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Eruption of the Submissive: A Study of Neurosis in Peter Shaffer's *Equus*

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Abstract

Peter Shaffer's drama *Equus* has long been the subject of scholarly research, much of which centers on the psychological aspects of the work. However, none has directed the focus to a Freudian tripartite model of mind. On this basis, and in order to fill the gap in the literature on the topic, this article takes it upon itself to focus its attention on the psychological aspects in *Equus*, and tries to deliver a more comprehensive notion of the psychological flaws inherent in Alan Strang's character. Based on the Freudian model of the mind composed of id, ego, and superego, this article analyzes the play in order to uncover the clues of Alan's instability and abnormal personality in committing a horrible crime of blinding six horses with a hoof pick. Moreover, this study attempts to explain the impact of other characters' behavioral patterns on Alan, while applying the same model. Methodologically, this study is divided into two different sections: contrary to the critics' ideas that have associated the horses with either superego or the id, hereby it is argued that the horses can represent both, since Alan has mutated his sexual drives into religious fervor; in addition, Alan's personality crisis is explained in terms of lack of ego formation which prevents him from creating a balance between the sense of guilt injected by the superego and the pulsing desires of the id that ultimately results in the dreadful crime of blinding the six horses. Lastly, this study moves to a discussion of the relationships between individuals and society, and explores how individuals are forced to conform to certain standards of behavior, since the resulting homogeneity contributes to the maintenance of society and its values.

Key words: Equus; Ego; ID; Superego; Imbalance; Neurosis; Psychodrama

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INTRODUCTION

Sir Peter Levin Shaffer was a contemporary English playwright with a Jewish background acclaimed worldwide for his brilliant dissection of eccentric characters. His brilliance especially showed itself in two great plays, *Amadeus* and *Equus*, the first of which centers on the genius Mozart, and the second on the single-minded passion of an abnormal young boy.

Equus came out in 1973, and was performed on stage in the same year. According to Shaffer, he conceived of the idea when he heard about a young boy who had blinded six horses. He had been so haunted by the shocking crime that he decided to write a play in which he would have the chance of exploring the potential motives for such a terrible act. Later in 1977, *Equus* was directed as a movie by Sidney Lumet and the screenplay was written by Shaffer, based on this play with the same name. The play shows Alan Strang, the disturbed teenager as he is hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital, and is to be treated by Dr. Dysart, a man battling his own anxieties who is entreated by a judge to delve into the core of Alan's crime. The play, with its central theme of how a human being is influenced and disturbed by the different demands on his inner self, has been quite controversial, mostly due to its depiction of human agony, sexual content, undertones of

homoeroticism and bestiality, and full frontal nudity. But it would be too shallow to focus on its taboo subjects, as underneath it, there lies a grand portrayal of human misery and his subjugation by the forces governing life, which merits scholarly research.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

What strikes one in the body of literature surrounding *Equus* is the lack of a comprehensive study of the play in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis. Although a number of theses and articles have devoted themselves to the psychological aspects of the play, they have not done more than glaze over the Freudian psychoanalytic as it is manifested in the work. Other researches concern themselves with the greatness of Shaffer as a playwright and the controversial productions of his plays. The bulk of the research conducted on Peter Shaffer's *Equus* has focused on myth and its representations in the play. Others have adopted a psychoanalytic outlook, with their attention more directed on the oedipal implications of the relationship between Alan Strang and Martin Dysart. Despite the specific attention paid to the psychoanalytic aspects of the play, none has shed light on the ones on which this article wants to focus.

Among the works that were of special help to this article, K. A. Hudson' master's thesis, *Equus: A Psychological Interpretation Based on Myth* (1978) discusses *Equus* in terms of its depiction of myth, and cites numerous examples of the mythical features of the work. It also discusses the symbolism of the horse as shown in Shaffer's play. "'God-Hunting': The Chaos of Worship in Peter Shaffer's *Equus* and *Royal Hunt of the Sun*" by Barbara Lounsberry (1978) argues that both plays are mainly concerned with worship and humans' quest for finding an appropriate god. She claims that "indeed, a further breakdown of the structure of a Shaffer god-play reveals an inevitable and implicitly repetitive four part sequence: 1) the god free; 2) the god chained; 3) the god sacrificed; 4) the sacrifice chained, etc." (p.16).

Joan F. Dean's "Peter Shaffer's Recurrent Character Type" (1978) discusses how Shaffer uses place in order to convey a sense of characterization. This sense is further conveyed through culture and heritage. Later on, she discusses how Shaffer uses the same system to offer criticisms of these places and cultures, an example of which can be seen in *Equus* as a critique the barren modern life. Berry Witham (1979), in his article "The Anger in *Equus*," compares the play with another seminal work of theatre, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. Comparing the anger inherent in both plays, the writer goes on to comment on the closeted homosexuality barely contained in the two works.

"Literary Onomastics in Peter Shaffer's *Shrivings* and *Equus*" by Dennis A. Klein (1980) concerns itself with the names in Shaffer's plays and how they reveal information about those to whom they are applied. Among them, he mentions that Hesther, Alan, and Dysart stand for wisdom, strangeness, and discomfort with art, respectively. "The Double Crisis of Sexuality and Worship in Shaffer's Equus" by I. Dean Ebner (1982) begins by a description of the stage in Equus and how it accentuates the meanings unfolding before the audience. In his view, sexuality and religion are repeatedly linked in Shaffer's *Equus*, a fact he elaborates upon by citing different instances from the play.

James M. Welsh, in "Dream Doctors and Healers in Drama and Film: A Paradigm, an Antecedent, and an Imitation," (1987) discusses three films that are focused on psychiatrists: *Equus*, *Agnes of God*, and *Suddenly Last Summer*. In the sections devoted to *Equus*, the writer focuses on the relationship between Alan and Dysart, how the latter's problems may have stemmed from a weakness of heart, and also provides a thorough review of how the play was received among psychologists.

> This doctoral dissertation of J. C. Watson entitled *The Ritual Plays of Peter Shaffer* (1987) focuses on *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus*, and *Amadeus* as manifesting a high number of ritualistic elements, and discusses how this feature works in their unique structures and portrayal of character. Vera Gottlieb, in "Thatcher's Theatre—or after *Equus*" (1988), discusses how theatre is affected nearly a decade after the upheavals of the 60s. In doing this, she highlights *Equus* as a seminal play affecting other dramatic productions.

