

Equus Study Guide

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Plot Summary

“Equus” is a 1974 Tony Award-winning play written by Peter Schaffer and published in 1973. It details the efforts of Dr. Martin Dysart to get to the root of the problems affecting neurotic seventeen year-old Alan Strang, who has blinded six horses with a pick at the stable where he works. Dysart is reluctant to take the case on, because he is overworked, but ultimately agrees to do so. Yet his experiences with Alan ultimately disturb him, and make him question the fundamentals of his own work.

Alan is obsessed with horses, to the point of worshipping them religiously. Alan’s father, an atheist, blames religion on his son’s problems, while his mother says that Alan is his own person, and is to blame himself. Dysart finds that Alan’s obsession with horses is rooted in a childhood experience with a horse, where he felt powerful and free by controlling a horse by riding one. This obsession skirts with the sexual as well, and after a failed sexual encounter with a girl in a stable, Alan attacks the horses, believing they can see all and know all.

Dysart realizes that Alan can be treated, and will be treated. But Dysart is jealous of the kind of passion that Alan has experienced, because he himself has never experienced anything remotely similar in modern society, which looks down on any kind of real passion. Dysart worries that, although he will cure Alan, he will make Alan a ghost.



Act 1, Scene 1 - 7

Summary

Act 1, Scene 1 – At Rokesby Psychiatric Hospital in southern England, Martin Dysart, a psychiatrist in his mid-forties, watches seventeen year-old Alan Strang standing beside and nuzzling a horse named Nugget. As Alan leads Nugget away, Dysart wonders what is going on in the horse's head, believing such questions to be absurd and subversive. Dysart realizes that he is bound up in old education, old knowledge and old assumptions, that he is looking at things from the wrong angle. He wonders if the heads of children and of horses are completely unknowable to him. He then recalls one Monday the previous month, which begins with visit from a woman named Hesther.

Act 1, Scene 2 – The Nurse announces the arrival of Mrs. Hesther Salomon, a magistrate. As Dysart waits for her, he explains to the audience of people watching around him that some days he blames Hesther for bringing Alan to him. Hesther appears, and explains that the case she has just tried has been the most shocking she has ever done. The boy will be sent to Dysart instead of to prison for life for the crime he has committed.

Dysart refuses any more patients, saying he has his hands full, and that he shares an office with two very competent psychiatrists, Bennett and Thoroughgood. Hesther implores him, explaining the crime of Alan: He has blinded six horses with a spike, all in the same night, all at the riding stable near Winchester where he was working on the weekends. And in court, all Alan did was sing. Hesther believes the boy needs mental help, not a prison sentence. Hesther also believes there is something special about him, some sort of vibration.

The Nurse then brings Alan Strang into the room as Hesther leaves. Dysart introduces himself to Alan, who refuses to reply in any way.

Act 1, Scene 3 – Dysart begins to ask Alan a few basic questions about his name, age, and trip on the British Rail. Alan responds by singing the jingle from Doublemint Gum. When Dysart asks Alan about his work during the week at an electrical shop, and his father's work as a printer, Alan responds by singing about Martinis and then gum once more. Dysart has Alan put in room Number Three by the Nurse.

Act 1, Scene 4 – The Nurse brings Alan to Room Number Three, a private room, which the Nurse explains is much better than the ward. She tells him that she hopes he'll behave himself, to which Alan finally speaks and replies, telling her to "F--- off." The Nurse points out the bell and where the lavatory is, and then leaves while Alan lies down.

Act 1, Scene 5 – Dysart addresses the audience, and is slightly annoyed. He reveals a dream to those watching him, where he is a chief priest in Homeric Greece, dressed in



a gold mask, like that of Agamemnon at Mycenae. He is sharpening a knife to ritually sacrifice a herd of kids, some five hundred boys and girls. Either crops or a military expedition depends on this sacrifice. Dysart guts the children, extracting their innards to be deciphered and read by two assistant priests. But with each dissection, Dysart becomes more and more nauseous. He wonders if the work he is doing is doing any social good at all, and then his mask begins to slip. The other priests' eyes fill up with blood, they grab the knife from Dysart, and he wakes up.

Act 1, Scene 6 – Hesther arrives on scene, telling Dysart that his work with children does matter, and that the work is superb. Dysart dismisses his dream as “professional menopause”. Dysart tells Hesther the dream is her fault, because the dream began with Alan. Dysart explains to Hesther that, for the first two days, all Alan did was sing, but then just suddenly snapped, and is talking now. He has been having nightmares, as well.

The Nurse explains that Alan has had to be given sedatives the past few nights, for he has been screaming out “Ek!” over and over again. Dysart tells Hesther that Alan confesses his father hates him watching television, that it is a dangerous drug, and that Alan will become stupid like the rest of the population if all he ever does is watch television. Alan's father, Frank, is further horrified by the fact that Alan never thinks of reading, especially when Frank is a printer. Frank therefore forbids his wife, Dora, to keep a new television set. He especially hates it because of advertising and the free-market economy. Alan's parents are much older, and are Communists. Dora is also an ex-teacher.

Dysart and Alan talk about history, about the Kings. Alan prefers King John, for putting out eyes, and pauses, believing he has said something wrong. When Alan asks about Marx, Alan laughs, and when Dysart responds with Marx, Alan tells him to mind his own beeswax.

Dysart also reveals to Hesther that Dora may be religious, and that he wants to have a look at Alan's home. He suspects this because of some perceived tension over Marx and the phrase “Religion is the opium of the people”. Dysart and Hesther both then exit.

Act 1, Scene 7 – Dysart goes to meet Frank and Dora Strang. Frank is at work on Sunday morning, but Dora receives Dysart into the living room. Dora can't understand what has happened to Alan, because Alan has always been good and gentle, and has always loved horses. Alan even has a printed photo of a white horse upstairs in his room from an old calendar. His favorite story as a child was about a horse named Prince.

Dora also reveals that Alan loved the idea of animals being able to talk. She also explains that when Christian cavalry first appeared in the New World, Indians believed that the horse and rider were gods, because they believed that the horse and rider were one person –and that the truth was only discovered when one of the riders fell off. Dora also relates reading to Alan from the Bible about horses, as well. Dora also permitted Alan to go and watch Westerns as a friend's house, without the knowledge of Frank.



Frank arrives home and introduces himself to Dysart. Dora explains that her family has always been attuned to horses, that her grandfather used to ride every morning on the downs at Brighton. He would call such activities “indulging in equitation”, with “equitation” coming from the Latin word “equus” for “horse”. And Alan becomes fascinated by the word “Equus”. But as much as Alan loved horses, he never wanted to ride, Dora explains further. At the stables, all Alan does is rake out manure. When Dora goes to get tea, Frank explains to Dysart that Dora believes she married beneath her. And Frank likewise cannot understand why Alan would not want to ride horses.

