend that knows me the best and the one I can share all my happiness and sorrow with in life. I am lucky to have such a friend.

Thirdly, I would like to give thanks to my favorite band, BTS, and especially the member SUGA. Their music truly gives me a great comfort and enormous courage to pursue my dreams. When I was writing my thesis alone until midnight, their music kept me company like the gentle moonlight. Thanks to their music and inspiring lyrics, I find hope and pleasure in my life.

Lastly, I want to thank myself for being through all of this. When I look back now, the four-year journey is bitter-sweet and undoubtedly turns me into a better and more capable person. I believe that I have developed a stronger mind to face all kinds of challenges in the future.

I hope you enjoy reading this thesis, and do keep in mind that the crack in your life is where the light comes in. May we all have a prosperous future.

論文名稱：《戀馬狂》中的燈光診斷

指導教授：姜翠芬 教授

研究生：趙育萱

論文提要內容：

本論文以彼得·薛佛《戀馬狂》劇本中的舞台燈光（包含黑暗），來探討其如何詮釋該劇本的中心思想。在劇中，不同型態的燈光及黑暗有其不同的象徵。劇作家藉由六種不同型態的燈光及燈光轉換，描繪出各角色的心理狀態，以及對「正常」產生質疑的一連串過程。暖光主要與海希瑟有所連結，它營造出熟悉感及安全感，象徵「正常」的普遍定義跟社會規範。昏暗的燈光則創造出陰鬱的氣氛，象徵艾倫與馬匹奈格特間曖昧不明的情感，以及朵拉對自身情況產生的懷疑及混亂。當冷光照進舞台時，代表「正常」的普遍定義，被證明是有缺陷的，也象徵了戴瑟跟艾倫幻想的破滅。黑暗不僅在舞台上呈現，也被用來象徵角色的絕望，例如戴瑟。聚光燈的光強調了艾倫對馬不尋常的情感，而光束顯現出艾倫對馬既神聖又恐懼的心態。因此，本論文主張，《戀馬狂》中不同型態的燈光、黑暗及燈光轉換是用來描繪角色心理狀態，以及闡述劇本主題不可或缺的元素。

關鍵字：《戀馬狂》、燈光、黑暗、正常、社會規範

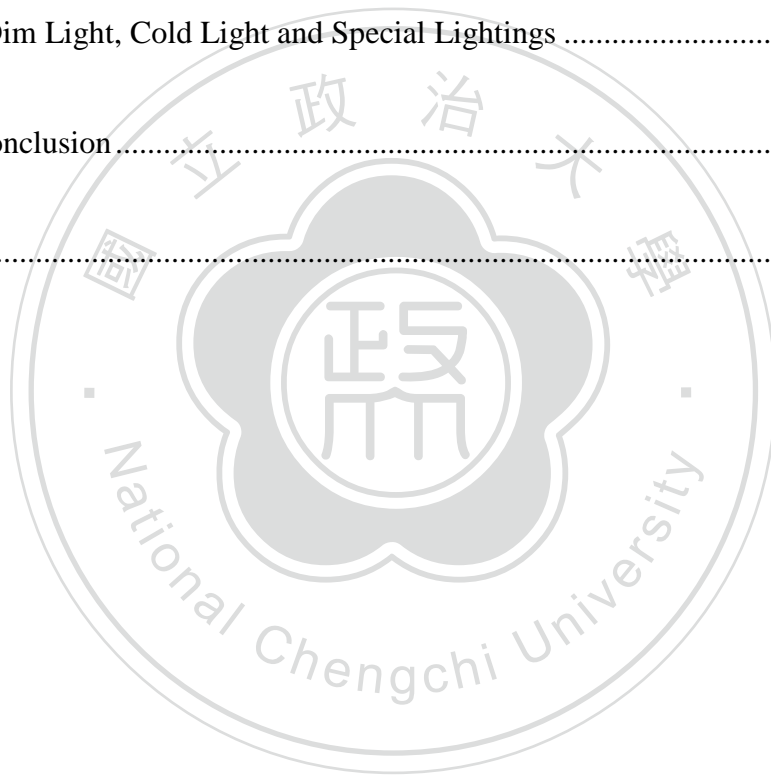
## Abstract

This thesis focuses on how lightings, including darkness, manifest the motif of Peter Shaffer's *Equus*. In the play, different forms of lights and darkness have different symbolisms. Shaffer uses six different forms of lights and lighting changes to depict the psyche of the characters to show the sequence of process of questioning "normality." The warm light, which is mainly associated with Hesther, creates a sense of familiarity and security and symbolizes the general criterion of normality and social norms. The dim light creates a melancholy atmosphere, which symbolizes Alan's obscure relationship with Nugget and Dora's doubts and confusion of her situation. The cold light comes in when the general criterion of normality is proved problematic in a way, and it symbolizes the disillusion of Dysart and Alan. The darkness is both presented on stage and used metaphorically to show the dark side and desperation of characters like Dysart. The spotlight intensifies Alan's abnormal passion for the horses while cones of light manifest Alan's divine and dreadful attitude toward the horses. Therefore, I argue that different forms of lights, darkness and changes of lights in *Equus* are the vital elements to depict the psyche of the characters and to manifest the themes of the play.

**Keywords:** *Equus*, light, darkness, normality, social norms

## Table of Contents

Chinese Abstract .....	iv
English Abstract.....	v
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Chapter Two: Warm Light and Darkness .....	15
Chapter Three: Dim Light, Cold Light and Special Lightings .....	37
Chapter Four: Conclusion.....	53
Works Cited .....	57



## Chapter One

### Introduction

Peter Shaffer, a British playwright, wrote *Equus*, a play based on a true story which was told by Shaffer's friend in 1973. Shaffer recalled in an interview with *New York Times* that the story took place in the north of England when a boy was accused of blinding 26 horses. His parents were said to be the members of the peculiar religious sect. When the boy was seduced by a girl in the stable, he distortedly thought that the horses surrounded him would go tell his parents (Buckley 242). Fascinated by the story, Shaffer started to write *Equus* afterwards.

*Equus* raises the philosophical question about normality by revealing a shocking crime. The profound depiction of the tension between characters is highly praised, which arouses the audience's doubts about the long-existing standards of normality and social norms. However, there are also controversies over how the play questions and disrespects psychiatry. It is also argued that the play deliberately defends against insanity. All in all, it is undoubted that *Equus* does make people aware of the conflicts between social norms and one's intrinsic value.

As mentioned above, it is of great significance to interpret *Equus* by exploring the struggles and conflicts between characters and inside the characters' minds. Yet, this thesis intends to examine the theme of the play from a new perspective. It aims to



point out the symbolic meanings of the light and darkness and further suggest that they are vital to interpret the theme of the play. In *Equus*, the light comes in various forms, such as warm light, dim light, cold light, and so on. The different forms of lights not only intensify the dramatic effect, but also reflect the psyche of the characters and have important symbolic meanings. Likewise, darkness can create tension and disclose the dark sides or secrets of the characters. Therefore, I argue that it is crucial to interpret the shift between the different forms of lights and darkness to comprehend the theme of the play more thoroughly and refreshingly.

### **Plot Summary**

*Equus* is about Alan Strang, a seventeen-year-old boy, accused of blinding six horses with a steel spike. He is therefore taken to the hospital by Hesther, a magistrate, to receive psychiatric treatment. Martin Dysart is Alan's psychiatrist, who finds his life and career distressing and unsatisfying. He has also long been haunted by a dream, in which he is a chief priest at the ritual sacrifice of a herd of children. The dream makes Dysart doubt the legitimacy of turning the "abnormal people" into "normal" people.

During Dysart's treatment, it is revealed that Alan has a strong passion for horses and has been sexually attracted to them since his first encounter with a horse at the beach. Moreover, Dysart finds out that Alan grows up receiving conflicting beliefs.

Dora, Alan's mother, also a devout Christian, tells Alan lots of biblical stories, especially the one about the horse called Prince. The story makes Alan fascinated with the idea of animals talking. On the contrary, Frank, Alan's father, is an atheist who thinks that the Bible should take the responsibility of Alan's abnormality. He is also the one who finds Alan's excessive obsession toward horses when he accidentally witnesses Alan secretly chanting and bowing himself to the ground in front of the photograph of a horse in his room.

