

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARTIN DYSART AND ALAN STRANG IN PETER SHAFFER'S EQUUS IN THE LIGHT OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Zafer SAFAK^a

Öz

Equus is a psychodrama written by the British playwright Peter Shaffer. In *Equus*, Shaffer narrates the story of an emotionally distressed adolescent Alan Strang who is torn between religious passion, his awakening sexuality and a quest for transcendental unity. Due to his parents' conflicting values, Alan is forced to create a mythic worship mixed with his psychological complexity to transfer his passion and enthusiasm. Because of the ensuing events, which lead Alan to blind the eyes of the horses in the stable he works, he is taken to psychiatrist Martin Dysart. During the therapeutic sessions, which transference and countertransference occur, Dysart recognizes the barrenness of his individual and professional life lacking genuine enthusiasm. He also questions the socially constructed terms and phenomena such as sanity, insanity, proper and improper behaviour and he acknowledges that treating Alan or bringing him in line with what society confirms will at the same time extinguish the boy's enthusiasm. Through *Equus*, Shaffer touches upon the themes of religion, freedom, God, pagan and Christian faith, development and taken-for-granted truth of sanity and insanity, which are the agencies of social constructions in the individuation process. With a focus on Freud's psychoanalysis and R.D Laing's studies, the objective of the study endeavors to invite readers to think upon what extent Shaffer's argument and Alan's case can be justified as well as encouraging readers to investigate their psychologies.

Keywords: Twentieth Century British Drama, Psychoanalysis, Peter Shaffer, Equus, Transcendental Unity, Passion, Worship, Sanity and Insanity, Transference and Countertransference



^a Res. Asst., Iğdir University, The Faculty of Science and Literature, zafersafak61@hotmail.com

An Introduction to *Equus*

Equus (1973) portrays the story of emotionally troubled Alan Strang, who is torn between religious passion and gradually awakening sexuality, because of the conflicting values of his parents. Alan, who is horrified by the bloody story of Jesus' crucifixion, he adopts a personal mythology about horses. He invents an unorthodox kind of worship during his midnight rides. During therapeutic sessions, psychiatrist Martin Dysart realizes the barrenness of his own life and understands that treating Alan will extinguish boy's enthusiasm and creativity. Later, it comes out why Alan is unrest; his frustration and sexual failure with Jill and equus' witnessing his ostensible infidelity, which he dearly loves, lead him to stab the eyes of the horses- including his favorite one- as he feared that the equus would avenge his "infidelity".

Peter Shaffer was stimulated to write *Equus* when he came across a friend of him while narrating the story at *the British Broadcasting Corporation*. The friend related Shaffer a news story about a British teenager who stabbed the eyes of twenty-six horses without any overt reason. Shaffer did not verify the incident or was engaged with the details of it, but the story drew his attention¹ In an introduction to the play, Shaffer expressed that his aim was to "to interpret it in some entirely personal way. I had to create a mental world in which the deed could be made comprehensible."²

Equus depicts the teenage Alan Strang's psychological condition. While relating his themes, Peter Shaffer makes use of *psychological realism*³ and expressionistic theatrical techniques including masks, mime and dance. Through the conversations, which oriented towards therapeutic objectives to cure the psychologically distressed Alan, Shaffer tries to demonstrate the theme of contrary human impulses toward rationality and irrationality. Dysart fears that if he managed to cure the boy and bring him in line with the socially accepted norms, it would stultify Alan's creativity and extinguish his enthusiasm.⁴ At the end of the play, Dysart acknowledged that "Passion, you see can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created"⁵ Dysart believes that he could

¹ Galens David M, *Drama for Students*, Vol.5, The Gale Group, London, 1999, p. 101.

² Shaffer Peter, *Equus*, Penguin Books, London, 1977, p. 9.

³ Psychological realism can be regarded as a facet of realism, which depicts the inner lives of its characters in a work of fiction who are haunted by their irresistible impulses. Instead of the depiction of life as it is, that is the authentic report of incidents and people found in realism, psychological realism places emphasis on interior experience, inner lives, mental processes and insights of its characters in the perception of reality. As a facet of realism, psychological realism makes much use of retrospect and stream of consciousness technique to find out what motivates a character in the way s/he does. Henry James is one of the major representatives of psychological realism and Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Stephan Crane's works are ample in terms of the elements of psychological realism. August Strindberg and Arthur Miller can be cited as playwrights whose works bear the same tendency. For more discussion of the subject see, Anne Carter's *The Effects of Psychological Realism Within Literature and Literary Criticism: Three Studies of the Mind*. University of the West of England, 1995.

⁴ Galens David M, *ibid*. p.101.