Frank goes on to explain that his wife is excessively religious, and it annoyed him in the past to hear mother and son late at night reading the Bible. Frank blames Alan’s closeness with his mother, and the Bible, for Alan’s current troubles. Alan is also fascinated by religious imagery, which Frank put a stop to. Frank also contends that the violence in the Bible has marked Alan for life. Dora returns, and disagrees with her husband. Frank further contends that the Bible is just about bad sex. Dora disagrees. Dysart asks Dora how much Alan knows about sex, to which she replies she has prepared him with facts biologically, and spiritually in terms of education. Dora breaks down crying over Alan.

Analysis

When Martin Dysart takes on Alan Strang’s case, he is totally unaware that the experience will profoundly affect him, and haunt him. Dysart expects that Alan will be a run-of-the-mill off-balanced teenager that can be made right with some kind of treatment, therapeutic, medicinal, or otherwise. But Alan presents a case unlike any that Dysart has had before. Alan is obsessed with horses, and has blinded six of them at the stable where he works.

At the same time, Dsyart has been questioning his own efficacy and purpose as a psychiatrist. His dreams are transparently reflective of these self-doubts. As the Greek chief priest, he carves up children to offer them as sacrifices for a successful military campaign or crop yield; as a psychiatrist, he carves up the mental landscape of children to offer them back to society at large as successful citizens. Through the process of evisceration, the children are forever changed in some way, leaving part, or all of their former selves behind. And Dysart wonders if this has any real worth, value, or merit.

Discovering that Alan’s parents are communists –the mother, religious; the father, atheist – Dysart decides to pursue how the belief systems of both parents have affected the son. The father contends that religion is evil, is about bad sex, and has nothing constructive to offer. Frank believes that his son has been negatively scarred by the violence in the Bible. The mother, Dora, on the other hand, contends religion has helped her son, and while she has raised him with faith, she has not shut him off from the secular world the way Frank has by shutting out television. Here, the reader discovers that would could –or should –be a clear-cut case of influence on the child, really isn’t. The religious mother is open-minded and wants her son to experience the secular world, as well as to understand things from a scientific point of view. The father, the



atheist Communist, wants to shut his son off from the evils of the secular world, from the free market to television. Dysart has his work cut out for him.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Hesther press Dysart to take on the case of Alan Strang? For what reasons does Dysart agree to take on the case of Alan Strang? How do these reasons parallel normality in society? Explain.

Discussion Question 2

Describe briefly the dream that Dysart has. Explain his dream, and explain why it is relevant to Dysart's self-confidence as a psychiatrist.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Dysart want to figure out if Alan's parents are religious? How could their being religious have impacted Alan's life? What takes do Alan's parents have on religion? Is it possible that the dichotomy between them about religion may have itself affected Alan? Explain.

Vocabulary

contour, propagating, subversive, provincial, catatonia, unwarrantable, abominable, unperturbed, belligerently, noble, equitation, susceptibilities, insuperable



Act 1, Scene 8 - 14

Summary

Act 1, Scene 8 – Alan murmurs from his bed. Eventually, he begins shouting “Ek! Ek! Ek!” Dysart watches and looks on, and then exits.

Act 1, Scene 9 – Dysart speaks to Alan the next morning asking Alan how he is. Alan answers Dysart’s questions with more questions, and Alan agrees to answer questions if he is also allowed to ask questions. Dysart asks about Alan’s dream the previous night, but Alan can’t remember the dream. Alan then asks about Dysart’s dream, and Dysart replies that his dream is about carving up children, to which Alan smiles. Alan asks if Dysart is married, and Dysart explains that he is. He asks about Alan’s history with horses, and if he remembers the first time horses entered his life. Alan says he cannot.

Dysart goes on to ask Alan about “Ek”, to which Alan replies in song. When Alan refuses to respond any further, Dysart dismisses him, making Alan angry.

Act 1, Scene 10 – Alan recalls the first time he sees a horse, on a beach when he was six. He begins calling Dysart “Swizzy”. Alan recalls seeing a horse coming in out of the tide, galloping through the surf. And there was a college-aged male on horseback. The Horseman allows Alan to pet his horse, Trojan. The Horseman allows Alan to mount Trojan. They go riding around, until they are stopped by Frank and Dora, who believe the Horseman should have asked permission before allowing Alan to ride the horse. Alan refuses to get down from the horse, and as Frank grapples with Alan, Alan falls and hurts himself. Frank threatens to report the Horseman to the police for endangering the lives of children. As the Horseman gallops away, Alan and his parents are soaked by the water kicked up from the horse’s hooves, and Frank shouts after the Horseman, condemning him as upper-class riff-raff.

Alan explains that, following the incident, he never rode horses again. Dysart explains that he has never been on a horse, either. Their time being up for the day, Dysart tells Alan to bring along a tape recorder, to send Dysart tapes through the Nurse should Alan feel like talking any further, or sharing secrets. Alan takes the tape recorder, and leaves.

Act 1, Scene 11 – That night, Dora Strang comes to visit Dysart. She and Frank have been talking, and Dora has come along to share some information with Dysart. The picture of a horse in Alan’s bedroom replaced a picture of the Lord on His way to Calvary, which Alan found in Reeds Art Shop and bought with his own money. The picture, Dora explains, was too bloody for her, but she allowed Alan to have it, anyway. Frank is ultimately fed up with the picture, throws it out, and replaces it with the horse picture, five years before.



Dysart asks for information about the picture of the horse, which Dora says is taken at an unusual angle: head on, so that the horse appears to be looking at the viewer. Dora says she will come and see Alan very soon, without her husband, because her husband and Alan are not getting along well at the moment. And Dysart is overcome by dread.

Act 1, Scene 12 – Dalton appears. He is the owner of the stable and the horses that Alan blinded. Dalton believes Alan should be in prison, rather than receiving treatment in a hospital at the expense of taxpayers. Dalton relates that Jill Mason, a girl who works for him at the stable, has had a nervous breakdown, blaming herself for introducing Alan to Dalton in the first place. At first, Dalton believes Alan is a real find, for Alan tends to the horses very well. Dalton does find it strange that Alan never rode the horses, and also found it strange that in the mornings, they would be sweaty, as if they had been ridden at night. Dalton says he was never able to prove anything. Dalton finds that strange as well. Alan explains to Dysart that riding at night alone was sexy, and sends over a tape to Dysart.