Afterwards, Alan works at a stable with a girl, Jill Masons. One night, Jill asks Alan to watch a porn movie at the theater, where they accidentally meet Alan's father Frank. After the awkward encounter with Frank, Jill seduces Alan to have sex with her at the stable. However, Alan is unable to have sex with Jill when hearing the noises made by the horses. He then begs the horses for mercy since he regards them as his god, Equus. At last, Alan breaks down and takes a steel spike to blind six horses in the stable.

After knowing Alan's story in the treatment, Dysart is plunged into deliberation. He actually envies Alan's passion and worship, for his life is monotonous and repressed. Hence, he doubts that whether he should obliterate Alan's passion as well as his soul and make him become "normal." The play ends with Dysart sitting silently in endless darkness.

## Literature Review

*Equus* was first presented at the Old Vic in London in 1973, and it has been both a sensational and controversial play ever since. Many critics were first amazed and impressed by its “theatrical intensity, the white-hot fusion of script, staging, performance, costume and lighting” (Buckley 242). The cast of *Equus* is all seated on the stage and directly rises to perform in different spaces on the stage (Shaffer 13).

David M. Galens points out that audience then will be further engaged since there is no division between the stage and audience (108). This technique “[creates] an intimacy which underscores the intensity of the drama” (Galens 108).

In addition, several scenes in the play take place in different places, and the quick shifts in locations are achieved through “rotating turntable as well as other set techniques such as spot lighting and sparse use of props” (Galens 108). These stage effects and techniques intensify the suspense of the play and make the audience feel that they are participants, not bystanders. Albert E. Kalson also suggests that “the director sets the play in a surgical amphitheatre, [...which provides] a logical and forcefully symbolic background as Dysart tells the story in which he ‘murders to dissect’” (514). All these settings make the scenes much more realistic and also invite the audience to be a part of the play.

Besides the stunning stage techniques and effects, *Equus* is recognized as an

innovative and intellectual play for its variety of themes and profound arguments as well. Michael Billington calls the play “sensationally good” and admires the intellectual arguments in it (qtd. in Galens 112). Clive Barnes suggests that the play “has a most refreshing and mind-opening intellectualism” (26). Moreover, *Equus* probes into the issue of passion and normality by drawing a comparison between Alan and Dysart. Gene A. Plunka suggests that “characters like Alan teach Shaffer’s misguided protagonists that they are living in a phony, artificial world” (qtd. in Mustazza 180). Don Shewy also states that Dysart is a “portrait of a universal product of the crippling ‘normality’ of modern-day society” (11).

Indeed, *Equus* raises doubts about the well-acknowledged standards of normality and opens up discussions about the relation between passion and normality. It is obvious that in the play, the criterion of normality and the obliteration of Alan’s passion appear to be absurd. Fushan Lai suggests that *Equus* points out the crisis of “modern man, dissatisfied with the secular existence in which he is moulded by social conventions, finds his life meaningless, and desires to transcend it by filling himself with a sense of the divine” (5). Lai further indicates that a sense of divine is “an escape from the destructive confines of social establishments, normality and dominant order” (8).

Since *Equus* is written from the angle of the psychiatrist, psychoanalytic theories

are widely applied to digging into the characters' minds and behaviors as well. Don Shewey appreciates the "insights from the point of view of the psychiatrist—aware of his potential power and precarious position, stricken with a desperate fear of his own incompetence and mistrust of his own motivations" (11). Zafer Safak applies the idea of transference and countertransference to analyze the relationship between Dysart and Alan and indicates that the roles of psychiatrist and patient are changed in *Equus*. He further suggests that the play is affected by "Freud's theories of childhood development and human subconsciousness [...and] Carl Jung's premises [of] the individuation process and archetypal images of humanity" (15). Like many other critics, Leonard Mustazza also sees the tension between Dysart and Alan in the theme of Dionysian and Apollonian conflict. He concludes that "Dysart still prefers Dionysian transcendence to the great god of Normal, but he sees the change as necessary not only to the society but also to Alan himself" (184).

On the other hand, there are some opposite views and criticisms of the discussed issues in the play as well. Ian Christie argues that the script is "pretentious, philosophical claptrap" (qtd. in Galens 112-13). Some critics also condemn Shaffer for questioning psychiatry and justifying insanity and crimes. Dr. Sanford Gifford denounces that Shaffer was "catering to the audience's wish to know more about the private life of psychoanalysts" (qtd. in Buckley 242). J.W Lambert states that "the

purpose of the play's exposition is to offer us some reason for the irrational" (qtd. in Galens 116). The diverse interpretations prove that *Equus* is an impressive and inspiring play which raises several controversial issues for people to consider.

### **Contribution**

The quintessence of *Equus* is to bring out the conflicts of "normality" and "abnormality." Through the psychiatric treatment and the tension between the characters and one's selves, Shaffer continues breaking people's original concepts of normality. Most of the critics use psychoanalytic theories to discuss the theme of the play and the relationship between the characters. They mainly focus on the characters' behaviors to analyze their states of mind. However, I suggest that the theme of *Equus* can be examined from a different perspective.

As many critics point out, when we watch the stage performance of the play, the stage effects and the lightings are particularly impressive. In *Equus*, lighting changes unravel the core of the themes and reflect the psyche of the characters. The warm light associated with Hesther symbolizes the general criterion of normality while darkness is both presented on the stage and used metaphorically to symbolize the dark side and desperation of characters such as Dysart. The dim light symbolizes Alan's obscure relationship with Nugget and Dora's doubts and confusion of her situation. The cold light symbolizes the disillusion of Dysart and Alan. Whereas the spotlight highlights

Alan's strong but abnormal passion toward the horses, the cones of lights manifest

Alan's divine and dreadful attitude toward the horses.

Basically, there are warm light, dim light, cold light, and the darkness in the scenes. Besides creating the mood and building dramatic tension and atmosphere, they are also employed to disclose the psyche of the characters. The warm light symbolizes the normality and social norms. It creates the mild atmosphere which is easy and contented to most people. Likewise, most people intend to accept the traditional standard of normality and social norms, and they feel secure by doing so. It is just like a comfort zone that hardly anyone will try to get out of. People are willing to stick to the status quo since they are afraid to be labeled as the abnormal ones. Just as in the play, whenever Hesther appears, the light is always warm. Hesther is not only a court magistrate, her act to take Alan to see a psychiatrist also indicates she is a warm person. However, the warm light associated with Hesther refers to not only her warm personality, but her profession, that is legitimacy and rightfulness.

The dim light is first used in the very beginning of the play. It creates a gloomy atmosphere and settles a melancholy start of the play. In the dim light, everything is obscure. It gives people the feeling of uncertainty, which also symbolizes the doubts about the traditional standards of normality, social norms, and one's self. For instance, Dora deeply believes that love and sex are closely related to religion, and she also

tells Alan that way. However, when Dora reveals the fact to Dysart, she starts to doubt the belief she has always believed in since it may be the cause of Alan's crime. To Dora, the belief was once solid, but now it begins to shatter. What she thinks is normal and true now appears questionable. To allow the audience to visualize her shattered world, the lights then grow much dimmer.

The cold light then appears when the cruel fact is eventually unraveled. It comes in when the characters, Dysart and Alan, are disillusioned with the reality. With the shedding of the cold light, the world that most people are familiar with now becomes brutal but a lot more real. For instance, when Dysart hypnotizes Alan in the treatment, the light changes to cold light. He sees into Alan's eyes and suddenly finds out that he is at the same time saving and destroying Alan. He then realizes that normality "both sustains and kills" (Shaffer 65). The cold light thus symbolizes the characters' disillusion.

The darkness bears multiple symbolic meanings in the play. It symbolizes the dark side of characters, the loss of one self, and desperation. The play also ends with Dysart feeling himself standing in the dark. He finds that he can see nothing in the dark, and he cannot get out of the dark, either. The audience then can visualize Dysart's hopelessness and desperation.

The spotlight in the play is used when Alan is with a horse. The first time is in



the very beginning of the play when Alan stands in the spotlight with Nugget in his front. The second time is when Alan rides the horse for the first time. The spotlight in the play is applied to drawing the audience's attention to Alan and the horse, which also accentuates Alan's unusual and strong passion for horses. Moreover, the cones of lights are employed to show the divine but dreadful image of horses. The special lightings are indispensable since they not only capture the audience's attention, but more importantly, they bring the conflicts to the climax.

In *Equus*, the warm light is used the most, and darkness is the second most in order to bring out the polemics and new perspective of "normality" and "abnormality." The oscillation of lighting creates conflicts, which push the audience to rethink about their original concepts of "normality" and "abnormality." Moreover, the special lightings, the spotlight and cones of lights, can draw the audience's attention to a particularly important character or scene to build a climax of the play.