⁵ Shaffer Peter, *ibid*. p.108.

treat the boy of his distress but Dysart's last expression reveals that by curing Alan, he relieved the boy not only of his pain but also of all the qualities he possessed including his inspiration and imagination. Dysart also draws a lesson from Alan's case; Alan has proved how lost Dysart actually is.⁶ He expresses that "There is now, in my mouth, this sharp chain and it never comes out"⁷

A. A Concise Background for Psychoanalysis and the Issue of Transference and Countertransference

The term psychiatry is originated from two Greek words which mean 'mind healing.' By the 18th century, mental illness was often regarded as demonic possession.⁸ Although the play was not written in the 18th century, we witness the extension of the same idea-the demonic possession-well in to the 20th century. This is best illustrated when Dora comes to see her son and justifies Frank's and her behaviors in raising the boy by condemning devilish powers:

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 would know the Devil isn't made by what mummy and daddy says. The Devil's there⁹

But in time mental illness began to be regarded as a sickness requiring professional treatment. J. Connolly in England laid the foundations of modern psychiatry by suggesting humane approaches to mental disturbance. Until the 19th century, research, classification, and treatment of such disorders gained considerable significance. Psychotherapy developed out of spiritual treatment. The psychoanalytic theory and the rules of Sigmund Freud dictated the field for years and his theories were not challenged seriously until behavior therapy and humanistic psychology were introduced into the area in the 1950s. Psychoanalysis values the awareness of the patient's inner conflicts and it is still viewed as valid in psychiatric practice. The psychoanalytic movement originated from Freud's clinical observations. Observation of neurotic patients proved that when the sources of the patients' impulses were elevated from sub-consciousness to consciousness during hypnosis, the patients showed signs of relaxation which were the indications of potential recovery. Observations of patients, who talk freely without hypnosis, provide Freud to evolve the technique of free association¹⁰

Freud would allow the patient to abandon himself to a process of free association, on the condition that the patient report literally everything that had occurred to him, no matter how irrelevant or meaningless it seemed. The advantages of free association were that the patient was subjected to the least

⁶ Galens David M, *ibid.* p.104.

⁷ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.109.

⁸Teacher's Guide, (2000). *Equus*, Accessed: 15 November 2014 <http://www.alleytheatre.org/images/alley/SG/Equus>.

⁹ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.78.

¹⁰ Teacher's Guide, *ibid.* p. 8-9.

compulsion, that no element related to the neurosis would be overlooked, and that the course of the analysis would be guided by the patient rather than the expectations of the analyst¹¹

By employing this technique, Dysart encourages Alan to say anything that comes to his mind, without attaching any importance to relevancy or propriety. If one had difficulty in making associations, the situation was regarded by Freud as repression of painful experiences. A great deal of cases from Freud's early practices demonstrated that the memoirs that are usually repressed are about distressing sexual experiences. Thus, Freud hypothesized that the repressed energy results from the anxiety which is combined with sexuality. Free association and hypnosis serve as means to interpret dreams, slips of the tongue, memory lapses, and other kinds of mistakes. Freud's effort and observations of the mentally distressed patients formed the foundation of his well-known tripartite division of personality which consists of id, ego, and superego.

While writing *Equus*, Peter Shaffer was particularly affected by the theories of psychologist Ronald David Laing. In relation to human psychology, R. D. Laing touches upon the sphere of the agencies of individuation process. Laing puts forward that mental illness is a shared idea formed by society to some extent. In other words, it is the society that decrees what is acceptable or improper for individuals.¹² In the context of propriety and impropriety or sanity or insanity, Laing states in his work *Politics of Experience* that:

hat the ordinary person is a shriveled, desiccated fragment of what a person can be. Humanity is estranged from its authentic possibilities. This basic vision prevents us from taking any unequivocal view of the sanity of common sense, or of the madness of the so-called madman. However, what is required is more than a passionate outcry of outraged humanity¹³

Doctors act on society's taken-for-granted truths while categorizing people as healthy or not. Although labels such as "schizophrenic" and "psychotic" may refer to a physical or biological condition, they are also formed according to societies' "ready-made" precepts about the "normal" state of a healthy individual. Sometimes patients are tried to be treated by paying less attention to the variables resulting from individual cases. For the sake of societies' norms, individual peculiarities are sacrificed.¹⁴

Other significant issues in psychiatry are transference and countertransference, which bear vitality in the understanding of *Equus* and particularly the relationship between psychiatrist Dysart and patient Alan. Change of roles and understanding of each other in psychiatrist-patient relationship in psychology are explained by the terms transference and countertransference. Transference means that certain unconscious

¹¹ Habib A. Rafeu, *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory: A History of Literary Criticism from Plato to Present*, Blackwell Publishing, U.S.A., 2005, p. 576.

¹² Teacher's Guide, *ibid.* p.8-9.

¹³ Laing R. David, *The Politics of Experience*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1967, p. 25-26.

¹⁴ Teacher's Guide, *ibid.* 8-9.

feelings, fears or emotions are redirected from client to counselor. Wiener Jan states that although there are great varieties of differences in the use of the term transference, there is a consensus on its meaning. She puts forward that “All of them seem to agree that transference is an unconscious form of projection from the patient on to the analyst and a universal phenomenon.”¹⁵ In *Analytic Psychology: Its Theory and Practice*, Carl Gustav Jung indicates that the term transference is the German translation of the word *Übertragung* which literally means “... carry something over from one place to another.”¹⁶ Jung’s approach to negative and positive aspects of the term is ambivalent since for Wiener he “left a confusing legacy about his thoughts and feelings about transference.”¹⁷ Although his thoughts and feelings vary to the extent that he contradicts himself “even within the same paper”¹⁸ in his book, *The Psychology of Transference*, Jung acknowledges the vitality of transference by emphasizing that:

Once the transference has appeared, the doctor must accept it as part of the treatment and try to understand it, otherwise it will be just another piece of neurotic stupidity. The transference itself is a perfectly natural phenomenon which does not by any means happen only in the consulting room—it can be seen everywhere and may lead to all sorts of nonsense, like all unrecognized projections¹⁹