> "Peter Shaffer's Vision of the Failure of Society: A Study of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus* and *Amdeus*" by Lai (1989) takes these three important plays of Shaffer, and discusses them in terms for the portrayal of the individual vs. the society. In P. C. Jr. Wagner's master's thesis *The Rational vs. the Arational: Peter Shaffer's 'Divine Trilogy'* (1989) *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus*, and *Amadeus* are discussed in terms of their religious rituals. It is argued that each play features 2 characters, each representing either rationality or irrationality, and that the tension between these two sides propels the plot.

Peter Shaffer's Obsessional 'Myths/Religions': Amadeus, Equus and Yonadab from a Psychoanalytic Point of View, Maryam Soleimani Ardekani's (1992) master's thesis, discusses three of Peter Shaffer's seminal plays, and discusses them in terms of their representations of religions and myth-making, and how they lead to the individual's becoming ostracized. The thesis at hand differs from Soleimani Ardekani's in that it focuses more on the causes of Alan's abnormality, whereas the previously published research centers on the representations of communal myth-making rituals in Shaffer's play. Technology and Tragic Conflict in Peter Shaffer's *Equus* and Walker Percy's *The Thanatos Syndrome*" by Patricia C. Click (1992) compares the two works based on their portrayal of people disturbed by technology and morality, and having psychiatrist narrators. The article concerns itself with the dead society at the heart of *Equus*, and the individual pained by the bland, joyless society that surrounds him.

MacMurraugh-Kavanagh's 1998 lengthy study of Peter Shaffer entitled *Peter Shaffer: Theatre and Drama* focuses on his career as a playwright, his place in English theater, and the different noteworthy elements of his body of work. It is mainly used in the thesis's introduction in order to convey a better sense of Shaffer's position as a dramatist. Theodore D. George's "The Disruption of Health: Shaffer, Foucault and 'the Normal'" (1999) sees *Equus* as a critique of the practitioners of mental health care. In order to unearth this, George employs a post-structuralist perspective, that of Foucault, in order to reveal more than what a psychoanalytic perspective might.

Graham Wolfe's "Enjoying *Equus*: Jouissance in Shaffer's Play" (2010) looks at the play from a different perspective. While the other critics had focused on the joylessness of modern life, this article argues that perhaps modern life is oppressive because of its constant demand on the humans to enjoy everything. "The Relationship between Martin Dysart and Alan Strang in Peter Shaffer's *Equus* in the Light of Psychoanalysis" by Zafer Safak (2016) discusses the process of psychoanalysis performed by Dysart and how it reveals his troubled background in the process. According to Safak, transference and countertransference continually recur in the sessions between Alan and Dysart. Kim Marra's "*Equus* and the Production of Queer Historical Memory" (2017) digs deep into the historical past in order to unearth instances of hippophilia and homosexuality. It also focuses on the archetypal symbolism of the horse in the play. It then turns its attention to *Equus* in its film version, and discusses how these ideas and images are portrayed.

Putting aside the psychological realism and expressionistic devices employed in Shafer's dramas (Safak, 2016), it is undeniable that the work is a criticism leveled at psychoanalysis (George, 1999). Shaffer himself approved of the psychoanalytic associations of the play, and claimed that it was approved of by a child psychiatrist (Buckley, 1975), but in response to the enraged psychologists who saw the work as an affront to their profession, he claimed that he was serious about his profession, as they were about theirs (Buckley, 1975). In looking at this modern drama, many critics have noted the influence of Laing on Shaffer (Click, 1992), yet the absence of a wholly Freudian outlook makes itself felt, especially in light of the shades of meaning that it can provide the work. As such, this article takes it upon itself to focus on Freudian concepts as they are manifested in *Equus*.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The Neurotic and the Insane

This play has a host of characters who show a diverse range of mental disturbance, from the teenager who ruthlessly blinds animals to barren yet respected child psychiatrists yearning after insane passion. According to Ebner (1982), no adult in the play has a healthy relationship. Among these disturbed characters, Alan is condemned to be "normalized," since his personal brand of worship proves too exotic for the others' taste. He is sent to a psychiatric hospital to be expunged from his abnormalities. His most erratic behavioral patterns may be divided in two respects, the sexual and the religious.

In a household where the parents agree on the religious doctrine they wish to teach their children, or one in which they do not bash each other's form of faith as ridiculous, the child is given a chance to adopt a normal attitude with regard to religion. Unfortunately, Alan does not enjoy such a privilege. His mother, in clandestine sessions, manages to acquaint her son with a rich and vibrating account of biblical stories, and the father promptly silences the budding emergence of his son's religious fervor. This clash between the two forms of belief results in Alan's apotheosis of horses. According to Soelimani Ardekani (1992), Equus is a totemic God, a result of "fixation of infantile sexuality" and his guilt at Christ's suffering (p. 26).

Although Shaffer's animosity towards institutionalized religion is not a mystery, he claims in The Listener that this play is not solely concerned with Christianity (1976). In his worship of Equus, Alan appropriates the language of the Bible, and this creates a chilling critique of Christianity. The Biblical phrases he uses to worship his god serve to cast a ridiculing light on the language of institutionalized religion. By changing religious words and substituting them with gibberish, he casts a shadow on the holiness of the accepted religious practices, showing them to be susceptible to contempt and derision. What marks the line between holy and blasphemous if the mere changing of words shows them to be quite arbitrary? Furthermore, Alan's god is unforgiving and strict (Ebner, 1982). Equus does not deign to bestow mercy, yet is relentless in his prosecution. He is similar to a Catholic God in his demand for elaborate ritual and sacrifice, and an Old Testament God in his strict and unforgiving cruelty toward erring subjects. For an attempt at sin, even a failed one, he rushes at the repenting adolescent with great force. This god is not the one represented in the New Testament, since the Christian God advocates humbleness and compassion. Yet by the associations made between the two gods, it seems as if Shaffer is implicating the Christian God in his counterpart's cruelty. As must be noted, Equus does not impose any physical hardship on Alan in lieu of punishment for his sin, but merely makes his presence known by his all-seeing eyes. Oddly enough, the physical punishment results from the psychological one: Alan is castrated and left impotent, although nothing has been severed and no blood is spilt. Christianity (or institutionalized religion as Shaffer would have it) is implicitly responsible for castrating and inhibiting many from steeping forth from their cocoons and exploring new territories. As he admitted to Barbara Gelb (1965) in an

interview, he is of the belief that "no church or shrine or synagogue has ever failed to misuse its power" (pp. 2, 4).