## **Methodology**

The most important function of the stage lighting is to make what on the stage visible to the audience. Cynthia M. Gendrich and Stephen Rowman Archer point out that "stage lighting allows the audience to see all the visual theatrical elements: the actors, the scenery, the costumes, everything" (232). However, stage lighting is far more important than that. It is also in charge of the overall atmosphere of the play.

There are four main functions of stage lighting: visibility, motivation, composition and mood. Visibility is the very basic function of stage lighting. Motivation assures that the stage lighting makes the stage scene realistic. Composition is to enhance the lighting effect. Mood is decided and affected by the other three functions (“Stage Lighting Basics”).

Harry H. Schanker and Katherine A. Ommanney also point out that “lighting is the most important element in scenic design because it affects the creation mood and atmosphere” (453). They further suggest that “the effective stage lighting is based on three qualities of light: intensity, or brightness; color; and distribution, or area covered” (453). In short, the atmosphere of a play can only be perfectly created through the “careful manipulation of light and shade, color, and intensity in such a way that these harmonize with the other elements of visual production such as setting, costume and makeup design” (Bellman 270). The intensity of lighting is important since it would affect the visibility of the stage and actors as well as the atmosphere.

When designers are designing the colors of lighting, it is important to mind that color can make people react emotionally. The color white can be interpreted as purity, soothing, and innocence. The color black is often used to show fear, unhappiness, and hostility. The warm colors, like red, orange, and yellow, make people feel warm and serene (“The Importance of Color in Lighting”). Hence, different genres of the plays

will emphasize different colors of lighting. Generally, “tragedies and serious dramas emphasize cool colors, whereas comedies stress warm colors” (Schanker and Ommanney 457).

The distribution of lighting is especially crucial when a specific character or scene needs to be emphasized. “The most important acting areas need the most light. Bringing a greater quantity of light into a given area makes the actor playing in that area stand out” (Schanker and Ommanney 458). For instance, the spotlight is commonly used to draw people’s attention to the specific character to separate the character from other less important characters or backdrop. The spotlight enables people to completely focus on the lines, emotions and actions of the character (“How Lighting is Used in Theatre”). For instance, in *Equus*, the spotlight is used when Alan is with horses in order to underscore Alan’s obsession and intimacy with horses.

These three qualities of light are critical to a stage performance. Lighting designers should first scrutinize the script to grasp the genre and the theme of a play, then they can conceive how the lighting can be used to show the atmosphere of scenes and the emotions of characters according to the three qualities of lighting. Since *Equus* is a philosophical play, the lightings are not only meant to create dramatic effects, but also closely related to the characters’ psyche at that time. Appropriate lightings can highlight the actors and actresses’ great acting and intensify their

emotions. Moreover, Shaffer himself designs the lightings. It can be suggested that the lightings are crucial to interpret the psyche of the characters and show the conflicts between the characters' concepts of "normality" and "abnormality" in *Equus*.

In literature, the symbolic meanings of light and darkness is also very classic. It is widely acknowledged that light symbolizes warmth while darkness brings the fear of unknown (Obsorn 117). However, in *Equus*, the symbolic meanings of light and darkness are far more diverse and the interpretation of which can be much deeper. First of all, the shift of light and darkness is widely seen in the play. The shift in the play is especially important since it signifies a twist in the plots or emotions. Second, since there are many instructions of stage lighting in *Equus*, I believe that it will be refreshing to combine the concept of stage lighting and the symbolic meanings of light and darkness in literature to interpret *Equus* and dig out the psyche of the characters.

This thesis begins with an introduction, followed three chapters. The chapters will be dealing with six forms of lights to see what they symbolize in the play and how they reflect the psyche of the characters. Chapter One is the introductory chapter. Chapter Two analyzes the symbolic meanings of the warm light and darkness in the play. This chapter aims to investigate the conflicts between different characters, one and oneself, "normality" and "abnormality" by interpreting the warm light and

darkness. Chapter Three researches into the dim light, cold light, and the two special lightings, the spotlight and cones of lights. It investigates how the dim light and cold light visualize the characters' doubts and disillusion with reality. Moreover, it analyzes how the two special lightings highlight the characters' emotions and create the dramatic effect. Chapter Four is the concluding chapter of this thesis.



## Chapter Two

### Warm Light and Darkness

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, when someone is described as “normal,” it means that one “constitute[s] or conform[s] to a type or standard;” normal can also mean “regular, usual, typical; ordinary, conventional.” Indeed, in order to make the society stable and well-functioned, social norms and regulations are indispensable. Without norms and regulations, people literally can do anything at will, and that will throw the society into chaos. Therefore, only with these norms and regulations, people are assured to enjoy a certain degree of freedom.

However, there are also drawbacks if the norms and regulations are overly emphasized. A perfectly organized society may put people under pressure and make people dull. Rigid norms and disciplines of course can stabilize the society, but at the same time, they may also kill creativities and passion and assimilate all the people. In this sense, “being normal” indicates that one should not question the existing norms and offer different thoughts, but only follow the set of norms and regulations precisely. Therefore, to show the conflicts between the social harmony and individual enthusiasm, the warm light and darkness are the most used lighting designs in *Equus*. In the play, the warm light associated with Hesther symbolizes the general criterion of

normality while darkness is both presented on the stage and used metaphorically to symbolize the dark side and desperation of characters such as Dysart.

In *Equus*, the warm light is used the most when Hesther appears, and the warm light associated with Hesther symbolizes the general criterion of normality and social norms. As a court magistrate, Hesther acts as a judge who decides local legal matters.

Thus, Hesther is the character that the audience can most resonate with since she represents the model of normality in the play. Whenever she appears, the light is always warm to evoke the audience's trust and sense of security when they see Hesther on the stage. Hesther makes her first appearance when she takes Alan to see Dysart and asks him to turn Alan back to normal. In Act I, scene 2:

[*The light gets warmer. He sits. NURSE enters the square.*]

NURSE: Mrs. Salomon to see you, Doctor.

DYSART: Show her in, please.

[...]

[*HESTHER enters the square: a woman in her mid-forties.*]

[...]

HESTHER: [...] Because most people are going to be disgusted by

the whole thing. Including doctors. [...] You know exactly what I

mean! ... [*Pause.*] Please, Martin. It's vital. You're this boy's

only chance. (Shaffer 19-20; emphasis added)

In this scene, the warm light symbolizes not only Hesther's character as the representative of legitimacy and the public opinion but also her sympathy. The warm colors are believed to make people feel warm and serene ("The Importance of Color in Lighting"). Therefore, when seeing Hesther appears on the stage with the warm light, the audience tends to feel a sense of security and finds the character trustworthy. Moreover, when Hesther points out that Alan's crime cannot be tolerated in society and what he did is disgusting to most people as a magistrate, she makes the audience resonate with her opinion due to her identification. Hence, Hesther's point of view about Alan's crime can be regarded as universal and rightful. The warm light shedding on Hesther in this scene implies that she is the representative of the majority of "normal" people in society and the model of normality.

In addition, Hesther shows a great compassion by begging Dysart to treat Alan although she is fully aware of how strange and unusual of Alan's crime is. Despite the fact that the decision appears to be problematic afterwards, her striving to save Alan shows her kindness and warmth. She also tries to convince Dysart to help Alan by saying, "[H]e's probably abominable. All I knew is, he needs you badly. Because there really is nobody within a hundred miles of your desk can handle him" (Shaffer 20). The light getting warmer on the stage presents both the humane side of Hesther



and the image of a rightful magistrate reproaching Alan's crime. She endeavors to help Alan out and sustain the order and stability of the society at the same time. Hence, the warm light in this scene highlights both Hesther's role of the model of normality and her compassion.

Besides Alan, Hesther also shows her benevolence toward Dysart. When Dysart has doubts about his career and talks about his dream about the sacrifice of a herd of children, Hesther encourages him by saying that he is a great doctor:

[HESTHER *enters the square. Light grows warmer.*]

HESTHER: That's the most indulgent thing I ever heard.

DYSART: You think?

HESTHER: Please don't be ridiculous. You've done the most superb work with children. You must know that.

DYSART: Yes, but do the children?

HESTHER: Really!

DYSART: I'm sorry.