According to Freud, transference is a significant feature of the psychiatric analysis that includes close relationship between patient and analyst. What the patient feels range from love and sympathy to resistance and the analyst must convince patient that the sessions will be instrumental in healing the patient’s excessive attachment to an object or event originating from his/her repressed feeling and behaviour from childhood memoirs.²⁰ Freud believed the inevitability of transference and he argued that the transference is:

“The new editions of old conflicts...patient would like to behave in the same he did in the past, while, we by summoning up every available mental force (in the patient) compel him to come to fresh decisions. Thus, the transference becomes the battlefield on which all the mutually struggling forces should meet one another²¹

In other words, Freud assumes that the memoirs emerged in transference are the repressed recollections with which the analyst must struggle. While Freud’s convictions

¹⁵ Wiener Jan, *The Therapeutic Relationship: Transference, Countertransference and Making of Meaning*. Carolyn and Ernest Fay Series, U.S.A., 2009, p. 12.

¹⁶ Jung C. Gustav, *Analytical Psychology: its theory and practice: the Tavistock lectures*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1968. p.153.

¹⁷ Wiener Jan ,*ibid.* p.14.

¹⁸ Wiener Jan,*ibid.* p.15

¹⁹ Jung Carl Gustav, *The Psychology of Transference*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 13.

²⁰ Gay Peter, *The Freud Reader*, W.W. Norton, New York and London, 1989, p. 26.

²¹ Freud Sigmund, *Sigmund Freud-Complete Works*. Hakota, Blarney, 2011, p. 3494.

about transference are negative as he accepts it as “the strongest weapon of the resistance”²² Jung’s approach to the term is more favorable.

As for the countertransference, it is the counselor’s projection of experiences, values and repressed emotions on the patient; the feelings of which are called from subconscious to conscious by the identification with the client’s experiences. A safe atmosphere must be assured so that it would be possible for client to open up to counsellor, “filter out” his former experiences through the lenses of present conditions and deconstruct the unfavorable distressing painful experiences. Consequently, counsellor helps client reconstruct his experiences.²³ Although Freud viewed countertransference as a necessary and complementary part of the counselling process, he was of the opinion that it also stands out as “permanent problem” which the counsellor must “dominate countertransference.”²⁴ Freud warns analysts that they must keep countertransference under close scrutiny:

Our control over ourselves is not so complete that we may not suddenly one day go further than we had intended. In my opinion, therefore, we ought not to give up the neutrality towards the patient, which we have acquired through keeping the counter-transference *in check*.²⁵

Among the views, Jung hold for analytical process, transference and countertransference, his opinions about countertransference is the most apparent ones. In contrast to Freud’s convictions on transference and countertransference and his contradictory thoughts about transference, which are stated above, in his work *Dreams*, Jung accepts countertransference as “useful and meaningful”²⁶ by arguing that “I even hold it to be an indispensable prerequisite that the psychoanalyst should first submit himself to the analytical process, as his personality is one of the main factors in the cure.”²⁷ It is clear that Jung is positive on the benefits of countertransference to the extent of letting psychiatrist submit oneself to analytical process let alone resisting it, which is diametrically opposed to the views of Freud who urges psychiatrist to be neutral if countertransference emerges.

In time, those who have recoured to Freud’s studies and to those of Jung and particularly the post-Jungians have enlarged the scope of psychoanalytic process with the addition of innumerable terms to the former ones such as personal and archetypical transfer and reflective and embodied countertransference.

²² Freud Sigmund, *ibid.* p.2460.

²³ Jackson Kevin, *Counselling Transference and Countertransference Issues*, Accessed: 15 December 2014, <http://contactpoint.ca/2013/01/counselling-transference-counter-transference-issues/>.

²⁴ Bion Wilfred R, *The Complete Works of W.R. Bion*, Karnac Books, London, 2014, p. 272.

²⁵ Freud Sigmund, *ibid.* p.2514.

²⁶ Jung Carl Gustav, *Dreams*, Routledge, London, 2002, p.61.

²⁷ Jung Carl Gustav, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Freud and Psychoanalysis*. Vol. 4, Princeton University Press, New York, 1961, p. 260.

B. The Relationship between Patient and Psychiatrist and Change of Their Roles

Psychiatrist Martin Dysart is depicted by Hesther “You’re this boy’s only chance”²⁸ to diagnose the reason to stimulate Alan Strang to stab six horses’ eyes. Although the doctor is believed to be competent in his profession to cure the psychologically distressed people, he signals at the beginning that he is exhausted:

You see, I’m lost. What use, I should be asking, are questions like these to an overworked psychiatrist in a provincial hospital? They are worse than useless; they are in fact subversive²⁹

Despite his boredom and frustration of his profession, he is confident of himself in tackling the problems of his patients and he expects Alan’s case to be a regular disorder which can be treated easily:

What did I expect of him? Very little, I promise you. One more dented little face. One more adolescent freak. The usual unusual. One great thing about being in the adjustment business: you’re never short of customers³⁰

Later on, Alan’s case turns out to be a peculiar one which has a potential to reverse the doctor-patient roles. Alan is the one who affects Dr Martin Dysart and makes it apparent that Dysart himself suffers personally. Dr Dysart is deeply affected by the nightmare in which he sacrificed a herd of children and he dreamed that Alan’s face was on every victim across the stone. Dr Martin is disturbed by the stare of the boy and he feels that the boy senses something peculiar to himself and as a result, he feels being accused.