As regards the method of worship that Alan uses, it must be noted that it is highly ritualistic. It takes place in special times, with special apparatus that are handled delicately and with care. Again comparisons may be drawn between the rituals of the Christian church, especially that of the Catholic one, and Alan's equine religion. Alan casts himself down in front of Equus' picture, and subordinates himself to the degree that his presence virtually vanishes. As is implicit in his desire to be united with his god, he needs to be obliterated in order to be reborn as a higher entity, merged forever with his god. But this slavery is not unrequited, since in the ceremony, Alan is both slave and master of the God-horse (Ebner, 1982). Alan is not alone in bearing the yoke, as the god wears it as well.

Religion is not the only matter over which the Strangs are divided, since sexuality and sexual conduct is also an issue in their household. Dora seems quite sterile, and she does not show any special warmth towards her husband. Although she's the one who introduces her son to sexual knowledge, she does so in a vague manner, and in so doing, weaves sexual instinct with God's will to have humans procreate, thus associating the two in Alan's mind. On the other hand, Frank seems to have clear standards about correct and incorrect sexual conduct, yet he is seen by his son as watching a pornographic movie at a cinema. This conflicted background paves the way for an explication of Alan's abnormal sexual conduct.

When riding a horse for the first time as a young boy on the beach, he admits to Dysart how the whole experience was particularly arousing, and how the bliss of sexuality was brought to an abrupt end by his father. Later on, when his father replaces the picture of Jesus by one of a horse, Alan has an ever-present reminder of that ecstatic childhood moment when he felt nearly orgasmic. As a result, he spends night in front of the picture, worshipping his god with fervor. What is important here is that no explicit sexuality is mentioned in this scene (which is witnessed by the father), but the tone of the worship and its intensity, especially in light of some subsequent scenes, point to the sexual nature of the worship, and according to Soleimani Ardestani (1992), Alan's strong sexual impulse has been sublimated by Equus. Later on, when working in the stables, he takes Equus for nightly rides, enjoying the power coursing between his legs. The pleasure he receives from contact with the horse is another example of the abnormal behavior for which he is persecuted.

Alan's sexuality is not completely enslaved by a love for equines. When talking about Jill, he is particularly reluctant, which arouses Dysart's suspicion that the teenager found the young girl sexually attractive. Jill is more assertive than Alan, and invites him for a rendezvous. But although he deeply desires to consummate her relationship with Jill, he cannot. Soleimani Ardestani (1992) has claimed that Alan's impotence stems from the fact that he subconsciously fears castration as he sees Jill's genitals. Enrages by this impotence, he blinds the six horses.

Alan's behavior bears investigations on another account as well. As far as his behavioral patterns and words are concerned, he may be said to be an example of a masochist. This conclusion is arrived at if one considers both his religious and sexual behavior. For instance, as regards the former, he takes pleasure in prostrating himself in front of his God. He aspires to rise to the God's level, but he seeks to achieve this through reducing himself to the degree that he is left with no personality apart from that of the God. The fact that he is so submerged in the God's presence may be attributed to his lack of a well-developed ego part. Because of this abnormality, he does not perceive himself as anything significant. When the self is not significant, and does not possess the power to distinguish between the different options available to him, he will eagerly fling himself at anything remotely promising. Therefore, Alan seeks to inundate himself in his God, he wishes to become one with the God, since early on, when riding on the beach, he became aware of the power the rider possessed because of his horse. Also, he had grasped a knowledge of this power from the biblical stories his mothers had recounted to him. In those passages, the horse was described as being indistinguishable from the rider, since both had become one with each other. This is the same power that Alan aspires to. The bit that he places in his own mouth is also an example of those masochistic desires he is thought to possess. Also, if viewing his behavior in this light, it may be said that his impotence at consummating the relationship with Jill is a result of his wish to be berated. By showing sexual failure, he will be degraded as a male, and thus will deserve the heap of chastisements unleashed upon him. But when his impotence is revealed, Jill does not show herself to be the chastising and accusatory mistress. Instead of being mocking, she proves to be quite understanding and compassionate, and offers to help him with his problem. This is more unbearable to Alan, since he does not need her compassion, he needs her to chastise him just as the superego would have done. As a male, the society expects him to virile, and this expectation can be seen reflected in the superego. When Jill fails to provide this chastisement, Alan shuns him and turns to Equus.

This claim singly bears speculation up to this point, but when further developments in the story are considered, it must be coupled with the Freudian theory of the mind in order to be applicable. Throughout his life, Alan has suffered through many different outbursts. Early in his childhood, his father had torn him down from the top of a horse when he was enjoying a ride for the first time. Later, television as a source of pleasure had been denied him, and he had to watch it surreptitiously. When he developed a passion for religion, his religious fervor was cut short by an atheist of a father who thought his son's

behavior stemmed from perverse sexuality. When visiting the cinema that showed pornographic scenes, Alan had to leave because he was spotted by his father. It only seems natural that he expects no answer different than disruption, and as such, it is possible that in his subconscious, the two factors of pleasure and chastisement have come to be associated with each other. He is aroused by what is bound to induce displeasure in others, and displeasure in others is aroused at the sight of his pleasure. Thus he may have subconsciously brought about an act of chastisement in others in order to augment his pleasure by tinting it with pain.

Here some may argue that Alan does not experience a disruption of passion with regard to Equus, since he could have enjoyed his nightly rides with Nugget while he worked at the stables. In answer to this, it has to be argued that in worshiping Equus, Alan derived the masochistic pleasure he sought from subjecting himself to nothingness, since in the greatness with which he endowed Equus, his own significance came down to a level next to zero. Also, since Equus the God is an omniscient entity, his ever watchful eyes act as effectively as any deterrent. Thus, considering the above notions, Alan can be said to veer towards masochism in a number of behaviors he exhibits throughout the play.

