



Equus Presentation



Key Themes of the Play

- ▶ **Religion/Worship** - Throughout the play, Alan Strang worships his god, Equus, and he has a test of his worship when he attempts to have sex with Jill in front of the horses, but he fails to do so. Alan also whips himself whilst looking at the picture of Equus, as a form of religious worship.
- ▶ **Relationships** – Martin Dysart has to figure out why Alan committed the crime he did, and in order to do this, he must find out about his relationships with his parents. Also, the relationship between Dysart and his wife is also explored.
- ▶ **Freedom** - This is shown at the end, when Hesther wants Dysart to make Alan “normal”, but he fears that by making him normal, he will end his freedom and make him unoriginal and that he will remove Alan’s spirituality.
- ▶ **Blame** – This is shown at various points of the play, when Dysart is trying to figure out if it is Frank and Dora Strang who are to blame for Alan’s actions, and when Dora makes her outraged speech to Dysart blaming Alan entirely for who he is, and removing the blame from herself and her husband, Frank.



Style and Genre of the Play

The style of the play is both realism and naturalism. This is because, in the notes, Peter Schaffer explains that he had a friend that had heard of a real event in which a disturbed young man committed a crime which deeply shocked the local magistrates.

The genre of the play is tragedy. This is shown by the fact that the play is serious in terms of the way that the characters act and speak. Also, it features the demise of the relationships between Frank and Dora Strang and their son, Alan Strang.

How the Themes are Communicated

- ▶ They are communicated through the language Shaffer uses as the characters show emotion in the way that they talk. For example, when Dora Strang rants about Alan being at fault for the crime he had done, and that Dysart shouldn't look to blame it on either of the parents, she conveys the theme of blame entirely through the words she uses.
- ▶ The themes are also communicated through imagery as the characters talk to Martin Dysart about what they saw/did vividly. For example, Frank Strang talks to Dysart about what he saw Alan doing when he was whipping himself in front of the picture of Equus, like a form of worship. This shows the theme of religion/worship.
- ▶ The staging and stage directions are another way the themes are communicated, as, when Alan is riding the horse, he is on the circle bit of the stage, and not in the smaller, square bit, he is free. The square bit of stage is surrounded by the circular bit, and so when Alan is there, he is trapped, but when he is in the circular bit, he is free.
- ▶ The use of performance space and spatial relationships are a fourth way the themes are communicated when Alan 'passes dangerously close to Dysart', which reflects the theme of blame, as Alan clearly walks closely to Dysart on purpose, as if he is trying to intimidate him. He does this because there are many things in Alan's life that he needs someone to blame for, and with Dysart as an external form of authority (in the views of Alan) he blames him for everything wrong.
- ▶ The relationship between performers and audience is another way the themes are communicated. This is done through the character of Dysart, as he conveys the theme of relationships when addressing the audience in his soliloquy towards the start of the play, when he is talking about feeling ill carving victims. What he is actually saying is that he feels ill diagnosing people and trying to turn them 'normal', instead he would rather leave them as they are. He makes this speech to the audience, which, in turn, makes the audience his psychiatrist and him the patient, as he is talking about his issues to them.



Context

- ▶ The magistrates find the assault on the horses extremely shocking. This is because the hippy movements were now popular, and there were many campaigns for peace, including the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament)
- ▶ Psychiatry was a relatively new field of work, and all it really did was try and make the abnormal, normal. Dysart doesn't agree with the fact that we should change people to become normal, as he thinks it removes all integrity and takes away from who they are.
- ▶ Religion wasn't anywhere near as popular as what it was before the 1960's. And so the 1970's didn't involve too much religion and worship, which is why Dora Strang expects people to laugh at her when she mentions religion.
- ▶ Politically, 1970's started with Tory Prime minister Edward Heath, up until 1974, when the Labour party won the election and Wilson, then Callaghan were in power under Thatcher in 1979. When the play was written (1973), the Tories were in power, which reflects the angry nature of Frank Strang, as he is described as a socialist, so the politics of the time would've aggravated him.



Relevance to a Modern Audience

- ▶ With Dysart disagreeing with having to change people to fit the social 'norm', his view fits in with the modern view. Instead of changing people to make them into normal citizens, psychiatrists and therapist will attempt to make the person feel comfortable with who they are.
- ▶ Also, there is nowadays still a strong, left-wing opposition to the Tory influence in government, so the character of Frank Strang is one that can still be found in society today.
- ▶ The bit of the play when Alan whips himself as a religious ceremony is similar to Ashura, the Shi'a ceremony which involves whipping and cutting yourself to show your allegiance to Allah, or for Alan, Equus. Ashura is frowned upon in the UK nowadays, and seen as inhumane, which is the same way that an audience in the 70's would've felt shocked about Alan whipping himself for Equus.

Dysart Act 1 Sc 1 as a Performer

- ▶ I would use increasing inflection on the line "I kept thinking about the horse! Not the boy : the horse", with increased volume on the word "horse", along side an inquisitive manner in both the voice and the facial expression. This will show that Dysart is truly interested in the horse and what it is thinking, and not paying any attention to the boy.
- ▶ I would use mime on the line "You see, I'm wearing that horse's head myself". I would do this by pretending to pick up a horse's head and place it on my head, picking it up on "You see" and putting it on my head between "see" and "I'm". I would do this to really show that Dysart is invested into what he is saying, and, it will also draw attention from the audience, suggesting to them that he may be a bit mad.
- ▶ Furthermore, for lines immediately after "I'm wearing that horse's head myself", I would move quickly to face the two sides of the audience downstage, before holding onto the railings and saying the third clause to the audience upstage. I would speak whilst moving, and the movements would have to be quick, sharp movements, with plenty of hand gestures to accompany the speech. The lines would be "That's the feeling. All reined up in old language and old assumptions, straining to jump clean-hoofed on to a whole new track of being I only suspect is there", with the first movement being before "That's the feeling", and the other two movements during the separate clauses in the remaining sentence. I would once again do this to show that Dysart firmly believes what he is saying and that it is important to him, as he is trying to get the audience to believe it too.



Act1Sc1 Lighting Designer

- ▶ In would have diegetic lighting coming from Dysart, which would be a low intensity, small red light, to show that he is smoking, and so that it will draw a minimal amount of attention to him, enough so that the audience notice him, but so that the main attention is focused on Alan Strang. This is before anyone has said anything, as this is part of setting the scene.
- ▶ I would have a complete blackout apart from the dim spotlight from a backlit profile and the diegetic lighting from Dysart. On the first line “With one particular horse”, I would have a harsh spotlight appear on Dysart, with him turning off the red light he has at the same time. This will give a sudden revealing to the main audience of Dysart, and he will have a real cigarette in his mouth, but one that isn’t lit.