Act 1, Scene 13 – Dysart listens to Alan's tape. Alan explains that there was sweat on his legs from the horse's neck, and that he felt sheer power controlling the horse. Alan also confesses that when he saw the horse, he saw the chain in the horse's mouth, and he asked the horse if it hurt –to which the horse replies, but Alan cannot bring himself to say what the horse said. Alan admits to not being able to take his eyes off horses after that, especially their skin and their nakedness. And to dress up the horse in any way, shape, or form, is filthy to Alan. Alan feels as if only cowboys can relate to him, because cowboys are free.

Act 1, Scene 14 – Frank Strang comes to see Dysart. He appears embarrassed and unnerved. Frank comes to relate an event to Dysart in secrecy, asking that his wife not be informed. He wants to prove where all of his wife's stuff leads to. About eighteen months before, Frank goes upstairs late at night to fetch something, believing his son to be asleep. As he goes by Alan's room, the door is ajar slightly, and Frank hears chanting in the form of a list of names, as in the Bible. Alan is chanting things like "Prince begat Prince, and Prance begat Prankus." Frank looks in the room to see Alan standing directly in front of the photo of the horse, staring into it. Alan then kneels and bows before the photograph.

Alan then goes on to say, "Behold –I give you Equus, my only begotten son." The emphasis is on the "Eq", or "Ek". Alan then fashions a noose and puts it into his mouth, and begins beating himself. Frank then goes back downstairs, convinced that religion is at the root of Alan's issues. Frank also admits to never speaking to Alan about the events of that night. Before Frank leaves, he also tells Dysart that the night Alan blinded the horses, he went out with a girl.

Analysis

The source of Alan's obsession with horses appears to be on the beach when he is a child, when he is given the chance to ride a horse. Here, Alan's first experience of real



freedom is crushed by his father. He feels powerful and free being able to control and steer a horse –the first such control Alan has ever experienced in his life. But his father crushes this freedom by pulling Alan from the horse, and threatening the horse rider's freedom with a report to the police.

Alan's second freedom, committing to religion, is crushed by his father. Alan's father spares no expense to excoriate religion, one of the very things that Alan loves more so than anything else. The greatest act of aggression against religion comes from Frank, who throws away Alan's beloved image of Jesus on the way to Calvary, replacing it with a disturbing horse calendar photograph. Here, the father has substituted the Father for an animal on four legs, connecting in Alan's mind various religious elements with various earthly aspects. The horse, Equus, takes the place of God, and the associated freedom and power with riding a horse is transferred to the relationship between Alan and horses. Alan begins to worship Equus, finding power and self-fulfillment in such worship and passion. It is a warped system of worship that blurs together Christianity, religiosity, paganism, humanism, animalism, and sexuality.

What especially unnerves Alan is that the image of Jesus, on His way to dying for the sins of the world, has been replaced with a horse image that looks straight out onto the viewer. Alan is captivated by the eyes of the horse, by the idea of seeing, and then is brought back to the Biblical understanding that God knows and sees all. And here, the all-seeing Equus takes the place of God, a physical image in this world that looks out at Alan, always –and it drives Alan over the edge.

Discussion Question 1

What is Alan's earliest memory of a horse? Where in the memory can freedom, and the taking of freedom, be seen? Explain why this is important.

Discussion Question 2

Why do you believe that Alan forms such an immediate bond with the horse on the beach? Is there something in his genetics that predisposes him to a love of horses? Or is his passion for horses spontaneous? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Alan chanting and shouting, "Ek!"? How does this relate back to religion, according to Frank? What does Frank believe to be at the root of Alan's problems? What does he do to adjust this situation as he sees it?

Vocabulary

truculent, menace, hooligan, peculiar, ensuing, abruptly, genealogy, mime, viciousness, obliquely



Act 1, Scene 15 - 21

Summary

Act 1, Scene 15 – Dysart calls for Alan to come to his office. Alan explains he watched television the night before, and Dysart thanks him for the tape. Dysart presses Alan about the talking horse, and Alan says that horses can't talk. Dysart then pushes Alan about how he came to work at the stable, about by whom he was introduced to the stable. Alan claims it was at the electronics shop, Bryson's, where he met someone. Alan is not thrilled working with electronics. Alan recalls the day Jill Mason came to the shop looking for blades for hair clippers for horses. She is in her early twenties and beautiful, and from the middle class. She has seen Alan at the stables before, and wonders if he is looking for a job. Alan can only work on weekends, and Jill agrees to introduce him to Dalton.

Act 1, Scene 16 – As the Chorus hums in the background of the stage, three horses appear on stage. The horses converge on Alan. Alan is about to bow down to the horses, but is interrupted by the arrival of Dalton and Jill. Dalton and Jill proceed to show Alan the ropes. They show him how to muck stalls and groom the horses, as well as cleaning out stones from hooves. Jill consents to looking after Alan. Dalton tells Alan to never hesitate to ask questions, and to enjoy himself. Jill and Alan then begin work around the stables.

Jill introduces Alan to Nugget, her favorite horse. She instructs Alan on how to groom the horses properly. Jill believes that Alan has a feel for horses, and training him will be easy. She then heads out on her own. Alan is thrilled to be so close to horses. Dysart wonders if Alan took out Jill, but Alan explodes, telling Dysart that he is prying, just like his father.

Act 1, Scene 17 – Dysart apologizes for pushing, but Alan wants to ask his own questions now. Dysart tells Alan they are not playing that game. Alan questions Dysart about his wife, Margaret, who is a dentist. Alan wants to know if they don't have kids because they don't have sex, and he wonders if Dysart cheats on Margaret. Dysart rejects the assertions, and tells Alan to return to his room. But Alan grabs one of Dysart's cigarettes, and refuses to return it. Dysart then explodes, which sends Alan running back to his room.

Dysart knows that Alan is trying to get to him, and has marched around the hospital asking questions about his life. Neurotics, Dysart knows, aim at areas of vulnerability, with Dysart's being his wife.

Act 1, Scene 18 – Dysart describes his stale and uninteresting home life to Hesther, lamenting that he and Margaret never had kids. Margaret has become a nag. Hesther believes the description is cruel. Dysart longs for something more. He knows there is



much more to life, and he can find it in his love and reverence for Greece. He longs to show someone these sorts of things. But Margaret is worshipless.

Hesther and Dysart talk about Alan. Dysart believes Alan is trying to save himself through him. They both realize they are not dedicated to helping Alan achieve some sense of normalcy, and are attempting to find some sense of normalcy themselves.

Act 1, Scene 19 – Dysart and Alan meet once more. Dysart apologizes for the day before, and Alan says his own words were stupid. Alan is not feeling well. Dysart decides he and Alan should play the game “Blink”, where one person stares, opens, and closes his eyes while the other person taps to tell the former to open or close his eyes. Dysart says it is relaxing to do. Alan thinks it is stupid, but consents to doing it.