2.2 When Sex and Religion Face Each Other

As was previously noted, Alan combines religion and sexuality in order to relieve himself from a deeply disturbing and unrelenting sexuality that could find any healthy outlet. This combination had proved fairly efficient, up to the point where religion and sexuality had an inevitable clash. Where Jill choses for the rendezvous is a sacred place to Alan, sex and religion are juxtaposed (Ebner, 1982), and thus the affair takes on a sacrilegious overtone. When touching her, Alan is unable to feel her by his side as a woman of flesh, since the neighing and watching eyes of his god are embossed across his mind. Therefore, he cannot find the inner peace to let go of his inhibitions and enjoy his time with Jill. After ordering Jill out, he has to face his god, and he does so by an act of rebellion. A retaliation is now to be made, since as a punishment for his crime, he is now the one to be maimed and sacrificed.

2.3 Normal or Abnormal, That Is the Question

Alan is primarily submitted to the hospital because his behavior fails to accord with society's standards. It is inconceivable for this society that a young boy should worship a horse. But in this section, it is attempted to show that Alan's behavior is simply a continuation of long-held traditions of humanity. According to Fromm (950),

> Man may worship animals, trees, idols of gold or stone, an invisible god, a saintly man or diabolic leaders, he may worship his ancestors, his nation, his class or party, money or success. His religion may be conductive to the development of destructiveness or of love, of domination or of brotherliness, It may further his power of reason, or paralyze it, he may be aware of his system as being a religious one, different from those of a secular realm, or he may think that he has no religion and interpret his devotion to certain allegedly secular aims like power, money or success as nothing but his concern for the practical and expedient. The question is not religion or not but which kind of religion, whether it is one furthering man's development, the unfolding of his specifically human powers, or one paralyzing them. (pp. 25-26)

As can be seen, not all human beings find it in themselves to worship the same god, one that is approved of by all, yet society demands an understanding of the chosen deity. What Fromm here defines as a key characteristic for the religion, that is, its ability to propel one forward, is undoubtedly blurry, and subject to interpretation. If one considers it simply from an individualistic perspective, it may be said that Alan's religion is certainly beneficial. Because of his God, he has the ability to lose himself and find an outlet for his sexuality. Through his worship, he can differentiate himself from others, and become the complete man, the man one with his god. From this perspective, the blinding of the horses is the denouement to a battle between god and man, the one in which Alan takes the situation in his stride, and manages to free himself of the divine stare when it gets too oppressive. What results in his hospitalization is the fact that this battle is not recognized and identified by the society as such, but as the working of a deranged mind.

Also, as Jung is quoted by Antonio Moreno (1970),

> To be normal is the ideal aim for the unsuccessful, for all those who are still below the general level of adaptation. But for people of more than average ability, people who never found it difficult to gain success and to accomplish their share in the world's work — for them the moral compulsion to be nothing but normal signifies the bed of Procrustes — a deadly and unsupportable boredom, a hell of sterility and hopelessness — consequently there are just as many people who become neurotic because they are merely normal as there are people who are neurotic because they cannot become normal… To be a social and adapted person has no charms for one to whom such an aspiration is child's play. (p. 183)

This is a belief shared by Alan and Dysart, although the latter is more aware of it on an abstract and theoretical level. Dysart, as is manifested in his dreams and speeches, is fully aware how Alan's worship is a distinguishing feature, what keeps the boy "alive" in a modern world full of semi-human creatures. He knows enough of the world to renounce its ideals for the sake of those he has read about in books, yet he is doomed to be the executioner for the society's governing morality. On the other hand, Alan does not possess the same sophisticated worldview that Dysart does. He is simply grabbing instinct by the hand, he worships his god, not because he wants to renounce society, but because he cannot conceive of another way of living. He cannot grasp how one may not take Nugget

for nightly rides of ritual, since that is the only thing that occurs to him. He is the "noble savage" deemed important by the Romantics, the man who simply feels and acts, without awareness of what his actions signify to the intellectuals and the masses.

This view of the play as a whole is one that does not clash with Shaffer's beliefs. As he admitted to Tom Buckley (1975),

> I think a great deal more self-reliance and tolerance of personal eccentricity would do the American character a great deal of good. . . . But I do think one has the right to be eccentric or different. To be more and more extremely one's self. To discover one's self. To make one's self—one isn't born one's self—and it's a hard job. (pp. 24-25)

This is a view proved to be quite controversial, since apart from those who saw it as harmless (Gottlieb, 2009), some critics were quick to point out that his play is a defense of insanity. These claims are based mainly on the appreciative remarks of Martin Dysart in relation to Alan's worship and his reluctance in curing the boy of his sickness. In answer to these claims, Shaffer, in a 1975 article published in Vogue, defended Dysart and himself against these accusations and made it clear that there was no doubt that the blinding of the horses is a heinous act, yet one that stems from individual rigor and power.

2.4 Imbalance and Its Results

Different critics have offered different explanations for Alan's crime. According to Soleimani Ardekani (1992), Strang is a neurotic because the failure of his obsession leads to his spiritual death. Others have seen Alan's "sexual confusion" to be what led to the boy's emotional difficulties (Welsh, 1987, p. 121). In this section, it is argued that Alan's problems stems from the fact that his ego is undeveloped, whereas his superego and id are extremely powerful and demanding. Similarly, Kapustin (2015) claims,

> The specifics of normal and abnormal personality are determined by its three main features: the degree of tension in the conflict between the superego and the id, the position of the ego in relation to this conflict, and the particular features of the formation of this position. (p. 8)

Throughout the play, he is seen as haunted by an overpowering superego, represented in different degrees by his father, mother, god, and society. Always held responsible before the superego, he cowers and relents to its demands. He adopts religious fervor because of his mother's encouragement, and when his father replaces the picture of Jesus with a horse, he simply transfers his feelings to the new image. When Jill tells him his father is a hypocrite, he accepts what is said, and rebels against Frank. At the end of the play, it is shown that by all likelihood, he will not prove too difficult for Dysart to heal, since he too has come to be a father figure for Alan.