He has the strangest stare I ever met... It is exactly like being accused. Violently accused... Treating him is going to be unsettling. Especially in my present state. His singing was direct enough. His speech is more so³¹

Although Dysart is a psychiatrist who diagnoses and cures the illnesses of his patients, he signals that he desperately needs help. During the psychological sessions, Alan is mostly the dominant character who directs and changes the discourse and startles Dysart. At the beginning, Alan does not want to be questioned like a patient. He seems to have adopted the role of a psychiatrist:

DYSART: Do you dream often?

ALAN: Do you?

DYSART: It’s my job to ask the questions. Yours to answer them.

ALAN: Says who?

²⁸ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.20.

²⁹ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.18.

³⁰ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.21.

³¹ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.26.

DYSART: Says me. Do you dream often?

ALAN: Do you?

DYSART: Look-Alan.

ALAN: I will answer if you answer. In turns³²

What's more, Alan is the one who determines whether psychological sessions with Martin Dysart will go on or not. "I'm not doing anymore...I hate this...You can whistle for any more. I've had it!"³³

At some points, the relationship between Alan and Dysart becomes a tense one as Alan challenges Dr Martin Dysart and protests his constant, never-ending questioning. This is particularly clear when Dysart wants to learn more about the girl with whom Alan went out.

ALAN: On and on, sitting there! Nosey Parker! That's all you are! Bloody Nosey Parker! Just like Dad. On and on and bloody on! Tell me, tell me, tell me...Answer this. Answer that. Never stop!³⁴

Alan's protestation "that all you're" is a tough summary of Dr Martin's inactive life, which later leads to a self-examination of himself and envy of enthusiastic nature of Alan. From that point on, psychological sessions become a process of search for self for Dr. Martin Dysart who is already suspicious of the productivity of his profession. Dysart and Alan's question and answer game turns out to be a merciless process, a kind of torture for Martin Dysart who already refers his office as a torture chamber. "Madam Chairman! Welcome to the torture chamber."³⁵ but during his "interrogation" with Alan, it is the psychiatrist who is trapped in his "torture chamber".

Dysart's "impotency" in her marriage is revealed when Alan takes his turn and questions Dysart as if the doctor was the patient to be treated. Alan has no mercy and asks grave questions which force Martin Dysart to face his deep-seated anxieties, fears and frustrations both in his life and marriage.

ALAN: Do you have dates?

DYSART: I told you. I am married.

ALAN: Do you have girls behind her back?

DYSART: No.

ALAN: Then what? Do you [...] her?

DYSART: That's enough now [...].

He rises and moves away.

³² Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.36.

³³ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.53

³⁴ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p. 59.

³⁵ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.19

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ALAN: Come on, tell me! Tell me, tell me!

ALAN: I said that's enough now.

DYSART: I bet you don't. I bet you never touch her. Come on, tell me. You've got no kids, have you? Is that because you don't [...]?³⁶

It seems that Martin Dysart's cross-examination fires back and he becomes the victim of Alan's questioning and it becomes crystal clear that Alan knows Dysart better than the psychiatrist knows himself. Dysart states this fact: "Wicked little [...] he knew exactly what questions to try [...] Ever since I made that crack about carving up children, he's been aware of me in an absolutely specific way."³⁷ Alan sensed Dysart's sickness and helps him to diagnose it which he normally does for others. This is one of the intersection points where the transference and countertransference occur. Shaffer's play is consistent with R. D Laing's theories; Laing expresses that: "I think, however, that *schizophrenics* [emphasis added] have more to teach psychiatrists about the inner world than psychiatrists their patients."³⁸ Dysart exclaims his grief and disappointment in marriage by putting forward that his world and his wife's are apart because of their different interests: "Do you know what it's like for two people to live in the same house as if they were in different parts of the world?"³⁹

Alan has zeal or zest for life even though it is labeled as abnormal by the society as his zeal is a combination of religious passion and sexual hysteria. His enthusiasm is the very thing that Dysart longs for in his life. Dysart is interested in antiquity, shrines, sacred streams and worship. Worship is a significant feature for Dysart as it includes the passion he lacks in his life and he feels anxious if people around him remain indifferent to his passion. "If I had a son, I bet you he'd come out exactly like his mother. Utterly worshipless."⁴⁰ Then he suspects the precepts of society of being normal: "What am I trying to do him."⁴¹ Martin Dysart feels that if he cures the boy, he will deprive him of what he longs for. After having conversed with Alan, Dysart questions the validity and usefulness of "normal" and he infers that what society perceives and imposes as normal can be more dangerous to the health and happiness of an individual than the postulated abnormality can affect him/her in an adversary way.

The Normal is the indispensable, murderous God of Health, and I am his Priest...I have honestly assisted children in this room. I have talked away terrors and relieved many agonies. But also -beyond question- I have cut from them parts of individuality repugnant to this God, in both his

³⁶ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.59-60.

³⁷ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.60.

³⁸ Laing R. David, *The Politics of Experience*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1967, p. 75.

³⁹ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.61.

⁴⁰ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.62.

⁴¹ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.62.

aspects...Sacrifices to Zeus took at the most surely, sixty seconds each.
Sacrifices to the Normal can take as long as sixty months⁴²

Despite his discontent with and suspicion of curing the distressed boy, Dysart employs treatment strategies such as the game “blink”, tape recording and placebo effect which he calls “truth pill”. The game blink calls for Alan to think back in time and recalls the incidents and brings his recollections from subconscious to conscious and enacts what he did in the past that triggered his present distress. To exemplify the effect of the recollections in Alan’s life, his childhood memory about a Horseman and horse, can be given:

DORA Is he all right, Frank?... He's not hurt?