Dysart puts Alan into a trance. He gets Alan to recall the day on the beach from childhood, and Alan says he speaks to the horse in his mind. The horse says the chain in his mouth hurts, and it never comes out, because he is in chains, like Jesus. The horse’s real name is Equus, and lives in all horses, not just one. Dysart asks why Equus is in chains. Alan replies that it is for the sins of the world. Alan says that Equus will save him, that horse and rider shall be one person.

Equus made Alan mount and ride at night. But Equus does not show Alan how to ride, and Alan says he is mean, and this is because of the Straw Law. Equus was born in the straw, and this is his law. Eventually, Alan masters riding Equus by riding at night, having stolen and copied a key to the stable. Dysart then brings Alan through time to the stable, and tells Alan to unlock the stable door.

Part 1, Scene 20 – As Alan opens the door, the Equus noise, made by the Chorus, begins. The horses all circle around Nugget. Alan puts sacks around the hooves of Nugget. He brings Nugget to the field, but Nugget won’t go in, because it is the place o Ha Ha. Dysart makes Alan bring Nugget into the field.

Act 1, Scene 21 – As the field is entered, the Equus noise dies away. The field is gigantic. It is full of mist. Alan says he takes all of his clothes off. He then puts his Manbit in his mouth, a sacred stick so that things won’t happen too quick. He gives Equus a lump of sugar, a last supper, before Ha Ha. Alan chants “Equus” as he mounts Nugget. The horse’s hair is sharp and painful against Alan’s legs. Equus appears in place of Nugget. Suddenly, Alan and Equus are a team together, riding against their foes. Their foes are electronics and horse accouterments. They ride around and around, Alan declaring that they are becoming one, and he laughs loudly, “Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Analysis

As Dysart goes further into Alan’s case, he discovers more and more to be unnerved about. Alan’s night rides while nude with the horses, all while worshiping them –and Equus above all –dangerously meld spiritual obsession with sexual perversion, all in the pursuit of yearning to be free, to be powerful. Indeed, the kind of passion that Alan has



experienced in his life, though indeed twisted and extreme, makes Dysart envious for never having experienced anything remotely similar to it.

Indeed, Dysart's work has only with Alan become something more than a simple process of evisceration and curing. Dysart doesn't realize, however, that his desire to get to the root of Alan's problem is a quiet passion of his own. Dysart's desire to get to the root of Alan's problem is his own quest, in a way, that needs to be completed – without Dysart understanding it. Though the kind of passion that Dysart is seeking is something much more extraordinary, something trending in Alan's direction – a passion for something, for anything beyond simple curiosity.

When Alan indulges his passion, he is no longer himself, but someone else. He and the horse, Nugget, become one, and then he is one with Equus. Ordinarily, this sort of transcendent reality, of becoming one with God, would be considered normal. But that Alan's god is Equus, and there is a severe sexual and animalistic nature to his passion, to his worship, means that Alan's worship is twisted. There are religious extremists of every faith, and Alan's own obsession certainly ascends to the same levels. Even the horse, the source of Alan's worship, wants no part in what is going on.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does Dysart begin to reflect on his own life as he learns more about Alan's? What realizations does Dysart make about his own life? Why is this important?

Discussion Question 2

What similarities can be drawn between Alan and Equus? Between Equus and God? Between Alan and Jesus? Are these individuals all one in the same? Or are they different and distinct? In other words, is there a religious influence on Alan? If so, is it a pure religious influence, or has it been corrupted? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

Equus and Alan have enemies in electronics and horse accouterments. Why? Are these things meant to represent anything? If so, what? And what is their symbolic purpose?

Vocabulary

aptitude, exultant, sporadically, insolently, perceptive, vulnerability, proficiency, prophecies, intuitive, repugnant, plinth



Act 2, Scene 22 - 28

Summary

Act 2, Scene 22 – Alan embraces Nugget. Dysart watches. As Alan leaves with Nugget, Dysart is left alone with Equus. Equus questions Dysart how Equus can be accounted for. Equus asks Dysart questions that he has avoided for most of his life. Children are born into a world full of things to enslave them. But why does a child become enslaved by one and not others, or some but not others? Dysart does not have an answer. He can trace a chain of moments, of memories, but doesn't know how they can all snap together in the first place.

The Nurse interrupts Dysart's ruminations to tell him that Alan's mother has come to visit, and Alan has thrown a tray at her. She is screaming at her son when Dysart arrives, and she slaps Alan. Dysart orders her to leave, which she reluctantly does.

Act 2, Scene 23 – Dysart says he must ask Dora Strang to never visit her son again. He cannot understand why Dora has exploded on her son when her son is at a very delicate stage of treatment. Dora is enraged. She knows that society always blames the parents, that they are always responsible, and Dysart tells her that this is not true. She and Frank know they have done nothing wrong, and Dysart's questions force them to stay awake at night in wonder. Dora says that whatever has happened to Alan, has happen to him because of himself. Dora says that if Dysart knew God, he would also know about the Devil. And the Devil is in the room with her son.

Act 2, Scene 24 – Alan and Dysart talk. Alan says that Dysart's pencil game made him tell a bunch of lies. Alan realizes that truth drugs will come next. Dysart asks Alan if he knows why he is at the hospital, and Alan replies that it is so Dysart can give him truth drugs.

Act 2, Scene 25 – Dysart and Hesther converse. Dysart knows Alan is looking for a way to tell him the full truth of things, and that truth drugs could be his excuse to do so. Dysart will give him a Placebo, probably an aspirin, he contends. Dysart knows that Alan trusts him as well. Alan is living in a modern world, without being able to be a part of it. He barely knows how to read, doesn't understand paintings, physics, or anything that can make the world real to him. And so he turns to worship instead.

Hesther contends that Alan has been in pain for years, but Dysart isn't so sure. Dysart further isn't so sure that he can take away Alan's pain if it is there. Hesther is distraught. But the passion that Alan knows for his horses is a passion Dysart has never known, and he envies such passion. He explains that all the time, Alan's eyes say to him, "At least I galloped! When did you?"

Dysart says he settled for being simple out of timidity, and the truth of his having no children is that he has a low sperm count. Hesther is dismissive, thinking that Alan is



only in pain, and is looking to Dysart as a father or a new religion, not accusingly for not galloping.

Act 2, Scene 28 – Dysart reads a quick letter from Alan, which explains that everything he told Dysart was the truth, and the he does know why he is at Rokesby. Dysart stays late to talk to Alan.

Act 2, Scene 27 – Dysart apologizes to Alan for not seeing him earlier in the day. Alan knows that Dysart was angry with him. Dysart consents to the truth drug for Alan. Dysart contends that Alan's nightmares would end if the truth drug, in pill form, was taken. Alan takes a pill, and chases it with a cigarette.