HESTHER: So you should be. (Shaffer 25; emphasis added)

In this scene, the warm light on the stage creates a mild and heartwarming atmosphere to represent the relationship between Hesther and Dysart. Hesther shows her support and care for Dysart, and at the same time, she is being Dysart's consultant. Dysart is

temporarily convinced by Hesther that treating Alan is the correct thing to do, and the job as a psychiatrist is meaningful. To Dysart, Hesther is the role model of “normality.” She reminds him of the responsibilities and duties he has to fulfill as a psychiatrist. However, Hesther may succeed in turning Alan back to “normal,” but not Dysart. I believe that Hesther actually prompts Dysart to reflect on what normality is and what he should do as a psychiatrist, which further makes him assured that his old belief and social norms are problematic in a sense.

In the scenes afterwards, they have a deep conversation in the warm light, but the conversation does not go as smoothly and harmoniously as it was in the previous scene. They have total disagreement over the issues of normality and whether it is correct to restore Alan:

*[He sits. HESTHER enters the square. Light grows warmer.]*

[...]

DYSART: What am I trying to do to him?

HESTHER: Restore him, surely?

DYSART: To what?

HESTHER: A normal life.

DYSART: Normal?

[...]

DYSART: You mean a normal boy has one head: a normal head with  
two ears?

[...]

HESTHER [*rising: smiling*]: I won't be put on the stand like this,  
Martin. You know what I mean by a normal smile in a child's  
eyes, and one that isn't—even if I can't exactly define it. Don't  
you?

DYSART: Yes.

HESTHER: Then we have a duty to that, surely? Both of us. (Shaffer  
60-63; emphasis added)

In this scene, the warm light not only as usual symbolizes Hesther's character as the model of normality, but because it is "warmer," it shows Hesther's belief in normality stronger. However, her opinion about what normality is deepens Dysart's doubts about the criterion of normality and the treatment for Alan. Dysart finds that his thoughts actually conflict with Hesther's, which makes him realize that he is going astray from the path of "normality," and he is not able to stick to his old beliefs and principles and return to his old "normal" life anymore. From this conversation, we can learn that Dysart is no longer persuaded by Hesther, and he begins to doubt what Hesther says.

At the end of this conversation between Hesther and Dysart, Dysart exclaims:

DYSART: You're really quite splendid.

HESTHER: Famous for it. Good night.

*[She leaves him]*

DYSART: *[to himself—or to the audience]*: Normal! ... Normal!

(Shaffer 63)

Compared to the previous scenes, it is apparent that Dysart fails to be convinced by Hesther this time. Since Hesther the character represents the universal standard of normality and social norms, the conflicts between Hesther and Dysart can be further indicated as the conflicts of the concepts between “normality” and “abnormality.” With the same warm light shedding, the change of Dysart’s attitude and thoughts are accentuated, which enables the audience to consider the incongruities of what Dysart thinks about treating Alan in the two scenes.

In *Equus*, the warm light is also used in the scene where Alan shows his passion for horses, and it symbolizes Alan’s affection toward horses and the warmth which horses bring him. In the treatment, Alan talks about his encounter with horses at the beach to Dysart:

*[He [Alan] steps out of the square, upstage, and begins to walk around the circle. Warm light glows on it.]*

[...]

ALAN: What's his name?

HORSEMAN: Trojan. You can stroke him, if you like. He won't mind.

*[Shyly ALAN stretches up on tip-toe, and pats an invisible shoulder.]*

*[Amused.]* You can hardly reach down there. Would you like to come up?

*[ALAN nods, eyes wide.]* (Shaffer 38-39; emphasis added)

In this scene, Alan recollects the very first time he encounters a horse and rides on it at the beach. The warm light symbolizes Alan's passion for horses and the joy which horses bring him. It is shown that at first, Alan's affection toward horses is rather moderate since he pats the horse shyly; however, his affection gets much stronger as time goes on and becomes unusual and excessive. In the other scene, the warm light is used as well when Alan recalls that he is in the stable thinking about riding on

Nugget:

*[ALAN steps secretly out of the square through the central opening on to the circle, now glowing with a warm light. He looks about him. The horses stamp uneasily; their masks turn*

*towards him.*]

DYSART: You are in the inside now. All the horses are staring at you.

Can you see them?

ALAN: [*excited*]: Yes!

DYSART: Which one are you going to take?

ALAN: Nugget. (Shaffer 69; emphasis added)

In the two scenes, Alan's love for horses is intensified through the warm light. The scenes are lovely since they show Alan's true affection toward horses; however, Alan's crime and the accusation against him make his affection guilty and abnormal. Alan blinding the horses should be something unusual and terrifying, but when the warm light is used in the scenes of Alan being together with horses, it beautifies Alan's excessive passion and arouses the audience's compassion for Alan. The audience then is prompted to consider the difficulties and contradictions of keeping one's own passion and abiding by social norms in the meantime.

Besides the warm light, the change of lightings is also commonly used in *Equus* to intensify the dramatic effects. The sudden change of lightings can create tension and suspense; it may also hint that there is going to be a twist in the following scenes. In *Equus*, the story reaches a climax when Alan shows to Dysart how he blinded six horses at the stable in Scene 33 and Scene 34. Therefore, the intense changes of the

lightings can be seen in these two scenes and also the following scene, Scene 35, in which Dysart reacts emotionally after treating Alan.

When Alan starts to talk about him having sex with Jill in Scene 33, there is rich light on the stage:

*[A rich light falls.*

*Furtively ALAN enters the square from the top end, and JILL follows. The horses on the circle retire out of the sight on either side. NUGGET retreats up the tunnel and stands where he can just be glimpsed in the dimness.] (Shaffer 99-100; emphasis added)*

With the rich light shedding, everything goes smoothly and temptingly in the beginning of the scene, and the affection between Alan and Jill is highlighted.

When Alan and Jill later take their clothes off, the light on the stage increases:

*[He [ALAN] stares at her [JILL]. A pause*

*She lifts her sweater over her head; he watches—then unzips his. They each remove their shoes, their socks, and their jeans. Then They look at each other diagonally across the square, in which the light is gently increasing.] (Shaffer 101; emphasis added)*

It can be seen that before Alan has a breakdown, the light remains rich and bright, which creates a warm and gentle atmosphere. Moreover, the increasing light projected on Alan and Jill draws the audience's attention to them and underscores how important the sex is to Alan's crime. There will also be a strong contrast and visual impact to the audience when the stage begins to darken afterwards.

However, Alan is incapable of having sex with Jill when hearing the noises made by the horses. He feels the horses are watching him and thus has a nervous breakdown:

ALAN [to DYSART]: He [NUGGET] was there. Through the door.

The door was shut, but he was there! ... He'd seen everything. I could hear him. He was laughing.

[...]

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

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

(Shaffer 105; emphasis added)

The change of the lightings from brightness to the gradual darkness symbolizes and intensifies the sudden and drastic change of Alan's emotion from joyful to fearful. It also gives clues that Alan is about to reveal his very weakness and dark side. Since



Alan worships and feels sexually attracted by Equus at the same time, it makes him feel guilty and shameful when he is having sex with Jill at the stable. The sense of betraying his God makes Alan out of control and prompts him to stab the horses in the eyes:

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

*[...]*

*[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.]* (Shaffer 105-06; emphasis added)

Alan blinding the horses is undoubtedly the most crucial and sensational part of the play. Therefore, when he moves toward the horse, the stage becomes even darker to bring the suspense and thrill to the audience. The growing darkness on the stage also symbolizes that Alan is out of his mind since he fantasizes that the horses will hurt him because they see him kissing Jill. However, since Alan used to have a strong

passion for horses and regard them as his God, blinding the horses can be interpreted as destroying his passion himself. To Alan, horses are no longer sacred and charming; instead, they turned to be a nightmare.

When Alan finds himself unable to have sex with Jill, he somehow senses that his passion and religious beliefs in horses may be abnormal and inappropriate. The image of Equus now haunts Alan instead of bringing him comfort and joy. Since horses now forbid Alan to lead a “normal” life as others, he has no choice but forsake his passion for horses, which is signified by the action of stabbing the horses’ eyes. In the end, Alan and the horses “plunge off into darkness and away out of sight” from the stage (Shaffer 106), implying that excessive passion can be dreadful and destructive. Although Dysart envies Alan for showing his passion regardless of others’ opinions, it is actually difficult and painful for Alan to reserve his passion to live in a “normal” society. Thus, I suggest that Alan blinding the horses indicates the failure and incapability of being the true self while fitting into society.