In addition to the superego, the play is also rich in its portrayals of the id and its great power. According to an article published in *The Guardian* (2007), *Equus* is a passion play which begins when Frank replaces the picture of Jesus with a horse. It also reveals the consequences of when humans long too much for passion. Critics too have noted the instinct and passion portrayed in the play. Hudson (1978) draws a parallel between Dionysian rituals and Alan's worship, and Shaffer himself admitted that the play was written because of his wonderings about his own mental state and myth (Gussow, 1974). Alan simply does whatever his instinct dictates to him. He does not filter his actions according to how they will affect others or himself, since he is oblivious to consequences. He rides and blinds horses at is occurs to him. The strong id leads him to worship a horse, with no apparent defenses or barriers against a practice deemed bestial by society. This strong passion is what makes him unique, what differentiates him from the passionless and sterile Dysart, yet it drives him powerfully toward destruction. The power of Alan's id is still more intensified since it is combined with his superego. Because of the intense power of the superego represented by his father, mother, and religion, he is barred from giving vent to his urges. As a sublimation, he has directed his sexual desire towards his object of religious reverence, and the powerful mix of the two warring sides are converged, forming a current too strong for Alan to fight off, especially since his ego is not a well-developed one.

According to Hudson (1978), Alan is searching for his selfhood, and his unconscious has dominated the conscious. But this article wishes to go one step further, and claim that Alan's ego is virtually non-existent. As was shown above, from early on he has been dominated by the ideologies others have imposed on him. In this, he has merely been an empty receptacle for the others to fill according to their desire. No conscious filtering of the input has been undertaken, and he has simply been adopting whatever was offered. Alan's behavior throughout the play is impulsive and spontaneous. He does not show any sign of pondering over his actions or considering them in any great respect. He is a man of action, subsumed in his single-minded obsession with the horse. He has special difficulty in relating his experience to Dysart, a fact that may be attributed to the depth of his feelings and their importance, but also to the reason that he does not possess any coherent thoughts about his actions. Although Safak (2016) claims that Alan is a perceptive character who makes the others aware of their problems, it must be mentioned that this perceptiveness of his only emerges with regard to others. The discussion at hand only concerns itself with Alan's awareness of his own affairs.

Due to this lack of perceptible ego, Alan does not possess a fair intermediary. He is pulled between rationality and irrationality (Safak, 2016), either urged on by his desires, or else condemned because of them. His love and passion for his equine god proves unacceptable

to society, and so does his rebellion against the god. The whole context of the play is telling with this regard, since it portrays Alan being sent to the hospital after his trial. The setting of the play, that is seen as resembling that of a Greek tragedy (Hudson, 1978), hosts a number of characters who sit on stage and witness the action unfolding, well showing the fact that the judges are always watching Alan. He is condemned and judged by all who walk on the stage, without any visible defense against their accusations and attacks.

Alan's ego did not fully develop simply because it was not allowed to do so: Alan was not given the proper time and guidance to make his own decisions. In order to appease his sexuality and keep the superego satisfied, Alan resorted to project this sexual feelings onto those associated with religious fervor, thus strengthening his id by feeding it, without threatening to wake the superego's wrath. Due to the suppression imposed on his ego, Alan is feeling overpowered and oppressed. On the one hand, he is haunted by an increasingly intensifying lust for gratification, and on the other, he is barred from the pleasure, and cowered into submission. In order to free himself from this bondage, the only recourse he can find is an act as horrendous and shocking as the blinding of horses. Two opposing and great forces are torturing him; in response, he can rage against one, since the other does not have an outward manifestation, only rages inside. Thus the mystery of the crime is solved in context of Freudian psychoanalysis.

2.5 *Equus* and Its Characters

The fact that the play is deeply symbolic is not hidden to anyone, and the most functional symbol that most of the critics have concerned themselves with is the image of the horse. Dennis A. Klein (1980) sees the horse as a religious symbol for people of yore. Kathleen Ann Hudson (1978) claims that the centaur is the most prevailing image in *Equus*; she takes its horse part as sees the animal as a symbol of god; "a fertility symbol for Alan, whose life at home is barren" (p. 76); and a symbol of transcendence, since Alan "transcends his own limitations through the psychological symbol of the horse, becoming one with his god, one with infinity" (pp. 77-78). In this thesis, the horse is seen as representing the superego, since its omniscient eyes are always looking at Alan.

Eyes are featured prominently in the play. Their gaze is not endearing or encouraging, it is accusatory and demanding, accepting nothing less than complete submission to the power of the superego.

The superego is not merely represented by the horse. Frank, Dora, and the magistrate also work as representatives, yet their degree of omniscience is less than the horse. Frank is the person who is always standing against her son's enjoyment. Although throughout the play, he had functioned as a figure of authority, in the last section, his authority was subverted. Dora too imbues her son with religious fervor. She has done this in order to shape her son according to her own standards. Lastly, Hesther Salomon, whom Klein sees as representing the wise Queen Esther and King Solomon (1980), may also be seen as a representative of superego, since she works in the judicial system, and holds great authority. She is the one who decides what is normal and who should be subjected to change in order to become so.

Alan, whose last name resembles "strange" (Klein, 1980), can be said to stand for id in the play. He rarely shows any self-control, and follows blind instinct as it comes his way. Throughout the play, he submits to the animalistic desires that surge through him, regardless of the repercussions that may ensue. He does not offer any rational explanations for his behavior, and feels closer to the animal than he does to actual human beings.

Lastly, Dysart may be said to represent the ego. He is ever so conscious of what he does and what is required of him. He no longer believes in what he does for a living, yet he dutifully fulfills what is demanded from him, since like his dream, he does not want to admit to the society that he is no longer a believer in its norms. He is haunted by dreams of letting go of his inhibitions and embracing the animalistic desires he hungers after, but he still cannot do so since his awareness of the social requirements of his role is relentless. In the fact that he keeps a balance between his desires and duties, he is said to represent the ego.

On another note, the dynamic relationship between Alan and Martin suggests that they may be twins or foils. Alan and Dysart share interests, since both wish to lose themselves in the ancient and pagan rituals. According to Kalson (1973), Dysart "coldly surrounds himself with books on ancient Greece and looks at pictures of centaurs, while the boy is himself wildly becoming a centaur in a Hampshire field and reliving the myths which the doctor can only read about" (p. 514). This shared interest points to their similarity. Therefore, in some respects, Dysart may be said to be the future Alan, the boy after being "cured" of his eccentricities. As desired, the new Dysart/ Alan is a respected society member, someone useful, yet sterile and passionless. As regards the twinship between the central characters, an article in New York Times mentions that they recur in Shaffer's other plays as well, and that they are symbols of his relationship with his twin brother Anthony (2016). This twinship also takes the form of opposed forces, each highlighting the aspects that the other lacks. For instance, while Alan is troubled because of his lack of a decisive ego, Dysart suffers because his ego has barred him from realizing many of the dreams and passions he has. According to Safak, Alan and Dysart keep changing roles, and Alan often assumes the dominant role with regard to his psychoanalyst (2016).