FRANK Don't you think you should ask permission before doing a stupid thing like that?

HORSEMAN What's stupid?

ALAN It's lovely, dad!

DORA Alan, come down here!

HORSEMAN The boy's perfectly safe. Please don't be hysterical.

FRANK Don't you be la-di-da with me, young man! Come down here, Alan. You heard what your mother said.

ALAN No.

FRANK Come down at once. Right this moment.

ALAN NO... NO!

FRANK (*in a jury*) I said - this moment!

*He pulls Alan from the Horseman's shoulders. The boy shrieks, and falls to the ground.*⁴³

In a classic Freudian conception, Alan has repressed this event: His parents’ protestation and Alan’s being pulled from the horse can be given as a major catalyst for Alan’s subconscious unrest and his response in the form of *reaction formation*⁴⁴ draws him near to horses instead of abhorring and alienating from them. By means of the

⁴² Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.62.

⁴³ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.40-41.

⁴⁴ Reaction formation is one of the psychological strategies of defence mechanisms. Reaction formation means internalizing feeling or behaviour in stark contrast to what one feels or thinks. It is commonly held that defence mechanisms, which were originally conceived by Sigmund Freud and were later developed by his daughter Anna Freud, arise from the need to protect ego from the feelings of anxiety accompanied by embarrassment, guilt and shame. Since then defence mechanisms have ramified. Among such fundamental defence mechanisms as regression, isolation, reaction formation; repression is the primary one and the basis for others. As the strategies of unconscious, they are employed to manipulate, distort or deny reality for the justification of one’s act for the well-being and unity of a healthy individual. For the discussion of the subject from the firsthand source, see Anna Freud’s *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, London: Karnac Books, 1993.

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psychological sessions, Martin Dysart digs into Alan's memories and he uncovers how Alan's world is entangled with religious and sexual passion. Alan's speeches demonstrate how much he is confused. It is apparent that after his father's substitution of Jesus' bloody image on the way to the crucifixion with a horse, he attaches Jesus' role to the horse and he sanctifies it. In a way, Alan creates his personal mythology and genealogy about horses and he shifts from the faith in Jesus to a sadomasochistic belief in and attitude towards 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 [...] He was born in the straw⁴⁵

In addition, Alan's religious zeal merges with his sexual desire. This is particularly valid when we think of his rising sexuality with regard to his adolescence and his lack of a genuine guide in sexual matters. To exemplify, his father is an atheist with whom Alan later encounters in an adult movie and his mother does not either conform to a proper role model for the guidance as she is heavily occupies Alan's mind with excessive religiosity. Due to this condition of "in betweenness", Alan instinctively searches for passionate spiritual life apart from what his parents represent since their religious convictions distinctively conflict with each other. This haunts Alan even in his dreams: Alan's cries "Ek" in his nightmares meaning *Equus* which means *equitation* in Latin and his ecstatic expressions "Bear you away [...] Two shall be one [...] I want to be in you [...] Make us one person [...] I 'm stiff in the wind [...] I want to be you forever and ever"⁴⁶ are connotations for sexual experience. Once again, Alan turns into religious sphere by associating Jesus and his parables with the horse.

ALAN: His Last Supper.

DYSART: Last before what?

ALAN: "Ha ha"⁴⁷

Alan's offering a lump of sugar to Nugget resembles the wine and bread rituals in church.

DYSART: Do you say anything when you give it to him?

ALAN: Take my sins. Eat them for my sake...He always does⁴⁸

After Alan has re-enacted his memories and left Martin Dysart alone, he was distressed by the overt passion and enthusiasm that Alan demonstrated. Alan's

⁴⁵ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p. 66.

⁴⁶ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.65-67.

⁴⁷ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.71-72.

⁴⁸ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.72.

enthusiasm is the very thing which Dysart has never been able to actualize in his life and he is also haunted by the idea of horse:

DYSART: Now he is gone off the 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... He opens his great square teeth, and says-[Mocking.] 'Why Me... Why-ultimately-Me?... Do you really imagine you can account for Me... Poor Doctor Dysart!⁴⁹

In his 'torture chamber', Martin Dysart becomes a victim and he is nearer to reality; to his personal dilemma more than ever. He confesses that the boy, by means of the horse Nugget, asks the questions even Dysart evades to ask and answer and he no longer hides the truth under the disguise of ostensible terms such as "professional menopause": "It asks questions I have avoided all my professional life. 'Account for me,' says staring equus, 'First account for Me...' I fancy this is more than menopause"⁵⁰

Dysart questions his right as a doctor to remove the most precious thing a boy has in life.

DYSART: Can you think of anything worse one can do to anybody than take away their worship? [...].I don't. I only know it's the 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 is a modern citizen for whom society doesn't exist He lives one hour every three weeks –howling in a mist⁵¹

Dysart sympathizes with Alan's case and compares Alan's enthusiasm and wish for passion to indifferent husbands and wives. "And after the service kneels to slave who stands over him obviously and unthrowably his master. With my body I thee worship!...Many men have less vital with their wives"⁵²

The scene which Dysart confesses his suppressed feelings and thoughts to Hester is the most obvious point demonstrating his envy to Alan as Alan achieves what Dysart craves to fulfill –but fail- for his marriage and satisfy his sense of wonder in ancient world.