In the scene followed, “the light changes quickly back to brightness” (Shaffer 106), and the scene switches back from Alan’s memory. The change of the lighting pulls the audience back into reality and change the audience’s focus from Alan to Dysart. In scene 35, darkness is also used metaphorically to show Dysart’s mentality. When Dysart is treating Alan, he gradually discovers that he in fact envies Alan for

having such passion, and he begins to doubt whether he should obliterate Alan's passion and make him a "normal" person. However, his doubts contradict his duty and responsibilities of being a psychiatrist, which torture him and plunge him into despair. It is especially a crucial moment for Dysart when Alan tells him about his first ride on Nugget. After listening to Alan's story, Dysart feels that he is emotionally connected to Nugget:

DYSART: [...] Now he's [Alan's] 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 the Psyche. I shove in my little dim 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!' (Shaffer 75; emphasis added)

To Dysart, he has been trapped in his own black cave of psyche since his life is shattered after meeting Alan. He begins to doubt that if he is really helping people as a psychiatrist and realizes that he has been concealing his true self. The black cave of psyche symbolizes not only Dysart's desperation about the status quo, but also his failure of justifying in treating Alan back to normal. Therefore, when Equus calls

Dysart out of his black cave of psyche, it represents that Dysart is finally willing to face the problems that have been deep down in his mind. The questions that Equus asks Dysart is what Dysart has long been puzzled, and therefore he feels connected to Equus. In this scene, Equus is the incarnation of Dysart's true inner self, which motivates him to confront with his struggles and reflects on his professional life.

Moreover, in this scene, Dysart is ultimately confirmed that his treatment for Alan in fact fails to enable Alan to lead a better life, and it may make Alan's life more miserable instead:

DYSART: [...] And weirdly often now with me the feeling is that they are staring at us—That in some quite palpable way they precede us. Meaningless, but unsettling ... In either case, this one is the most alarming yet. It asks questions I've avoided all my professional life.

[...]

Yet *if* I don't know—if I can never know that—then what I am doing here? I don't mean clinically or socially doing—I mean

*fundamentally!* (Shaffer 75-76)

In the monologue, Dysart confesses that Equus has forced him to face the questions he has long been avoided—the meaning and responsibilities of being a psychiatrist.

To Dysart, the treatment is only beneficial to the society and the clinical world since the order of the society is preserved, and the clinical treatment then is proved effective and worthwhile. However, what Dysart really wants to find out is the fundamental reason of Alan's strong passion for horses and the way to both preserve Alan's own life experience and social order. In the dark side of his heart, he has always doubted that in his professional life whether he is helping his patients or destroying them. Equus compels him to accept the fact that he actually takes away an important part and experience of his patients' during the treatment. Indeed, when Dysart gets out of the black cave of his psyche and shove in the little dim torch, it symbolizes that for the very first time, he endeavors to face his dark side and the deepest worries about being a psychiatrist. Although Dysart does not have a solution to deal with all his problems and worries, getting out of the black cave of psyche shows that he at last reflects on himself and desires to redefine what normality is.

In this very last scene of the play, Dysart sits in the dark alone, staring at the audience after a long monologue of his true feelings and opinions about the treatment he gives Alan and his profession life. In this scene, the changes of lightings are particularly intense. The light brightens in the beginning of the scene when Dysart finishes listening to Alan's story of blinding the horses, and then it brightens more when Dysart has no choice but can only compromise with Hesther to treat Alan:

[He [Dysart] *steps backwards into the centre of the square. The light brightens some more. A pause.*]

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 feeling like his can be simply re-attached, like plasters? Stuck on to other subjects 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! (Shaffer 107; emphasis added)

The intense change of lightings symbolizes that Dysart is going through a wide range of emotions. The light first changes to brightness in the very beginning of scene 35 when Dysart treats Alan. The scene seems to be hopeful in the beginning, with the bright light and Dysart promising Alan that he will be fine after the treatment.

However, the light grows even brighter when Dysart suddenly has a breakdown after the conversation with Hesther and apologizes to Alan for destroying his passion. In this sense, the bright light intensifies the conflicts and tension between Dysart's and Hesther's thoughts about treating Alan and highlights the collision of two different opinions on the issue of "normality" and "abnormality." Moreover, the brighter the

light is in the first half of the scene, the stronger the visual impact is when Dysart is sitting alone in the darkness at the end of the play. Hence, the drastic change of lightings on the one hand dramatizes the two extreme opinions on the issue of whether or not to treat Alan and what normality is, and on the other hand, it also makes Dysart's confession more prominent.

In the last scene of the play, the darkness is not only presented on the stage, but also pervades Dysart's mind when Equus calls him out of the black cave of psyche to show his despair and incapability of preserving people's passion and maintain the social stability at the same time. Dysart first denies the legitimacy of Alan's treatment; then he justifies Alan's passion by claiming that the so-called normal world is actually the place where "animals are treated *properly*: made extinct, or put into servitude, or tethered beside them" (Shaffer 108). Dysart points out that it is ridiculous and absurd of people who mistreat animals to call the ones who love animals, like Alan, abnormal. He does not justify Alan's crime, but what he truly wants to defend is Alan's passion since it is the most precious thing of a person, and there is nothing wrong for people to have passion.

Dysart claims that, "*I doubt, however, with much passion!* ... Passion, you see, can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created" (Shaffer 108). However, Dysart also admits that if Alan is treated, he will live without pain afterwards since he finally

becomes a “normal” person who does not have passion anymore. This fact makes

Dysart unsettled:

DYSART: [...] 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.

[*A long pause.*

DYSART *sits staring.*]

BLACKOUT (Shaffer 108-09; emphasis added)

Since Dysart values Alan's passion a lot, and he is deeply intrigued by Alan's story

and passion, he is prompted to look for the meaning of his private and profession life.

Although Dysart turns Alan back to normal, he sarcastically finds that he will never

be able to go back to his previously “normal” life. Equus will not stop calling him out

of the cave, and that he can no longer avoid the questions he has long doubted and

neglect his inner self and true feelings. His passion and desire, which he did not dare

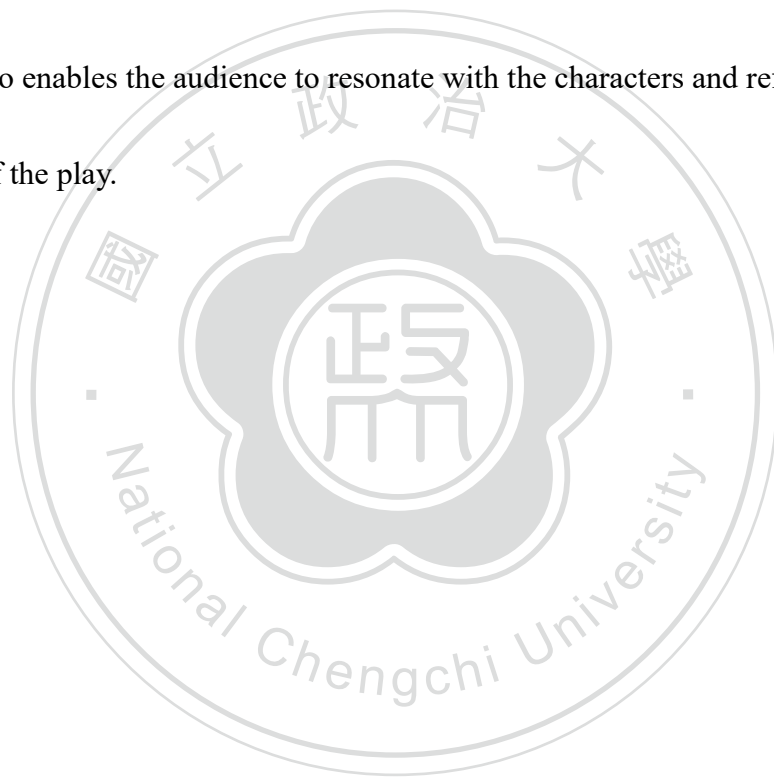


to reveal before, are difficult to be restrained now. However, he also has the sense that if he reveals his passion and his true self, he will become an abnormal person and be excluded from the society like Alan. Therefore, Dysart feels that he can see nothing in the dark; he cannot find out a solution to live “normally” in the society while preserving one’s true self so he can only obliterate Alan’s passion and suppress his true feelings to conform to social norms in order to be “normal.”