Alan leans back and begins to relax. He makes a comment about Dysart being unhappy, and then apologizes, only to believe the truth drug is beginning to work, that things just slip out. Dysart asks for more information about Jill, which Alan is reluctant to reveal at first, but finally comes around to telling Dysart that Jill lives about a mile from the stable.

Act 2, Scene 28 – Alan recalls Jill telling him how her father ran off one day, and her mother opened a place called the China Pantry. Jill explains she dates in secret, because her mother is always very strict with males she brings home, so she doesn't anymore. Jill wonders if Alan finds horses sexy, and explains that girls go through a phase where they find horses to be sexy, a substitute.

Over the course of time, Jill pursues Alan, who is shy and adverse to going out with Jill. Jill wants to go and see a skin flick. This entices Alan, and he agrees to go to the movies with Jill.

Analysis

Dysart, having discovered the origins of Alan's obsession with horses, and the inadvertent role his father has played in helping to twist the lines of Christianity and animalistic paganism, then proceeds to explore, in a very Freudian fashion, the sexual aspects of Alan. The sexual nature of Alan's worship of horses can be seen quite clearly, and so Dysart needs to understand Alan's own sexuality in order to further investigate Alan's condition. In this vein, he pursues questions about Jill.

Dysart also takes time to wonder about how the lives of children are shaped, how a string of memories can be put together, and why some things affect human lives, but not others. Indeed, he reflects on these influences in life as things that can enslave children. This also brings to light an important point to consider: what is the difference between enslavement and passion? When is someone passionate, and when is someone psychotic? Here, the reader must make up his or her own mind in determining the line between both.

Dysart himself is still jealous at having never experienced the kind of passion that Alan has, or anything even similar to it. Hesther, however, believes that Alan is not



experiencing passion of any kind, but is rather in pain, that he has been dealing with some kind of trauma that needs to be settled. But Dysart is more sensitive to Alan, seeing him as a modern citizen unaware of the modern world. He has nothing real which connects him to the present day, and so he turns to a warped kind of worship instead, because there he finds acceptance, power, and freedom.

Discussion Question 1

Dysart reflects on things that influence and enslave the lives of children. What sense does he make of this? Why? How is this important to the overall play?

Discussion Question 2

What does Dora blame for the things that Alan has done? What does she insist is not the cause of Alan's actions? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Dora, Frank, Hesther, and Dysart all have different ideas about what is going on with Alan, and what has caused him to commit such acts of barbarism. What are these ideas? Describe them. Which is closest to the truth? Explain.

Vocabulary

palpable, simultaneously, abreact, glowering, ferocious, pallid, timidity, provocative



Act 2, Scene 29 - 35

Summary

Act 2, Scene 29 – The theater is full of men, and Jill is the only girl. Alan describes the film being about a sixteen year-old girl who goes to stay in a house with an older boy who watches her completely undress to shower. It is the first time Alan has seen a naked girl. And then his father arrives at the theater, disrupting the show to get his son out. Jill also leaves.

Act 2, Scene 30 – Frank, Alan, and Jill all wait at the bus stop. Jill tells Frank that it is not Alan's fault, that it was her idea, and she doesn't mind films like that. Frank explains he arrived at the theater earlier for the purpose of posters, to print them up. But now that he knows what kind of films are being shown, he is going to refuse his services. They part ways so Alan can see Jill home. As Frank leaves, he looks scared of his son.

Act 2, Scene 31 – Alan and Jill begin to walk. Alan thinks of the look in his father's eyes. Jill finds the whole situation funny. Jill says that his father was only doing the same thing as his son. Jill is even more interested, however, to know if Alan was interested in the film itself. Alan realizes that all people have sex, and that his mother doesn't give his father anything. So his father goes off on his own with his own secrets. It makes Alan happy to think that other people have secrets, too.

Alan reveals that he wants to look at Jill's breasts, like in the film, but he keeps looking at her eyes instead. He feels free for the first time. He and Jill kiss, and then she brings him to the stables.

Act 1, Scene 32 – Alan is worried about having sex in front of the horses, so Jill says they will shut the horses away behind a door. They then enter the barn. Jill shuts and locks the door. Six horses are on the other side. They kiss and begin to undress, though Alan is distracted several times by the sounds of horses. Totally naked with each other, Alan wants to have sex with Jill badly, but he cannot bring himself to, because of the presence of Equus. He wants a horse instead of Jill. Alan panics and crouches by himself in the corner.

Alan screams at Jill to get out, despite her repeated attempts to stay. She finally leaves, horrified, when his face contorts with rage.

Act 2, Scene 34 – Alan stands alone, humiliated. He can hear Equus mocking him, laughing at him. Equus, Alan says, has seen everything. Equus says Alan is his, and no one else's. Flashes of Bible verses run across Alan's mind, about God seeing all and knowing all. And Equus seeing all, and knowing all. And then Alan snaps, stabbing out Nugget's eyes. Other horses appear, and Alan goes after them, stabbing out their eyes as well. Alan stabs at his own eyes with an invisible pick, asking to be found, and asking to be killed.



Act 2, Scene 35 – Dysart gets Alan to calm down. Dysart tells Alan that he can be treated now, that Equus can go away.

Hesther speaks to Dysart. He confirms the boy is in pain, and can be treated. But he also confirms that this treatment will probably make the boy a ghost. He'll live a normal life, without much passion, if any at all. And Equus will be gone for Alan, but not for Dysart. Dysart will be striking at Equus with picks. And there is a sharp chain that Dysart feels in his own mouth as well.

Analysis

Alan's extreme passion ultimately comes to hinder his relations with other people. Because he is obsessed with horses, with Equus, he cannot focus elsewhere when things require focus. At Dalton's stables, Alan cannot focus on Jill's naked body, but only on the bodies of horses, and on their eyes, staring into his. This ultimately ruptures the budding relationship between Alan and Jill, and ultimately compels Alan to snap, and go after the eyes of the horses around him, for his obsession with horses have now threatened his natural existence. Equus, once a liberating and empowering entity, has become the enemy.

It turns out that Alan is indeed in pain, and much of it is his own doing. There are multiple causal factors, but most of Alan's pain has to do with him turning on himself. By turning on Equus, Alan really turns on himself as well as is evidenced by the scene where Alan attempts to stab out his own eyes with an invisible pick. Dysart understands then that Alan can indeed be treated, and he shares this much with Hesther. But Dysart is worried that, without his worship, Alan will become nothing more than a ghost among others in modern society.