[...] But that boy has known a passion more ferocious than I have felt in any second of my life. And let me tell you something: I envy it [...] Don't you see? That's the Accusation! That's what his stare has been saying to me all this

⁴⁹ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.75.

⁵⁰ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.76.

⁵¹ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p. 80-81.

⁵² Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.81.

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time. 'At least I galloped! When did you?'... [Simply.] I'm jealous of Alan Strang⁵³

Martin Strang maintains his confession to Hesther; Alan embodies the ambition which the psychiatrist longs for passionately.

I sit looking at pages of centaurs trampling the soil of Argos-and outside my window he is trying to become one, in a Hampshire field...I watch that woman knitting, night after night - a woman I haven't kissed in six years - and he stands in the dark for an hour, sucking the sweat off his God's hairy cheek! Then in the morning, I put away my books on the cultural shelf...touch my reproduction statue of Dionysus for luck- and go off to hospital to treat him for insanity. Do you see?⁵⁴

At some points in the play, doctor-patient roles change and Alan adopts the role of a doctor who diagnoses the reason behind Dysart's uneasiness. What Dysart does in his cross-examinations is to open up to Alan:

ALAN: I bet this room's heard some funny things.

DYSART: It certainly has.

ALAN: I like it. -This room? - Don't you?

DYSART: Well, there's not much to like, is there [...] Actually I would like to leave this room and never see it again in my life [...] I wouldn't mind. I don't actually enjoy being a Nosey Parker you know⁵⁵

Through its characters' mental imbalance and unsuitability to one another as husbands and wives, the play is loaded with binary oppositions and the young boy is the one who unravels the characters' problems even before they are aware of them. Alan helps Dysart fully understand his impasse. Dysart is interested in ancient pagan world and he refers to his wife as puritan. They have no healthy sexual life and Dysart is devoid of any kind of enthusiasm and pleasure, which debilitates his power and distances himself from his job. Much like the same way, Alan's mother Dora and her husband Frank lead an uneasy existence. Dora is a woman who constantly reads passages from Bible to his son and Frank defines himself as an atheist. Due to this profound difference between the two, they may be regarded as misfits in their private lives. This surfaces in the speeches between Jill and Alan.

JILL: She doesn't give him anything?

ALAN: That is right I bet you...She doesn't give him anything...She likes Ladies and Gentleman. Do you understand what I mean?⁵⁶

⁵³ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.82.

⁵⁴ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.*p.83.

⁵⁵ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.*p.87.

⁵⁶ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.*p.96.

Alan recognizes his father's fake counseling after having encountered him in an adult movie, which can be taken as a sign of Frank's dissatisfaction in his marriage.

ALAN: I kept thinking- all those airs 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!' [...] Old [...] Filthy old [...]⁵⁷

During the truth drug game, Dysart gets Alan to re-animate and re-live his experience; as a result, Dysart soothes the troubled boy and cures him away from his distress but this time he troubles himself, which lead to his self-examination:

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...I need more desperately than my children need me...There is now in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out'⁵⁸

Martin Dysart employs various psychological methods to cure Alan and during the sessions, transference and countertransference between the two become inevitable as both characters share common distinct characteristics. At the end of these sessions, though Dysart is able to cure the boy by means of therapeutic re-enactments, Dysart feels that he extinguished Alan's most valuable trait and he also realizes that he cannot redeem his frailties.

Conclusion: Therapeutic Redemption or Deprivation of One's Enthusiasm for Normality

Through *Equus*, which is a play spying on the hazardous effects of convenience, Peter Shaffer touches upon themes such as freedom, God and religion, Christian and pagan faith, growth and development, sanity and insanity, being normal and abnormal and search for worship. Shaffer also achieves to pinpoint the spiritual deterioration in modern times in a conspicuous way. It is Peter Shaffer who proves that grave experiences can also be perfectly portrayed on stage in contrast to the conviction of another critically acclaimed British playwright Harold Pinter who says "The more acute the experience, the less articulate its expression."⁵⁹

In *Equus*, combinations of sexual desire and religious passion are all-visible elements throughout the play. In the sphere of psychoanalysis, it is apparent that Shaffer is not only affected by Freud's theories of childhood development and human subconsciousness but also one can infer the effect of Carl Jung's premises on the playwright about the individuation process and archetypical images of humanity which

⁵⁷ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.*, p.95.

⁵⁸ Shaffer Peter, *ibid.*, p.109.

⁵⁹ Kane Leslie, *The Language of Silence: On the Unspoken and the Unspeakable in Modern Drama*, Associated University Press, London, 1984, p.180.

can be found in individuals separately as in the case of Jesus and the horse's images and the way they are carved into Alan's mind.