The chains in Dysart’s mouth means that Dysart has become an “abnormal” person like Alan, for Alan once also put a piece of string in his mouth to pay respect to Equus. Dysart at last is inspired by Equus as well, which not only enlightens him on the issue of “normality” but also push him into despair and helplessness. As a psychiatrist, Dysart can only take away Alan’s passion and be the model of “normality,” like Hesther, to not break the order of the society. Despite the fact that during the treatment, Dysart’s nature is once awoken, but then it is suppressed again by the social norms. Hence, I suggest that Dysart’s seeing nothing in the dark can be referred to his failure of justifying human’s passion and overthrowing people’s original concepts of “normality” and “abnormality,” which make him desperate.

To sum up, the warm light in *Equus* can provide certain kinds of emotion. It is mainly employed to show Hesther’s character as the model of normality and a sympathetic magistrate. Moreover, the warm light is also used to symbolize Alan’s

strong passion for horses and the warmth that horses bring him. Besides the warm light, the change of lightings in *Equus* is worth studying as well, for it builds the dramatic effects and highlights the twists in the scenes and the change of the characters' emotions. The darkness is both presented on the stage and used metaphorically to show the desperation of the characters. With these lighting designs, the psyche of the characters can be interpreted and understood more thoroughly, which also enables the audience to resonate with the characters and reflect on the themes of the play.





## Chapter Three

### Dim Light, Cold Light and Special Lightings

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the symbolic meanings of the warm light and darkness. By examining the plots that have warm light and darkness, literally and metaphorically, I have demonstrated that the warm light and darkness play an essential part in our understanding and interpreting the relationship between characters, the struggles and states of mind of each character, and the themes of *Equus*. They also enable the audience to visualize the characters' emotions in the scenes where different kinds of lights are used, and bring out the highlights of the play.

In addition to the warm light and darkness, the playwright also employs four other kinds of lightings in this play. Hence, this chapter aims to analyze what the dim light and cold light symbolize in the play; moreover, this chapter particularly explores the function and symbolic meanings of the special lightings—the spotlight and cones of lights. Despite the fact that these four kinds of lightings are not used as much as the warm light and darkness, they undoubtedly bear significant symbolic meanings and build the dramatic effect as well. Among the four lights in *Equus*, the dim light symbolizes Alan's obscure relationship with Nugget and Dora's doubts and confusion of her situation, while the cold light symbolizes the disillusion of Dysart and Alan.

The special lightings, the spotlight and cones of light, draw the audience's attention at once and thus can highlight the most crucial plots and create the dramatic effect. The spotlight highlights Alan's strong but abnormal passion toward horses, whereas the cones of light manifest Alan's divine and dreadful attitude toward the horses.

The dim light in *Equus* symbolizes Alan's obscure relationship with Nugget and Dora's doubts and confusion of her present situation. It not only creates a sense of uncertainty but also corresponds to the character's chaotic and unsettling mind. The dim light makes obscure whatever is on the stage; as a result, the audience cannot see the entire stage clearly but can only have a peek of it. It gives the audience the feeling of melancholy and arouses their curiosity at the same time.

Moreover, just as the audience cannot see the stage clearly in the dim light, the states of the mind of the characters on the stage are in a muddle as well. Whenever the dim light appears, the audience might perceive the dim state of the characters' mind. For example, in this play, the dim light is mainly used when Alan and Dora are on the stage. It is first used when Alan stands with Nugget on the stage in the very beginning of the play. Although Alan and Nugget react intimately on the stage, the use of dim light creates a sense of uncertainty and suspense, which also hints that the relation between them may be abnormal:

*Darkness.*

*Silence.*

*Dim light up on the square. In a spotlight stands ALAN STRANG, a lean boy of seventeen, in sweater and jeans. In front of him, the horse NUGGET. ALAN's pose represents a contour of great tenderness: his head is pressed against the shoulder of the horse, his hands stretching up to fondle its head. The horse in turn nuzzles his neck.*

(Shaffer 17; emphasis added)

In the very beginning of the play, it is already shown that the reaction between Alan and Nugget are very intimate, with Alan caressing Nugget tenderly and Nugget leaning against him. However, at this sweet moment, the light on the stage is dim, which overshadows the relation between Alan and Nugget. The dim light hints that the intimacy between them is obscure, and it is not purely lovely as it looks like. Therefore, I contend that the dim light actually sets a gloomy tone for the play, for it symbolizes a pessimistic and disagreeable attitude toward the intimacy between Alan and Nugget.

Later in the same scene, the dim light is also used to show that Dora has doubts about her religious belief. When Dysart visits Dora and Frank at their place, Dora tells Dysart what she teaches Alan:

DORA: I told him [Alan] the biological facts. But I also told him

what I believed. That sex is not *just* a biological matter, but also spiritual as well. That if God willed, he will 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.] (Shaffer 35)*

In Dora's confession, she believes that sex is both a biological and spiritual matter. With God's consent, Alan will fall in love, and he may get married and have a child, which is the most important thing of his life to Dora. After that, he may develop a higher love to God. To Dora, she believes that those important moments in life are closely related to God. Moreover, she often tells Alan stories in the Bible and the book about a horse called prince, which has made Alan fascinated with horses since then. Although Frank has already pointed out that religion is the "only real problem" in their house, Dora still can't understand how it may influence Alan in a negative way (Shaffer 34).

In the later plot, Dora finally breaks down when she is talking about what she teaches Alan—sex and the stories about the religion and the horse. She

begins to suspect if she is the one that makes Alan have excessive and abnormal passion and commit the crime. The thought makes Dora break down, for she hasn't thought about that her strong religious belief can affect Alan in a bad way. When Frank goes up to her, she becomes more hysterical and somehow feels ashamed:

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?

[*Tenderly, he leads his wife out of the square, and they resume their places on the bench.*]

*Lights grow much dimmer.*] (Shaffer 35; emphasis added)

To Dora, it is unbelievable that her religion has something to do with Alan's crime. Therefore, at this moment on the stage, the light grows dimmer to allow us to visualize her shattered world—that the religious belief and stories she used to strongly believe in appear to be problematic. The dimmer lights at this moment symbolize Dora's doubts about her strong passion for religion and further imply that her passion may be harmful. In this sense, the dim light in both plots related to Alan and Dora symbolizes the doubts caused by the excessive passion and foreshadows the miserable consequences of it. The sense of melancholy and uncertainty created by the dim light



overshadows both Alan and Dora's passion and implies that their passions are so strong that may be destructive.

Just like the dim light evoking negative association, the cold light in *Equus* also symbolizes the disillusion of Alan and Dysart; whenever it is used, a cruel fact is revealed. While Dysart hypnotizes Alan in the treatment, he makes a confession of how he feels when treating Alan:

DYSART: [...] [ALAN *nods*. DYSART *taps his pen on the wooden rail*. ALAN *shuts his eyes*. [...] DYSART *talks through this, to the audience—the light changes to cold—while the boy sits in front of him, staring at the wall, opening and shutting his eyes.*]

The Normal is the good smile in a child's eyes—all right. It is also the dead stare in a million adults. It both sustains and kills—like a God. It is the ordinary made beautiful; it is also the Average made lethal. The Normal is the indispensable, murderous God of Health, and I am his Priest. (Shaffer 64-65; emphasis added)

The cold light here highlights the plot that Dysart overthrows his original standards of normality and has a totally new insight of it. He at the end finds that although he can restore Alan and help him to live without pain afterwards, he in fact deprives him of his passion, which should be the most precious thing to a person. Although it seems

good when kids act normally, as time goes by, they are actually deprived of their passion for life in order to be normal adults. In Dysart's opinion, normality is not completely a good thing. Despite the fact that normality can make people fit into society and lead a peaceful life, it also wipes out the uniqueness of every single person, making adults have the dead stares. Therefore, Dysart points out that normality "both sustains and kills" (Shaffer 65). He agrees that being a normal person is the only way to have a beautiful life, but he is also aware that normality can destroy a person by taking away his/her individuality at the same time. Even though he realizes that demanding everyone to be normal actually turns people lifeless, he knows that it is his responsibility to do so.

Through Dysart's monologue on his opinion of normality, Shaffer somehow tries to redefine what normality actually is. Despite the fact that Shaffer attempts to interpret normality from a different perspective, I suggest that he in fact has a pessimistic attitude towards advocating the new definition of normality since in the play, Dysart is disillusioned and gives up on preserving Alan's passion. Hence, Shaffer uses the cold light in this episode to symbolize Dysart's disillusion with reality and brings out the moment when he is faced with the cruel fact of not being able to make changes.