Dysart's conclusion is that he ultimately feels as if he has a bit in his own mouth. The bit is controlled by society at large, by magistrates and medicine, by normative judgments and assumptions, and Dysart is powerless, like a horse, against these greater powers, where Alan had found a way, for a while, to control the beast by controlling and worshipping horses.

Discussion Question 1

What part does Jill play in Alan's undoing? Do their desire for sexual activities serve as a symbol of societal normality and enslavement, or freedom from society? Explain.

Discussion Question 2

Do you believe that if Alan had viewed God as loving and merciful, rather than solely as watchful and judgmental, his life may have turned out differently? Explain.



Discussion Question 3

What do you believe is to blame for Alan's psychosis? Is it genetic, external, religious, societal, or something else? Explain, using evidence from the play to support your claim.

Vocabulary

bewildered, furtively, spontaneously, distorted, naturalistic, archetypal, pitiless, hysteria, cannoning, ardent, abstract



Characters

Martin Dysart

A psychiatrist at Rokesby Psychiatric Hospital in southern England, he is in his mid-forties, Martin Dysart tends to Alan Strang at the behest of friend and magistrate Hesther Salomon, attempting to understand Alan's obsession with horses, and with brutality. Dysart comes to envy the passion of worship that Alan has for horses, placing Alan far outside the mainstream and modern conceptions of normality. Dysart lacks any sort of passion at all in his own life, especially in his married life, which is boring and dull. He has not kissed his wife, Margaret, in six years.

Through a series of therapies, Dysart determines that he will indeed be able to treat and cure Alan, but knows that doing so will probably rob Alan of any and all passion Alan has in life. Alan, Dysart worries, will become nothing more than a ghost. The play ends with Dysart questioning his own life, and his own practice as a psychiatrist.

Alan Strang

A thin seventeen year-old boy, Alan is a patient at Rokesby Psychiatric Hospital in southern England. His psychiatrist is Martin Dysart. His parents are Frank and Dora. Alan, when he first appears in court and before Dysart, prefers to only sing, especially the jingle from Doublemint Gum. Eventually, through a series of therapies, Dysart is able to get to the root of why Alan has blinded six horses with a spike in one night.

Alan is mentally off-center, having come to worship horses, specifically a horse god called Equus, in place of God Himself. This passion that Alan has is strong and unrelenting, and Dysart knows that this places him far outside the British mainstream. Alan can be cured, but Dysart worries that Alan will lose all of the passion that he has, passion which most others rarely even get a taste of.

Hesther Salomon

An English magistrate, Hesther is friends with Martin Dysart, and first brings to him the case of Alan Strang. Hesther contends that Alan is in pain, and needs to be treated. In so doing, she becomes the symbolic figurehead of mainstream British society, which declares that a case like Alan must either be imprisoned or psychiatrically treated.

Frank Strang

The husband of Dora, and father of Alan, Frank Strang is a printer by trade. A Communist, he deplores modern society, hates the free market economy, and is an avowed, militant atheist. He hates the fact that his wife is religious, and blames God and



religion for his son's unraveling. Frank replaces Alan's image of Jesus before Calvary with an image of a horse from a calendar his shop prints up.

Dora Strang

The wife of Frank and mother of Alan, Dora is a caring woman who is a Communist, but very religious as well. She brings her son up, instilling in him scientific and religious knowledge. She is horrified at what has happened to her son, and hates the fact that British society blames the parents for the misfortunes of the children, no matter what.

Nurse

An attendant at Rokesby Psychiatric Hospital, the Nurse acts as both a restraint against Alan, and reports on his day-to-day activities to Dysart. The Nurse is kind but firm, using both gentleness and force against Alan as needed.

Dalton

A heavysset man in his mid-fifties, Dalton owns and runs a stable with his son. At first happy with having hired Alan Strang, Dalton later comes to find Alan to be strange, and believes Alan should go to jail rather than a hospital for the crime committed.

Jill Mason

A beautiful girl in her early twenties, Jill works at Dalton's stables. She meets Alan at Bryson's, an electronics shop, where she goes to find blades for a horse hair clipper. She is immediately sexually attracted to Alan, and pursues him after he is hired by Dalton. She and Alan go to see a skin flick together for a first date, and decide to have sex in the stables. But Alan's neurotic nature, and his obsession with horses, prevents him from having sex with her, and he drives Jill off instead. Jill comes to blame herself for Alan's turn, and suffers a nervous breakdown.

Nugget

Nugget is one of six horses quartered at Dalton's Stables. Nugget is the favorite of Jill, and becomes the favorite of Alan, who rides Alan around at night, becoming one with Nugget, who then transforms into the horse god, Equus. This eventually causes Alan to snap, with the result being that Nugget has his eyes stabbed out with a pick.

Equus

Equus is the horse god that Alan worships above all other horses, and which comes to replace God. Equus is omnipresent, and this causes Alan to eventually snap, going over the edge, and stabbing out the eyes of six horses with a pick.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Bible

The Bible, comprised of the Old and New Testaments, is the Holy Book of members of all Christian faiths. The Bible in this play is owned by Dora Strang, and read to her son, Alan, on a nightly basis. Alan and his mother hold the Bible in high esteem, while Alan's father, Frank, finds the Bible to be evil, wrong, violent, and full of bad sex.

The Horse Photograph

The horse photograph is a picture of a horse looking directly at the viewer over a fence. The horse photograph is put up by Frank to replace Alan's image of Jesus before Calvary. The horse photograph thus becomes Equus, and supplants God for Alan.

Image of Jesus Before Calvary

The Image of Jesus Before Calvary is purchased by Alan as a boy at Reed's Art Shop. It is a particularly bloody depiction of Jesus's suffering before Calvary, which unnerves Dora, but which Alan seems to like. The Image of Jesus is destroyed by Frank, being thrown out in the trash, and replaced by a horse photograph.

Aspirin

An aspirin is used as a placebo in place of a truth drug, and is administered to Alan. Alan, under the placebo effect, believes he has been administered truth serum, and so reveals in full detail all of the events of the night during which he blinded six horses with a pick.

Clothing

Clothing is worn and taken off by the characters of Alan Strang and Jill Mason. Alan removes his clothing every night that he goes riding around on the horses at Dalton's Stable, stashing the clothing in a tree hole. Clothing is removed by both Alan and Jill the night that they intend to have sex. In so doing, they free themselves from their shackles to be with each other, and divest themselves of the accouterments of society and civilization to be intimate with one another.

Settings

England

England is a non-continental European nation. It is the main setting of the play "Equus" by Peter Schaffer. It is where Rokesby Psychiatric Hospital, Reed's Art Shop, Bryson's Electronics Shop, and Dalton's Stables are all located.