Although Peter Shaffer's innovative psychodrama is praised for its theatrical complexity and appreciated for its intellectual argument as the playwright managed to mix psychological complexity with theatrical narration and techniques, Shaffer's *Equus* is criticized because it is claimed to defend a latent homosexuality. Some critics point out that there is a latent homosexuality in the play as it includes frigid nature of Dysart's marriage and Alan's impotence with Jill seems to deny heterosexual togetherness. Moreover, sexual imagery of horses along with Alan's pseudo equine love has led to various accusations of aberration. John Simon, who supports these claims, expresses that "[...] toward its avowed purpose, the explication of 'a dreadful event,' by making the dreadful seem fascinating and even admirable. Dishonesty to audience by trying to smuggle subliminal and virulent homosexual propaganda into them."⁶⁰ A keen observer, who bears in mind these criticisms and who is not taken away with the claimed –if there is- "virulent subliminal propaganda" of the play, can transcend the assertions of aberration and realize the abreaction of the primary character. Once this phase is surpassed, the rest is to appreciate the subtle combination of the socio-psychological argument – validity and necessity of stultification of one's capacity for worship through the agencies of individuation- and theatrical innovations of the play and to decide whether Dysart's therapeutic remedies are ultimately helpful or detrimental to one's enthusiasm for the sake of society's norms of "sanity." The answer remains imprecise particularly when looked from different or diverging angles just as Oscar Wilde once stated "The truth is rarely pure and never simple"⁶¹ What is certain we can infer from the case, as a teenager, Alan has no proper role model and he is torn between religious passion and awakening adolescence sexuality, which force him to create his personal mythology and unusual kind of worship. It is apparent that Alan has no proper way-out to channelize his energy and enthusiasm and he idolizes or worships his pleasure after being "serviced" and enslaves himself to his joy which is crystalized in his expression: "With my body I thee worship."⁶² In the context of inability of finding a proper way-out or a transcendental goal, Samuel Terrein argues that:

The play is a study of the starvation for transcendence, but Shaffer does not wish to say how to cure this hunger. He has succeeded in exhibiting the vacuum or the perversity of human existence when it lacks a dynamic trust in God, but he has failed to show the kind of trust in the kind of God that can deliver us

⁶⁰ Barry B. Witham, "The Anger in *Equus*", *Modern Drama*, Vol. 22, Issue 1, 1979, p.61-66.

⁶¹ Wilde Oscar, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Heinemann Educational Publishers, London, 1989, p. 75.

⁶² Shaffer Peter, *ibid.* p.81.

from the enslavement of self. Theological ambiguity, however, should be the privilege of an artist⁶³

It is apparent that Alan has a zest for transcendence externalized with pseudo mystical unity with his equine love which Terrein defines as “starvation”. To this end, it can be put forward that societies’ norms of proper and improper remain up in the air and when the path of acceptable in front of the individuals is plugged by opposing forces -such as a zealot mother or a self-declared atheist father as in the case of confused Alan- individuals resort to derogatory ways and fall into predicament even if the situation seems ingenuity.



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The Relationship Between Martin Dysart And Alan Strang In Peter Shaffer's Equus

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PSİKANALİZ IŞIĞINDA PETER SHAFFER'IN KÜHEYLAN ADLI ESERİNDE MARTIN DYSART VE ALAN STRANG ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİ

Zafer ŞAFAK^a

Öz

İngiliz oyun yazarı Peter Shaffer tarafından yazılan *Küheylan* (1973) bir psikodramadır ve Shaffer, oyunun temasıyla bütünlük arz eden argümanını okuyucuya ve izleyiciye etkili bir biçimde iletmek için oyununun yazımında ve sahnelenmesinde psikolojik realizmden yararlanır. Oyunda Shaffer; dini tutku, yeni yeni baş gösteren cinsellik ve aşkın bir bütünlük arayışı arasında ezilen ve duygusal olarak huzursuz olan ergen Alan Strang'ın hikâyesini anlatır. Bir haber olan hikâyeyi, BBC'de çalışan bir arkadaşından edinen oyun yazarı, haberin detaylarını öğrenmek ve irdelemek yerine modern dünyadaki manevi çöküşe vurgu yapmak ve toplumdaki kısıtlayıcı normları serimlemek maksadıyla oyunu bütünüyle farklı bir bağlama oturtarak yorumlamayı yeğlemiştir. Eserde karşıt ikiliklerden (*binary oppositions*) yararlanan oyun yazarı, ebeveynlerinden bir tanesi tanrıtanımaz olan diğeri ise aşırı dindar olup oğullarına sürekli çarpmıha geriliş hikâyeleri anlatması sonucunda Alan'ın önce nasıl kendine özgü, tutkusunu ifade edeceği bir alan oluşturduğu sonrasında ise çatışan bu değerler sebebiyle oyunun başkahramanı Alan tarafından oluşturulan bu özel alanın genişleyerek yol açtığı olayları anlatır. Ebeveynlerinin çatışan değerleri sebebiyle Alan, tutku ve ilgisini aktarabileceği, kendi psikolojik derinliğiyle harmanlanmış ve efsaneye yaklaşan, kendine özgü tapınma şekli oluşturur. Alan, çalıştığı ahırdaki atların gözlerini kör etmesine yol açan olaylar silsilesi nedeniyle psikiyatrist Martin Dysart'a götürülür. Bu kısma kadar olaylar zaten yaşanmıştır ve Alan'ın psikiyatriste götürüldüğü an ise hemen hemen oyunun asıl başladığı noktadır. Olayı başlangıçta sıradan bir vakıa olarak değerlendiren Dr. Martin Dysart ilerleyen seanslarda bilincinde olmakla beraber kendi hayatıyla ilgili yüzleşmekten kaçındığı gerçeklerle karşı karşıya gelir. İşinden duyduğu tatminsizlik, hayatındaki yeknesaklık, eşinin kendisine ve çalışmalarına olan kayıtsızlığı bunların en önde gelenleridir. Psikiyatri terimleri olan ve Carl Gustav Jung ve Freud'un haklarında bir birinden farklı (ve kimi zaman çelişen) görüşler belirttiği *Aktarım* ve *Karşıaktarım*'in gerçekleştiği teröpatik oturumlar sırasında, Dysart gerçek bir heyecandan yoksun olan kendi iş ve bireysel yaşamının çoraklığının daha