Frank has inculcated a deep rooted fear in Alan with regard to sexuality, and has made it quite strange for him to see his sexuality as something normal. The father is the guardian of the word and in this capacity, he can bestow

unkind words on Alan for his desires and yearnings. Oddly enough, witnessing his son worshipping in a strange way and thus seeing his unnaturalness, the father refuses to supplement the word for him. This failure or reluctance to provide the situation with an apt name leads to its remaining unknown and undefinable. Without a name, Alan's desires and inclinations stay amorphous and as such, leaves little space for him to improve his behavior or deal with his issues. Instead of this healthy attitude, and without the mediating factor of the ego, he has to lean in to what his father presses down on him, that is, the picture of the horse. In this instance, he transfers his feelings of passion from biblical stories to the horse. Also, Alan's obsession with the horse may have developed from this untimely abruption of his desire. Additionally, the father disrupts the pleasure Alan could have experienced with Jill. His accusations may have influenced Alan in his decision to blind the horses, since their accusatory stares resembled the one his father had leveled at him hours earlier.

Equus is the most important character in the play. As the eponymous character and the one who is the object of worship for Alan, he is the embodiment of desire and passion. Conversely, he is also the character who is a representative of the pressure and the force of society. Passion and restriction are joined in this entity, and that is what disarms Alan. Had he been a boy with a well-developed ego, he would have been able to mediate the two warring sides represented by Equus, but having failed to develop such a distinguishing ability, he is crushed in the force of the pressure the combination of passion and restriction impose on him. This fact helps the reader understand why Alan veers dangerously to opposite poles with regard to the relationship between him and Equus. He must either submit to the God completely and be crushed, or else he should rebel and blind the entity. There is no middle ground in this fight between the opposites, and Alan's behavior has been a reaction to this issue.

Jill is the one who encourages Alan in his rise against the father. She points out to him that his father is a hypocrite, and that while coming to the theatre to watch the movie himself, he had berated his son for doing the exact same thing. As a result of this, Alan is persuaded to rise against the father. Although he finds it quite hard, he manages to stammer his acknowledgment of the hypocrisy of his father, and thus provides the father with an apt name, labelling a man who has spent his life labelling others. After the verbal rebellion comes the rebellion committed by the flesh. That is, Alan agrees to rise against the greater father, Equus. This rebellion is on a grander scale than the one raised against his father, since he has been emboldened by the success of the former. He agrees to commit this crime of flesh in the shrine where he used to genuflect before his God. Arriving at the stables, and excited by the prospect of acting out his desire, he is blocked by the sound of the reprimanding God. He cannot bring himself to commit the sin, and as a result, lashes out against the harsh God who will nonetheless punish him for his infidelity. Since the second rebellion was spurred on by the success of the first, and since the first was brought about by the urging insistence of Jill, she may be said to be influential in his rise against the tyranny of Equus.

2.6 Society and the Individual's Interactions

Many critics have discussed the play in terms of its societal implications. Patricia C. Click (1992) claims that *Equus* shows "that science and technology are concerned with the individual only as part of a groups, the individual is usually lost" (p.10); and she further states that in the play, modern society is dead (p.11). Dean (1978) sees in the play an attack against the British Law. Another striking issue portrayed in *Equus* is the narrow definition of what is normal and what is abnormal. Shaffer himself is aware of how a definition of normal behavior is defined and maintained by societies, he is quoted as having said, "I think I had not sufficiently realized when I began *Equus* how deeply the levelling and limiting of the human psyche by a cult of narrowly defined Normality is a common preoccupation of our time" (1987, p.49). Also, Ebner (1982) raises a valid question in the context of the play:

> As for sexual fulfillment, how is this, also, to be achieved in an era which either exploits sexuality openly, stifles it through parental and religious admonitions, or sublimates and redirects its ecstasy into longings for the commercial products of a technological civilization? (p.30)

It is indisputable that the society depicted in the work does not offer a healthy substitute to Alan's mode of worship. No character is shown who has a healthy and normal form of worship and sexual enjoyment. Dysart does not enjoy genuine sex or worship, but has "society's tame substitutes for each" (Ebner, 1982, p.31). Frank is fanatically opposed to religion and all that it stands for, choosing instead to flaunt his godlessness. But for all his pride in being an intellectual, he is no less barren and lifeless. He has to take recourse to watching pornographic movies, and does not enjoy a warm and affectionate relationship with his wife, or for that matter, any other human being. The pornography that he watches is a replacement for genuine sexual ecstasy (Ebner, 1982). Dora has religion, but her religion is another form of fanaticism. She seems haunted by her religion, and does not express joy at possessing faith, it is simply an order of the superego to be followed and passed on the next generation. Her relationship with her son is also primarily based on the importance of educating him in matters of religion. Hesther Salomon, who is the upholder of societal norms (Ebner, 1982), "is a symbol of the double shallowness and of the double crisis of our times" (p.32).

In this modern life, humans are wandering, lost individuals that walk in a semblance of a community of normalness. In this life, worship and sexuality, which are usually linked, do not come easily to the individual. According to Barbara Lounsberry (1978), the fact that

modern lives are permeated by gods makes a unified worship difficult. She further explains:

> Yet it seems to me that when we begin to examine the theme of worship in the play and to note how Alan's Equus is made up of conflicting aspects of the gods of Alan's society, we begin to see that Shaffer is suggesting that Alan's pathology is society's pathology, that our current social neurosis (or psychosis) is due to our inability to establish a hierarchy or priorities among our conflicting gods and thus to worship properly. (p.22)

Equus depicts Alan fighting against the oppressive modern world (Plunka, 1988). Although in Shaffer's worldview, God is "something right outside the universe and essentially irrelevant to it and to everyday dealings in the world" (Taylor, 1964, p.12), in his play, the characters find god as the ultimate source of salvation from their surroundings. Despite their differences in the validity of each other's gods, they nonetheless see worship (or lack of it for that matter) as the definitive mark of life and character. The clash between different religions is what lies at the heart of the drama. According to Soleimani Ardestani (1992), Strang's problems arises from his society:

> Strang, too, as Salieri does, endeavours to become identical with his pagan/Christian obsession. The development of Strang's obsession is the product of the frustration Strang experiences through his society. In fact, his obsessional neurosis is engendered by society: his society is one devoid of passion, imagination, and intuition. In order to protect the passion within him, Strang retreats from his society, by an act of rebellion which creates his obsessional neurosis. Society, needless to say, is the more capable rival, and condemns Strang to insanity. Strang, however, as Salieri had done, compromises with his society by agreeing to undergo medical care and to eliminate the passion within him. (p. 19)

Alan is the individual that stands before the society, alone and solitary in his worship. He is called on different sides to join their cult of prayer, yet he manages to stir up an exclusive god-figure for himself, one that he has scraped up from the pieces of the acceptable forms of worship preached to him. His success in unsettling the society actually stems from his weakness, meaning his failure to develop a criticizing and mediating ego. It seems as if all his life, Alan has lived as a great receptacle, absorbing what has been poured into him and merely vomiting back the mixed ingredients. Alan's Equus is a mix of the ritualistic, sexual, voyeuristic, revengeful, and all-encompassing, and as such, it is a grotesque pastiche of acceptable practices of society. In his fight against society undertaken to win individual right of worship, Alan is oddly mocking, because by his actual adoption of societal practices, but refusing to adopting them completely, he threatens society from within. His strategies are unsettling, since without introducing an original subversive element, he manages to shock many with his acts. He holds a broken mirror up to society, and holds up the fragmented images as true representatives of the nature of the society he lives in.

The sexual side of Alan's religion is ever-present in the society as well. Most characters of the play seem to be troubled by sex and sexual matters, either abstaining from them completely or else engaging in it to excess. The notables among the first group are Dora Strang and Margaret, Dysart's wife; and the ones preoccupied with sex are Dysart, Frank Strang, and Jill. In Shaffer's *Equus*, Dora is not depicted as having a particularly warm and affectionate relationship with her husband; on the other hand, she is very much detached from him. All her warmth seems to have been channeled into her role as a mother, and in this respect, she tries to educate the object of her maternal attentions. Interestingly, when Alan fails to become who she has expected him to be, she withdraws her love, and is not reticent to claim to Dysart that the blame for the crime rests on her son. Margaret is another sterile character portrayed in the play. She too is a wife, yet not a mother, and is defined by her job as a dentist. With regard to her, it might be interesting to note that while talking about her job, Dysart mentions that he has not kissed her in a long while. The significance of a woman who cleans mouths not having been "soiled" by the mouth of another must surely not be lost on the reader. On the opposite pole from the sterile women, Jill is the voluptuous one who is not afraid to pursue her desire. She is single, and does not seem to be hindered in sexual matters, and this fact, compared with the sterility of the two wives represented in the play, may raise interesting questions with regard to Shaffer's view of matrimony. Among the men, Frank Strang projects his fascination with sex onto others and accuses them of being perverts, whereas in reality, he is the same as the other men present at the cinema. Interestingly, his hidden motives are revealed by Jill, the girl who is not ashamed to pursue her sexuality, and openly admits to being interested in satisfying her desire. Lastly, Dysart is also hankering after sexuality, yet his is somewhat modified, because it has morphed into a general thirst for passion and active energy. Since he is not excited by his wife, instead feels jealous about Alan's sexual/religious passions, it might be claimed that he longs for the unlawful sexual acts, further pointing to the similarity between him and Alan.

The voyeuristic elements of Alan's religion are also mirrored in his society. His mother has warned him about an omniscient God who is always present. God is always watching and no error will go unnoticed. But God is not the only voyeur in the play. Dysart enjoys listening to Alan, fascinated by the images he calls to life for him, as if he is living the life Alan has led. Frank has watched his son worshipping, an act that had been taking place in solitude. Jill too, has watched Alan with the horses, and thus knows of his strong feelings. The men in the cinema too were enjoying watching an act that should have been confined to the private sphere of the individuals engaged. Therefore, when Alan is pasting together the attributes of his God, it is undisputable for him that he should be

omniscient and ever-present. The picture he has hanging on his wall is a testimony to the fact that he sees Equus everywhere, and can never escape his watchful gaze. The next aspect of Alan's God, that is his revengefulness, is directly related to the voyeuristic tendencies that he shows. In the play, in all the instances that someone is being watched by a voyeur, an outburst of violence is sure to ensue. When Frank witnesses Alan's worshipping, he rips off the picture of Jesus Christ hanging on his wall and replaces it with that of a horse. Alternately, when Alan and Jill try to sleep together, Jill reveals her awareness of Alan's strong feelings for the horse, which may be partly responsible for his metaphoric emasculation and inability to perform sexually. When Alan and Jill join the group of audience for a nighttime voyeurism, they are discovered by Frank, who rushed them out and whose authority is in turn subverted. Dysart too perpetrates violence on two levels: when he has Alan relate the tale of how he came to blind the horses, he forces him to recreate the violence for the audience; also, when the tale has been heard, he is going to undertake Alan's treatment, and thus will violate his mind. Therefore, given the experience Alan has had of violence, it is no wonder that his God is vengeful. Deep down, Alan has been wakened to the pattern that when he is watched, he will be punished. On the fateful night of the violent blinding, he had been watched by his father as he was aroused by the pornography on the cinema screen. As a result of this, he was berated and chastised, yet with the help of Jill, was freed from paternal control. But this sense of freedom was rather tenuous, and was quickly wavering by the time that for losing his virginity, he was led to the stable, the temple of the God against whom he was now about to sin. Nonetheless, he began to move forward with the plan, until blocked by his own erectile dysfunction. It may be argued here that this dysfunction was caused by his awareness that a heavy punishment was in store for him, one that was about to rock him to his foundations. Therefore, enraged and scared, he gave in to the instinct that invited him to lash out against his God and break the yoke that bound him to Equus. The act of blinding, seen as an abnormal act of violence, was merely a mirror of the violence Alan had witnessed perpetrated against himself.