Rokesby Psychiatric Hospital

Rokesby Psychiatric Hospital is located in Southern England, and is where people are treated for mental illness. It is where Dysart, the Nurse, and others work, and where Hesther brings Alan to be treated by Dysart. It is also where Alan's parents visit independently of one another, at different times.

Reed's Art Shop

Reed's Art Shop is an art store located in England, which sells pictures, paintings, and photographs of a variety of natures. It is in Reed's Art Shop that Alan Strang buys an image of Jesus before Calvary, using his own money.

Bryson's Electronics Shop

Bryson's Electronics Shop is where Alan Strang works Monday through Friday, selling electronics and related equipment. It is where he first meets Jill Mason, who comes into the store looking for blades for a hair clipper. It is there also that Jill entreats Alan to come and interview with Dalton at Dalton's Stables for a job on the weekends tending to horses.

Dalton's Stable

Dalton's Stable is owned and operated by Mr. Dalton and his son. It is where Jill Mason works, and Nugget and many other horses are stabled. It is where Alan comes to work at Jill's invitation to interview with Dalton. It is also where Alan and Jill attempt to have sex, but fail, because Alan can only think of horses. It is also where Alan blinds six of the horses using a pick.



Themes and Motifs

Normalcy

Normalcy is a major theme in the play "Equus" by Peter Schaffer. Normalcy includes that which is usual, acceptable, peaceable, and socially-approved by a majority or whole of a population, or by individuals. In the play "Equus", ideas of normalcy are on the minds of many characters, but most notably, on the minds of Dysart and Alan.

For Dysart, normalcy is that which is normal, meaning that which is not mentally imbalanced. As a psychiatrist, Dysart treats everyone from the neurotic to the psychotic to the insane. Dysart's understanding of normalcy has not only to do with socially-conventional and usual thoughts, behaviors, and lifestyles, but of mental cognizance, balance, and regularity. For Dysart, Alan's worshiping of horses is not a normal thing socially or scientifically. Dysart therefore endeavors to treat Alan, only along the way to wonder if what is considered socially normal is truly normal, because most of what is considered normal means there is no passion in life. He reflects on his own life as an example, where he goes home and reads about places he wants to go, but never goes. Dysart begins to wonder if perhaps society at large, himself included, is abnormal, because there is a lack of passion of any kind about almost anything among people.

For Alan, normalcy is at first that which is socially conventional and acceptable. He finds normality in the simple things in childhood, such as building sandcastles on the beach, or learning about God with his mother. But what is normal to society at large is considered unnatural and abnormal by Alan's father, who even goes so far as to throw out Alan's image of Jesus, replacing it with a photograph of a horse. Alan's love of horses, rooted in power and control and freedom, ultimately come to blur the lines of faith, warping Alan's sense of worship, and triggering an all-out obsession with horses. To Alan, this is normal at first, until his obsession endangers his relations with other people. It is then that he knows he needs help, and he ultimately entreats Dysart for a truth serum to be able to tell Dysart everything.

Religion

Religion is a major and underlying theme in Peter Schaffer's play, "Equus". Religion in the play consists primarily of Christianity, and the associated aspects of religion, such as worship, transcendence, and passion. Religion especially affects the character of Alan Strang.

When he is a child, Alan grows up with a deep and abiding love and respect for Christianity, instilled in him by his mother. But this love of Christianity is crushed by Alan's father, Frank, who condemns the Bible and religion routinely, going so far as to throw away Alan's image of Jesus before Calvary. Frank then replaces the image of Jesus with a horse, which conflates Alan's respectful passion for God with an obsession



for horses. Indeed, horses, in the form of Equus, ultimately come to take the place of God. Equus, and not God, makes up the center of Alan's world.

The obsession and extreme passion Alan has for Equus, for horses, comes to fully supplant Christianity, with many aspects of Christianity coming to influence Alan's worship of the equine. As one kneels and prays before God, Alan kneels before and worships horses. As one reaches a state of transcendence through meditation, peacefulness, and prayer, to achieve oneness with God, Alan rides around naked on horses to achieve oneness with Equus. As one loves God in one's heart, Alan loves horses externally as well, cuddling them, running his hands all over them, and bordering a very sexual relationship with them. Alan's religion of horses is therefore unusual, and indeed, warped.

Modernity

Modernity is an important and underlying theme in the play "Equus" by Peter Schaffer. Modernity has to do with the progress of civilization, and the associated culture and society of that civilization, running the gamut in everything from knowledge to work, education to science, art to politics, and so on. Modernity is exhibited best through the character of Dysart, and worst through the character of Alan.

Dysart is a symbol of modern society. He lives a simple, tranquil domestic existence. He works everyday, sometimes late. He is married, reads, has no children, has no affairs, and gets along in the world. An educated man of science and medicine, he is a psychiatrist. When people lose their way, become unsure mentally and emotionally, they look to Dysart, if not to God. Individuals like Dysart are the culmination of society's progress, and are supposed to be able to help society keep its bearings with modern techniques. But Dysart wonders if he is truly helping society at all sometimes, because there is so little passion in life.

Modernity, at its worst, is represented by Alan. Modernity masquerades as simple and domestic, but can be cruel and ruthless, as typified by the acts of aggression of Alan as a reaction against the world around him, and against his own obsession. Modern society looks upon any surge of passion, extreme or gentle, as extremism, and unacceptable. Any sort of passion is considered antiquated at best, and archaic at worst. And a passion such as Alan's is to be seen as utterly insane. And so when someone like Alan falls away from modernity, someone like Dysart must either recover him, or make room for him as a welfare case of modern society. Yet, Dysart knows that someone like Alan is not prepared for modern society. He doesn't understand physics or painting, and so has no place in the modern world. Thus, he turns to his passions, to horses. And he is condemned by the society that he could not find a place to fit in to begin with. Yet, when he tries to become part of modern society through relations with a girl, his own obsessions prevent him.

Styles

Point of View

Peter Schaffer tells his play "Equus" from the point of view of Martin Dysart, who acts as one of the two main characters, and the narrator of the play. Dysart relates the events of the play to the audience as though he is relating a story to his wife, or to a friend. This is done for two primary reasons. The first is that Dysart, the sane character, is able to objectively relate and analyze the events of the play to the audience. The second is that, Dysart, as an accepted member of modern civilization, is able to relate to modern civilization the events of Alan's life, inasmuch as Alan is not an accepted member of modern society. Because of this, modern society can understand the problems of Alan, who does not fit into modern society. Such thoughts allow modern audiences to reflect on modernity through Dysart's own reflections.