^a Arş. Gör., Iğdır Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, zafersafak61@hotmail.com

çok ayırdına varır. Dr. Dysart'ı bu farkındalığa iten ise kendi şevksiz hayatı ile tümüyle modern dünyadan kopuk olmakla beraber Alan'ın tutkulu hayatını karşılaştırma fırsatı bulması olmuştur. Öyle ki oyunun bir noktasında bu karşılaştırma olanağı sayesinde Alan Strang'i kışkırttığını açıkça itiraf eder. Dysart, Alan'ın anne ve babasının çatışan değerler sisteminin, yaşı itibarıyla de buna yatkın hale gelebilecek Alan'ı nasıl yalnızlaştırdığını, ana karakterin küçükken yaşadığı hoş olmayan bir olay sonucunda atlardan uzaklaşmak yerine onlara karşı nasıldan -psikolojik bir terim olan -*karşıt tepki*- geliştirdiğini gözlemler. Alan'ın Jill ile tanışması hastasının atları kör etmesi açısından katalizör görevi gördüğünü anlayan Dysart olaylardaki parçaları yavaş yavaş yerine oturturken kendi yaşamını, işinin toplumsal açıdan işlevini sorgular. Hastasının toplumun algıladığı şekliyle "travmatik" durumundaki parçalar bütüne ulaşma ve sorunu çözme hususunda Dysart'ın gözünde nasıl bir yapbozdaki gibi yerine oturuyorsa, Dysart'ın kendi bireysel ve iş yaşamıyla ilgili parçaları da o ölçüde dağılmakta, birbirinden uzaklaşmaktadır. Dr. Dysart'ın Alan için kırılma noktası teşkil eden Jill ile beraberliğinin imkânsızlığını keşfetmesi ve oyunun sonlarına doğru "hastasına" olayı tekrar yaşatarak onu "tedavi etmesi"; kendisine, seyirciye ve dolayısıyla da bizlere var olan tutkunun yok edilebileceğini fakat olmayan bir tutkunun ortaya çıkarılmayacağını itiraf etmesiyle sonuçlanır. Burada, Dr. Dysart'ın gönderme yaptığı yok edilen tutku Alan'ın bir özelliği iken yine kendisinin açıkça ifade ettiği yoktan var edilemeyen tutku ise kendisinininkidir. Oyunun sonunda Dr. Dysart'ın metaforik olarak Alan'ı dizginlerinden kurtarması ve sembolik anlamda bu sefer gemleri artık kendi ağzında hissetmesinin sebebi de tam olarak budur. Bu vesileyle Peter Shaffer, oyunundaki ana karakter Alan'ın vakıası sebebiyle bocalayan Dr. Dysart aracılığıyla sosyal olarak yapılandırılmış akıllılık, delilik, uygun ve uygun olmayan davranışlar gibi kavramları sorgular ve Alan'ı tedavi etmenin ya da onu toplumun onayladığı davranışlarla aynı konuma getirmenin aynı zamanda gencin tutkusunu söndüreceğini, onu sıradanlaştıracığını ve nihayetinde tıpkı Dr. Dysart gibi tutkudan yoksun bir birey haline getireceğini okuyucuya/izleyiciye hissettirir. Yirminci Yüzyıl İngiliz Tiyatrosu'nun önemli temsilcilerinden olan oyun yazarı, okuyucularının karşısına sosyo-psikolojik bir sorunsalla çıkarken toplum tarafından normalden sapma olarak nitelenen bir bireyin kendine has davranışlarının yine toplumun normları uğruna söz konusu bireyin tutkusunun söndürülüp söndürülmemesi gerektiğini tartışmaya açar. Dahası, *Küheylan* aracılığıyla Shaffer, kişilerin bireyleşme sürecinde (*individuation process*) sosyal yapıların aracısı olan özgürlük, Tanrı, pagan ve Hristiyan inancı, gelişme ve hazır kabul edilmişlik, akıllılık ve delilik gibi konulara değinirken, bizlere tartışmaya açtığı konularla ilgili hazır ya da tek boyutlu cevaplar sunmaktan kaçınır ve bu tür cevaplar bulmaktan ya da iletmektense bunları okuyucuya ve izleyiciye bırakarak onları diyalektik bir biçimde konu üzerinde düşünmeye sevk eder. Eser estetik açıdan teatral yoğunluğa/karmaşaya (*theatrical complexity*) sahip olmakla beraber çeşitli çevrelerden konu seçimi ve bunun sahnede yansıtılması açısından tenkit edilmiştir. Yine de eser konu seçimiyle cesur, yazıldığı dönem açısından da oldukça yenilikçidir.

Çalışma, Psikanaliz'in, Freud'un ve R.D Laing'in çalışmalarını odağa alarak okuyucuları kendi psikolojilerini incelemeye teşvik etmenin yanı sıra Shaffer'ın savlarına ve Alan'ın durumuna ne derece hak verilebileceği üzerinde okuyucuyu düşünmeye de davet eder.

Zafer ŞAFAK

Keywords: Yirminci Yüzyıl İngiliz Tiyatrosu, Psikanaliz, Peter Shaffer, Küheylan, Aşkın Bütünlük, Tutku, Tapınma, Akıllılık ve Delilik, Aktarım ve Karşı Aktarım