After Dysart's monologue on his reflections about the definition of normality,

the cold light changes back to symbolize that he is compelled to face the reality and resume Alan's treatment:

DYSART: [...] [*The natural sound of the pencil resumes.*

*Light changes back.*]

[*To ALAN.*] Now your eyes are feeling heavy. You want to sleep, don't you? You want a long, deep sleep. Have it. Your head is heavy. Very heavy. Your shoulders are very heavy. Sleep.

(Shaffer 65)

It can be seen that the light is cold when Dysart is having the monologue, but it is not employed when he finishes talking and continues to hypnotize Alan. The change of lightings shows Dysart's change of mood from disillusion to accepting the fact that he is incapable of redefining what normality is.

The cold light is also used in the scene where Alan, Jill and Frank walk together after meeting at the cinema, and it symbolizes Alan's disillusion with Frank's father image:

[*Light brightens from the cinema, but remains cold: streets at night. The three [Frank, Alan, and Jill] walk around the circle downstage in a line: FRANK leading, wearing his hat. He halts in the middle of the left rail, and stands staring straight ahead*

*of him, rigid with embarrassment. ALAN is very agitated.]*

(Shaffer 93; emphasis added)

The cold light in this episode intensifies the awkwardness between the three characters meeting one another in the porn theater, which also makes Alan find out the totally different side of his father. In Alan's eyes, Frank is a serious and strict father. Compared to Dora, Frank is much calmer and sensible, for he is aware that Dora being too obsessed with religion might be harmful to Alan.

In the previous scenes, Frank bears a harsh image of a father, and therefore, Alan is shocked and disillusioned when he sees Frank in the porn theater. He finds the fact unacceptable and tells Dysart, "I kept thinking—all those air he put on!... 'Receive my meaning. Improve your mind!'... All those nights he said he'd be in late. 'Keep my supper hot, Dora!' 'Your poor father: he works so hard!'... Bugger!" (Shaffer 95). To Alan, Frank has lost his dignity as a father. Thus, in this plot, the cold light not only symbolizes Alan's disillusion with Frank's image but also shows the awkward relationship between them after Alan realizes that his father also has unspeakable secrets like he does and that what he has taught him is hypocritical.

Knowing Frank's secret makes Alan perceive the fact that everyone has their own secret just like him. Therefore, Frank is not qualified to tell him what he should

do and what he should not do. Alan feels that he should be as free as all the other people, and he does not need to hide his passion and be ashamed of himself:

ALAN [*to DYSART*]: [...] He [Frank] goes off by himself at night,  
and does his own secret thing which no one'll know about, just  
like me! There's no difference—he's just the same as me—just  
the same!

[...]

DYSART [*firm*]: [...] When you realized about your dad. How lots  
of people have secrets, not just you?

ALAN [*to Dysart*] Yes.

DYSART: You felt sort of free, didn't you? I mean, free to do  
anything?

ALAN [*to DYSART, looking at JILL*]: Yes! (Shaffer 97)

To Alan, he is shocked to find that Frank is actually not as decent and respectable as he thought. Therefore, Alan finding this fact also symbolizes the absurdity of the traditional standards of normality, and it sarcastically implies that a well-accepted concept is not absolutely right or normal. Alan's accusation points out the fact that everyone has their own secret which he/she does not want others to know, and therefore, it is problematic to only indicate Alan as abnormal. The cold light not only

visualizes Alan's disillusion when he finds out that Frank is not as decent as what he thought but also makes the audience sense that Alan is overwhelmed with shock when realizing that everyone has their own secret just like he does.

In sum, the cold light in *Equus* is mainly employed to present Dysart's and Alan's disillusion with reality. Dysart has no choice but to treat Alan and deprive him of his passion to make him fit into the society. Alan is astounded to find the other aspect of Frank and the fact that everyone has their own unspeakable secrets. The cold light in these plots is used to highlight their disillusion when confronted with the difficult situation and cruel facts.

Besides the four lightings which have been discussed, the two special lightings, the spotlight and the cones of light, also have important functions and symbolic meanings in *Equus*. Spotlights are mainly used to "highlight specific performers, allowing the audience's focus to be placed where it needs to be. The rest of the stage does not need to be in complete darkness, but an audience can be primed to keep their attention on where it is desired to be" ("Benefits of a Spotlight When Choosing Stage Lighting Equipment"). In *Equus*, the spotlight highlights Alan's strong passion toward horses and implies that the relation between Alan and horses is not ordinary.

As mentioned previously, the spotlight is first used in the very beginning of the play to highlight the characters, Alan and Nugget, on stage. Because of

the use of the spotlight, the audience is able to focus on the interaction between Alan and Nugget and therefore grasp that the play features the close relationship between Alan and horses:

*Darkness.*

*Silence.*

*Dim light up on the square. In a spotlight stands ALAN STRANG, a lean boy of seventeen, in sweater and jeans. In front of him, the horse NUGGET. ALAN's pose represents a contour of great tenderness: his head is pressed against the shoulder of the horse, his hands stretching up to fondle its head. The horse in turn nuzzles his neck. (Shaffer 17; emphasis added)*

When Alan and Nugget stand in the spotlight, their surroundings are in dim light, and Alan can see nothing but Nugget. The spotlight not only highlights their close interaction but also creates a small and private space for Alan and Nugget, excluding them from the outside world and the audience. In this sense, the spotlight intensifies the strong bond and affection between Alan and Nugget. Under this spotlight, their affection is so intense that they neglect all the other people, which therefore can be inferred that their relation is not ordinary. Moreover, the use of the spotlight also indicates that the relation between Alan and horses is spiritual rather than common

affection since Alan regards horses as his God. Hence, the spotlight in this plot creates a sense of divinity at the same time.

In the later scene of the play, the spotlight is used again to show Alan and horses' intimate but unusual relationship. During the hypnosis, Alan tells Dysart about his experience of riding Nugget:

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

*[[...] 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.]*

Here we go. The King rides out on Equus, mightiest of horses.

(Shaffer 73; emphasis added)

In this plot, it is clear that Alan sees riding horses as a religious ritual since he parodies the names of biblical genealogy and says the names ritualistically. When he rides on Nugget with great speed, the light shedding on them also turns into a fierce spotlight to show Alan's strong passion for horses and emphasize the unique and strong bond between Alan and Nugget. Moreover, compared to the plot where the spotlight is first used, Shaffer especially points out that in this plot, the spotlight should be fierce. I argue that the fierce spotlight in this plot is to visualize Alan's



craziness of horses and his ecstasy when riding on Nugget. The strong beam of light projected on stage and the overspill glinting creates an unrealistic scene that makes the relationship between Alan and horses even more intense and unusual. Indeed, the spotlight not only creates the dramatic effect but also manifests Alan's strong but excessive affection for horses.

Besides the spotlight, the cones of light are also used in the scene where Alan stabs the eyes of Nugget's and five other horses' to manifest Alan's divine and dreadful attitude toward the horses and to show the two sides of people's passion. When Alan is trying to have sex with Jill, he feels that the horses in the stable are all staring at him, which makes him break down:

ALAN [*in terror*]: Eyes! ... White eyes—never closed! Eyes like flames—coming—coming!  
[...]

*[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.*] (Shaffer 105-06; emphasis added)

In this plot, the horses no longer appear pleasing and charming to Alan; instead, they turn into a horrifying image that haunts Alan. As what I suggested in Chapter Two, the reason why Alan stabs the horses' eyes is because he realizes that his passion for horses prevents him from having a normal life like others. Since he regards Equus as his God, he has a sense of guilt when having sex with Jill at the stable, which makes him feel that those horses are watching him furiously. Therefore, when the cones of light are projected on the stage, they intensify Alan's dreadful attitude toward the horses. More importantly, the cones of light divide the stage into irregular shapes, which will trigger the audience's uncomfortable feelings. Despite the fact that the cones of light reinforce Alan's emotion as the spotlight does, they further give the audience uneasiness and creepiness.

In the plots where the spotlight is used to symbolize the divinity of horses, the horses appear to be sacred and mild, and the relation between Alan and the horses are intimate and solid. However, the cones of light used in this plot create a totally different atmosphere. They not only create the dramatic effect to show the divinity of the horses but also bring out the dreadful side of them. Hence, the spotlight and the cones of light employed in different episodes signify the change of Alan's attitudes

toward the horses; that is, he sees them not as lovely animals, but fearful animals. The drastic change of the horses from the naturalistic to dreadful images can also indicate that Alan's passion for horses is too strong and excessive, and it finally becomes abnormal and problematic. Passion is precious and vital for people; however, it should be moderate. The dreadful image of the horses implies that the excessive passion can be dangerous and destructive to oneself. Since Alan regards horses as his Gods, the cones of light intensify the divinity of the horses; more importantly, they create a sense of thrill and oppression to show that *Equus* can bring Alan both joy and destruction at the same time.