Language and Meaning

Peter Schaffer tells his play "Equus" in language that is uncomplicated, simple, and straightforward, though not without philosophical consideration. Because of the torment and twisted worship of Alan, the reader is hard-pressed to keep up with the events of the novel, trying to understand Alan, just as Dysart does. Dysart's insights are shared with the reader, and help the reader to navigate Alan's turbulent life. The simple language employed makes this easier, and also makes Dysart's deep and philosophical considerations of the case that much more convincing. Such an example includes when Dysart tells Hesther that Alan can be cured, but if this occurs, he will lose all of his passion, and will become a ghost in the modern world.

Structure

Peter Schaffer divides his play "Equus" into two chronological acts, further subdivided into thirty-five scenes. Each act focuses on a specific part of Alan's treatment, and his time with Dysart. The first act concerns Dysart's attempt to get to the root of Alan's problem, discovering and following the evolution of Alan's obsession with horses. The second act concerns Dysart's attempt to figure out where everything went wrong, plunging the worship of horses into a dramatic commission of brutality against them. This also allows Dysart -and the reader- to trace Alan's attempts to both conform to, and escape from, the pressures of modern society.



Quotes

Is it possible, at certain moments we cannot imagine, a horse can add its sufferings together –the non-stop jerks and jabs that are its daily life –and turn them into grief?

What use is grief to a horse?

-- Dysart (Act 1, Scene 1 paragraph pp. 9-10)

Importance: In this quote, Dysart reflects on Alan's obsession with horses, and on the idea of attempting to figure out what is in a horse's head. Is it possible that animals can become depressed, can become grief-stricken out of knowledge of their own lives?

Dysart wonders this as he proceeds through the play, for the quote mirrors Alan's own evolution as a character, and his evolution with horses. What use is grief to a horse, Dysart wonders, in its whole existence. Extrapolated, what use is grief, or worship, to Alan in his existence in modern society?

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

-- Dysart (Act 1, Scene 2 paragraph p. 13)

Importance: This quote from Dysart demonstrates Dysart's assumption that Alan will be a case like any other that he has dealt with before. To Dysart, psychiatry is all business, and nothing more, and a thousand kids with a thousand problems will be repeated by another thousand kids all over again.

Of course, I redouble my efforts to look professional –cutting and snipping for all I'm worth: mainly because I know that if ever those two assistants so much as glimpse my distress –and the implied doubt that this repetitive and smelly work is doing any social good at all – I will be the next across the stone. And then, of course –the damn mask begins to slip.

-- Dysart (Act 1, Scene 5 paragraph p. 17)

Importance: Here, Dysart reflects on his nightmare as a Greek chief priest, sacrificing children for the greater good. Dysart is doubting his own mettle, his own worth, and his own merit in modern society, as he cures children of their ills for the greater good.

Dysart knows, however, that if he lets any of his doubts show, society will turn on him, and tell him that he must be done away with for the greater good.

What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve over, does it?

-- Dora Strang (Act 1, Scene 7 paragraph p. 24)

Importance: Here, Dora Strang explains to Dysart that she has let Alan watch television at a neighbor's house, without knowledge of her husband. Alternatively, this could be construed as "ignorance is bliss". Yet, this statement can also be applied to Dora, who has lived in ignorance of the bizarre behaviors of Alan, which were not always related to



her by her husband. She is unaware that her son has serious problems throughout much of his life.

It was then –at that moment –I felt real alarm. What was it? The shadow of a giant head across my desk?

-- Dysart (Act 1, Scene 11 paragraph p. 41)

Importance: As Dysart delves deeper into the mind and inner world of Alan, he feels greater and greater alarm, because he is aware that Alan's problems are greater and more varied than originally anticipated. The head -the head of the child, of the horse- falls across the desk of Dysart, because this is where the source of the problems lay -both in the mind of Alan, and under the shadow of Equus.

Advanced neurotics can be dazzling at that game. They aim unswervingly at your area of maximum vulnerability... Which I suppose is as good a way as any of describing Margaret.

-- Dysart (Act 1, Scene 17 paragraph p. 57)

Importance: Here, Dysart describe's Alan's attempts to get under his skin -namely, Margaret, Dysart's wife. Dysart lives a very simple life, but he wishes things could be better with his wife. The one crack in Dysart's exterior is his wife, and wanting things to be more passionate, more alive, and more involved with her, and it is this crack with Alan attempts to exploit.

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.

-- Dysart (Act 1, Scene 19 paragraph p. 62)

Importance: Here, Dysart speaks of, and reflects on, modern society's conceptions of normality, and how such normality might vary. For children, a good smile is normal, but for adults, just going about their lives without passion is normal. Normality has a way of keeping things moving, but also killing conviction, compassion, and individuality.

Why?... Why Me? ... Why –ultimately –Me? Do you really imagine you can account for Me? Totally, infallibly, inevitably account for Me?... Poor Doctor Dysart!

-- Equus (Act 2, Scene 22 paragraph pp. 73-74)

Importance: Here, Dysart is confronted by the specter of Equus after the departure of Alan and Nugget. Dysart is struggling to account for Equus, and Equus knows that Dysart cannot account entirely for his existence in the mind of Alan.

He's a modern citizen for whom society doesn't exist. He lives one hour every three weeks –howling in a mist.

-- Dysart (Act 2, Scene 25 paragraph p. 79)

Importance: Here, Dysart is conversing with Hesther about Alan's condition as a



person. Alan doesn't fit into modern society, and the one place he does fit in -among his worshipping of horses- he can only exist as a part of once in a while. Alan doesn't understand painting or physics or anything that a modern citizen would, and so he retreats into worship in such an extreme way that any semblance of wanting to be a part of society is rejected, and so he is lost and alone, howling in a mist.

I mean he's in pain, Martin. He's been in pain for most of his life. That much, at least, you know.

-- Hesther Salomon (Act 2, Scene 25 paragraph p. 80)

Importance: In this quote, heather Salomon attempts to drive home the point that Alan is in pain, more so than anything else. And that is what she believes is at the root of his problems. She believes he has some sort of inner light which means he should not go to jail, but his pain must be cured. Dysart does not necessarily believe that pain is at the root of all of Alan's problems.

At least I galloped! When did you?

-- Dysart, after Alan (Act 2, Scene 25 paragraph p. 81)

Importance: In this quote, Dysart recalls to Hesther the things that Alan's eyes seem to say to him whenever he talks to Alan. While Alan may not be living a normal life, he has at least experienced things that most never will, namely, passion. And Dysart is jealous of Alan because of this.

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!
-- Dysart (Act 2, Scene 35 paragraph p. 108)

Importance: In speaking with Hesther about Alan's progress, Dysart confirms that Alan can be cured. But this curing may destroy Alan of all of his zest and passion, extreme though it might be. And if every single bit of passion is destroyed in Alan, Alan may become only a shell, a ghost of his former self, though he will be everything else that society expects him to be.