Lastly, Alan's desire to become one with his object of desire is manifested in the society. Throughout history, poets and writers have given voice to the desire of lovers to be united with their beloveds. This oneness would lead to strength and power, since the dual sides of lover and beloved, with their respective strengths, would be joined as one, empowering both by uniting them. This motif and desire can also be seen in religious settings, such as the one represented in the Holy Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are incomplete on their own, yet together, they form the three aspects of the one God, the one who reigns supreme throughout all time. In the play, this religious notion is brought forth by Dora, who tells her son how the rider and the horse were inseparable, and how oneness brought power. Therefore, Alan wants nothing more than to be one with his god, a fact that he mentions in his prayers, and the sexual side of his relationship with Equus may be thus explained in this regard. By itself, sexual intercourse is an act that joins two bodies, and thus unites them as one. Taking into account the connotations of the act, it should be mentioned that it brings the two people closer, since by the physical bond, there forms a spiritual one as well. Alan, through his sexual desire for Equus, is seeking to empower himself by partaking of the power that Equus possesses. By the act of sexual intercourse, a union will form that will unalterably link the two together, making them one, just as the rider and the horse are.

Therefore, Alan may not be said to be abnormal, since his acts are not considerably different from those perpetrated by respectable society members. As was shown in the outline above, in all the discussed categories, Alan's behavior does not veer radically from what is normal. What marks his actions as particularly striking is the fact that he has blended all these different attitudes and as such, has created a sort of Frankenstein's monster. As similar to the predecessor's story, he has taken up parts that are not monstrous in themselves, and he has done this with no conscious wish to blend them into a monstrosity, yet nonetheless, his actions have given birth to a creation so awful as to provoke ghastly terror in the beholders. This monstrosity stems from the fact that these behaviors may seem normal while performed by conformists, yet when they are perpetrated by Alan, they have been stripped of their normal hue. As a result of this, they have donned a disproportionately terrible color. This anomaly is a caricature of all the flaws and faults of the society and as a result, must be disposed of by the members of the respectable community as soon as they are conceived. That is why faced with Alan's crime, everyone is too quick to condemn him. His parents refuse to acknowledge their complicity in their son's disorder, choosing to place the blame on his own self. Jill flees and is quite distraught, and the stable owner cannot grasp why the boy would have done such a crime. The magistrate is more understanding, yet she too cannot accept the youngster's behavior as he is. Instead, she urges Dysart to treat the boy and make him conform to societal standards. In this society, Martin Dysart is the only one who can accept Alan as he is. Throughout the play, he acknowledges that the boy has many admirable qualities, and that he himself wishes to accomplish that level of individualistic, religious, and orgasmic passion. But despite his apprehensions about the true meaning of treating Alan, he is afraid that by crying out, he will be sacrificed instead of his patient. He has long ago pledged his fidelity to the God of Normal, and no matter his changed allegiance, the bond is too strong for him to be able to break free from it.

Society is upheld through the superego and the guilt and punishment it imposes on people. Alan is a threat to this stability because of the fact that he challenges it through flaunting his grotesque caricature of its weak points. Since he can potentially raise havoc among the others who have not yet been afflicted with his disease, he must therefore be eliminated and neutralized. Since direct disposal must not be undertaken for the sake of appearances, in the aftermath of his rebellious actions, Alan is put at the head of the society's correction agenda.

When Alan is finally psychoanalyzed, and the source of his problem is revealed, the society breathes a sigh of relief, since now its safety is assured. The audience shares this relief as well, since the cathartic experience relieves them of their unease, and restores a sense of familiar stability. Dysart will begin his treatment on Alan, during the process of which Alan's ego will be strengthened. He will learn how to channel and direct his desires so that they will lose their sharp edge and no longer threaten the stability of the standard conventions of society.

CONCLUSION

In this article, by using the Freudian model of the mind, Peter Shaffer's *Equus* was analyzed in order to arrive at a more thorough understanding of the play. In this analysis, it is pointed out that the characters portrayed in *Equus* represent the different psychic agencies propounded by Freud.

Alan is born to parents who early on, have taken up the notion that their son must resemble them as far as possible. In order to reach this goal, each parent has started setting up a set of rules to prevent the boy's straining from the righteous path. Alan's upbringing led him to cower before an extremely powerful superego, since he was given no space to work out and come to terms with the input with which he was inundated. As a result, he became overly conscious of the eyes of god watching him anywhere he went. The picture of the horse that his father had hung on his wall came to strengthen this belief, since in the picture, the eyes of the horse were particularly prominent.

Alan is a teenager with a budding sexuality that screams for an outlet, but his strict upbringing does not allow him to explore this sexuality in a healthy fashion. In order to escape the accusations of the superego, Alan begins to project his sexual feelings onto the religious symbols, and thus combines the two. During his nightly rides with Equus, he is able to reach orgasm without feeling guilty towards his god. It has to be mentioned here that Alan has not developed a functioning ego, since his parents have failed to facilitate the development of this crucial psychic agent. He cannot mediate between his desires and duties, and as a result, is torn between warring sides. On the fateful night of the crime, while outraged and frustrated, he lashes out at the god that has enslaved him for so long, and blinds its once omniscient eyes.

In terms of symbolism, the characters in the play may be said to represent the different prongs of the tripartite Freudian model. Equus, Frank, Dora, and Hesther Salomon represent the superego, since they are the upholders of societal values. They are constantly watching Alan and accusing him in his every step. With their vigilance, Alan is forever enslaved in their mesh. Martin Dysart may be said to represent the ego. He is a prestigious and moderate man, mild in manner and respected by the society. He is aware of how Alan feels about Equus, and he envies the boy his ability to lose himself in his passion. Because of these reasons, and the affinity he feels with the boy, he is reluctant to treat him, since he believes by being cured, Alan will lose his source of individualism and passionate essence. Despite these apprehensions, he is too scared of the society and its values not to do what he is asked. Lastly, Alan can be said to represent the id, since he blindly goes after pleasure without taking into account the consequences for his actions. He reaches sexual bliss while riding a horse, and does not seem particularly concerned about how unorthodox his practice is. When he is unable to explore his sexuality with a girl, he is so enraged that he blinds the horses, again oblivious to what his action may entail.

By the end of the play, the characters and the audience are equally relieved, since the disruption caused by Alan in the texture of society is smoothed over. Individuation is not necessarily valued in a society, since by focusing on the individual differences, humans will be divided. What is prized in a society is homogeneity. Alan's passion will be subdued and his ego will receive the nourishment it needs, and by this treatment, the society can rest assured that its stability is no longer under threat.

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