In short, the dim light in *Equus* symbolizes the confusion, uncertainty, and doubts of the situation that Alan and Dora are faced with. The cold light symbolizes the disillusion of Dysart and Alan. The spotlight intensifies Alan's affection toward horses, but at the same time, it implies that the affection is abnormal. Lastly, the cones of light manifest Alan's divine and dreadful attitude toward the horses to show that the excessive passion can be harmful. By using the different forms of lights and the two kinds of special lightings, Shaffer further depicts the psyche of the characters profoundly and manifests the issue of normality and passion. The lights undoubtedly visualize the characters' emotions and enable the audience to apprehend them more thoroughly.

## Chapter Four

### Conclusion

*Equus* is the play that especially impresses the audience by its stunning dramatic effects and diverse stage lighting design. By employing different forms of lights, Shaffer digs into the psyche of the characters and discloses their inner feelings and guides the audience to explore the issue of normality and people's passion. With the ingenious lighting design, the audience can understand the episodes more thoroughly and be more capable of comprehending the characters' states of mind. By analyzing what the different forms of lights symbolize and how they reflect the characters' emotions in different episodes, we can picture the situation that the characters are faced with more vividly and grasp the changes of the characters' psyche.

In *Equus*, Shaffer mainly uses six different forms of lights to visualize the psyche of the characters and to create the atmosphere to absorb the audience in the plots because the lights in *Equus* symbolize the mental processes of the characters. The warm light, which is used the most in *Equus*, makes the scenes in an aura of warmth and serenity, and it is employed whenever Hesther appears on stage. The warm light characterizes Hesther as a humane magistrate and a model of normality and Alan as a lover of horses. For instance, the warm light is employed in the scene where Hesther persuades Dysart into treating Alan, for she believes that Dysart is the only person

that can help Alan become a “normal” person.

Moreover, in order to present the mentality changes of the characters, Shaffer also juxtaposes between different forms of lights, including warm light, darkness, dim light, cold light, the spotlight and the cones of light. The shift of lightings intensifies the sudden and drastic change of the characters’ psyche and implies that the plot is especially crucial. By the shift of lights, the audience can thus understand how and why the characters’ psyche changes. Darkness in *Equus* is not only visible on the stage, but it is also to show the characters’ mentality metaphorically. It symbolizes the characters’ desperate feelings toward the reality and their tragic stories. For instance, when Dysart ultimately finds out that he has no choice but to treat Alan, he feels he can see nothing in the dark since he fails to preserve Alan’s passion and redefine what “normality” is.

Because of Alan’s appalling crime, the characters in the play begin to have doubts about themselves and the things they have deeply believed in for a long time, which thrusts their mind into chaos. Therefore, the dim light is employed to represent the obscure relationship between Alan and Nugget and Dora’s confusion of her situation. Since the obscure stage cannot be seen clearly, the audience can perceive more genuinely the struggles and melancholy of the characters. When Dora realizes that she may be the one who makes Alan have excessive passion for horses, she

begins to have doubts about her religious belief. The dim light is thus employed to show her confusion about her present situation and her fragmented world.

After having doubts about themselves or the things they used to believe, the characters are likely to undergo disappointment and disillusion with the reality. The epiphany is precious but also cruel, and this is the moment when the cold light is used.

Unlike the warm light, the cold light brings people the feeling of sadness and aloofness. Therefore, the cold light is used in the scenes where the characters find that the facts are completely different from what they thought, which disillusion them.

For example, the cold light is employed in the plot where Alan and Jill meet Frank at the porn theater to show that Alan is disillusioned with Frank's solemn image as a good father.

Lastly, to emphasize Alan's obsession with the divine but fearful image of horses, Shaffer especially uses the spotlight and cones of light to intensify the dramatic effect and imply that Alan's passion is excessive, dangerous, and abnormal.

The spotlight excludes Alan and Nugget from the outside world and the audience, implying that Alan's passion is excessive and unusual. Eventually, when he stabs the horses' eyes, three of them appear in the cones of light dreadfully. The cones of light in this plot show that the horses can be divine and wild, just as people's passion can be good but destructive as well.

With the diverse and ingenious stage lighting design, Shaffer truly depicts the psyche of the characters vividly and precisely. Even when reading the script, we can sense the slightest change of the characters' states of mind through the changes of the lightings. Moreover, the different forms of lights enable us to get more immersed in the plots and the characters' emotions. In addition to creating the dramatic effects, these lights equip us to have a more profound understanding and interpretation of *Equus*.



## Works Cited

- Barnes, Clive. “‘Equus’ a New Success on Broadway.” *New York Times* Oct. 1974, p.26, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/10/25/archives/equusa-new-success-on-broadway.html>. Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.
- Bellman, Willard F. *Lighting the Stage: Art & Practice*. Third Ed. Broadway P, 2001.
- “Benefits of a Spotlight When Choosing Stage Lighting Equipment.” *SSRC Quality Theatrical Distribution*, SSRC, Mar. 2019, <https://www.ssrconline.com/blog/benefits-of-a-spotlight-when-choosing-stage-lighting-equipment/>. Accessed 25 March 2021.
- Buckley, Tom. “Why are there two u's in ‘Equus’?” *New York Times* Apr. 1975, p.242, <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/04/13/archives/why-are-there-two-us-in-equus-write-me-said-the-play-to-peter.html>. Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.
- Fu-shan, Lai. *Peter Shaffer’s Dramatic Vision of the Failure of Society: A Study of The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Equus and Amadeus*. MA thesis. Simon Fraser University, 1989.
- Galens, David M. “Equus.” *Drama for Students*. vol. 5, Gale, 1999, pp. 101-121. Gale eBooks, <https://link-gale-com.utorpa.lib.nccu.edu.tw/apps/doc/CX2693000016/GVRL?u=nccu&sid=GVRL&xid=7eb68ee4>. Accessed 17 Dec



2020.

Gendrich, Cynthia M., and Archer, Stephen M. *Theatre: Its Art and Craft*. Seventh edition, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.

“How Lighting is Used in Theatre.” *The Light Yard*, The Light Yard, Nov. 2017, <https://thelightyard.com/blogs/the-blog-of-light/how-lighting-is-used-in-theatre>. Accessed 15 June 2020.

Kalson, Albert E. “*Equus* Review.” *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1973, pp. 514–515. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3205613](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3205613). Accessed 29 Dec 2019.

Mustazza, Leonard. “A Jealous God: Ritual and Judgement in Shaffer’s *Equus*.” *Papers on Language & Literature*, vol. 28, no. 2, Spring 1992. EBSCOhost, [search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9704043709&lang=zh-tw&site=ehost-live](http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9704043709&lang=zh-tw&site=ehost-live). Accessed 15 Jan 2020.

“Normality, n” *OED Online*, Oxford UP, December, 2003, <https://www-oed-com.utorpa.lib.nccu.edu.tw/view/Entry/128271?redirectedFrom=normality#eid>. Accessed 17 Sep 2020.

Obsorn, Michael. “Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light—Dark Family.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol 53, No 2, 1967, pp.115-126. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00335636709382823>.

Accessed 9 Jul 2020.

Safak, Zafer. "The Relationship Between Martin Dysart and Alan Strang in Peter Shaffer's *Equus* in *The Light of Psychoanalysis*" Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 2016.

Shaffer, Peter. *Equus*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.

Schanker, Harry H., Katherine A Ommanney. *The Stage and the School*. New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies Inc, 1998.

Shewy, Don. "Equus—A Horse of A Different Color." *Gay Community News* Dec. 1975, [https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/downloads/neu:m046gz18h?datastream\\_id=content](https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/downloads/neu:m046gz18h?datastream_id=content). Accessed 6 Nov 2020.

"Stage Lighting Basics." *Drama by Design*, Drama by Design, <http://www.dramabydesign.com/stage-lighting-basics/>. Accessed. 15 June 2020.

"The Importance of Color in Lighting." *Illuminated Integration*, Illuminated Integration, 24 Feb. 2019, <https://illuminated-integration.com/blog/importance-of-color-in-lighting/>. Accessed 15 June 2020.