Of Men and Centaurs.
Identity and
the Relationship of Humans and Horses
in
Peter Shaffer’s *Equus*

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Language and Culture in Europe
Spring Semester, 2010
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There was a time when my world was filled with
   Darkness, darkness, darkness
And I stopped dreaming now I'm supposed to fill it up with
   Something, something, something
In your eyes I see the eyes of somebody I knew before,
   Long long long ago
But I'm still trying to make my mind up
   Am I free or am I tied up?
I change shapes just to hide in this place, but I'm still, I'm still an animal
Nobody knows it but me when I slip, yeah I slip
   I'm still an animal.
There is a hole and I tried to fill up with
   Money, money, money
But it gets bigger till your horse is always
   Running, running, running
In your eyes I see the eyes of somebody that could be strong
Tell me if I'm wrong
And now I'm pulling your disguise up
   Are you free or are you tied up?
I change shapes just to hide in this place, but I'm still I'm still an animal
Nobody knows it but me when I slip
   I'm still an animal.
I change shapes just to hide in this place, but I'm still I'm still an animal
Nobody knows it but me when I slip, yeah I slip
   I'm still an animal.

Miike Snow: Animal
1. Introduction

1.1 Aims
The thesis at hand deals with Peter Shaffer’s *Equus*, an English drama which originally premiered in 1973 at the Royal National Theatre in London. Its newest staging at the Broadhurst Theatre in 2008 is not just another successful revival of the play but also already its second season on New York’s Broadway. With everybody getting excited over the famous actors Daniel Radcliffe playing the boy Alan Strang naked on stage, and Richard Griffiths in the role of the other main character, the psychiatrist Martin Dysart, the text, the story and what the play is actually about seem to have taken a back seat.

Reading Shaffer’s work on a boy who gets treated by a psychologist because of blinding six horses does not only provoke thoughts about how to produce a spectacular or scandalous performance – especially not when knowing that *Equus* is based on a true event that really happened in north England in the nineteen sixties. It is rather questions like “Who was that person?” and “How could he do this to the horses?” that arise. Shaffer himself writes, in “A note on the play” (Shaffer 1977, 9), that this “alarming crime” (ibid.), this “one horrible detail” (ibid.) of a vague story left him with “intense fascination” (ibid.) and “engendered” (ibid.) a strong will to interpret it in a very personal way. The play for him then, is about *explaining* an incoherent, incomprehensible deed and *exploring* it in a created, mental world of understanding. And my analysis of the concept of identity and the relationship between humans and horses in his play can maybe help *exposing* a different understanding of our identity in connection with these special animals in our lives.

So this Master’s thesis deals with identity and the human-horse-relationship in Peter Shaffer’s play *Equus*. Returning to the initial questions given the first impression of the drama, it can amendatory be asked: How do the main characters in the play develop their identities? What type of relation between humans and horses appears in the drama? Do the two aspects analysed interfere and influence each other? By interpreting Dysart’s and Alan’s identity and the role of the horses and the god Equus, this thesis tries to discover the possible overlapping of both spheres – in other words: Do these characters use horses to build their identities?

1.2 About *Equus*
The play begins with Martin Dysart, a children’s psychiatrist introducing his own problematic relationship to his job and the case of Alan Strang, a teenage boy who has
blinded six horses with a hoofpick at the stable where he works. The local magistrate, Hesther Salomon asks her friend to take on this extreme case and he agrees. Dysart then begins a therapy with the initially very stubborn, silent boy in the hospital and uses different psychiatric methods like a question game or letting his patient record himself speaking on a tape, dream analysis, hypnosis and finally placebo treatment. This helps to appease Alan’s aggressiveness by re-enacting crucial experiences like his first encounter with a horse, from which his parents over-protectively snatch him away. Also, Alan’s relationship to his parents, the Christian chaperone mother Dora and the atheist communist father Frank, becomes clear, when they both separately visit the doctor secretly and tell him more about their son. For example, how Dora allows Alan to watch Western movies at a friend’s place despite her husband’s ban and how Frank replaces Alan’s adored poster of the Crucifixion with the picture of a horse with huge eyes; all this mingles with the boy’s puberty and influences his sexuality decisively, so that he ends up being erotically attracted to horses. Therefore he secretly takes out his favourite horse Nugget for naked, self-indulgent, riotous rides during the night, every weekend when he works at the stables, leaving his boring week job in a hardware store behind. In another re-enacting, the stable girl Jill persuades Alan to go on a date, where they surprisingly meet his father in a porn cinema. Both shocked, Frank makes excuses, but Alan self-consciously stays with the girl. However, when she tries to seduce him later in the stables, the teenage boy reacts impotent and feels watched and caught betraying by his self-made gods, the horses; he scares Jill away and injures the animals’ eyes brutally. Dysart ends the play by stating his professional and personal crisis and considering Alan’s cure as wrong, because he can only turn the boy into another normal person, without real passions – just like himself.

1.3 About Peter Shaffer
In handbooks of English playwrights, Peter Levin Shaffer can be found in between two extreme entries: a rather short one about his twin brother Anthony Shaffer, who produced a fair-sized number of works – of which most are cooperations with Peter –, and a really substantial entry about William Shakespeare with much information about his well-investigated life and his all-embracing literary career. Shaffer however, who was born in Liverpool in 1926, first works on the other side of literature, namely as a librarian and as a critic, before he starts writing his first plays in the late nineteen fifties. Until the early nineties of the last century he mainly produces plays for theatre, screenplays and also some novels, living and working both in London and New York City.
Looking at groups and genres of British drama during the time of his creative period, Shaffer appears again in between very different trends and labels. As a playwright, he is described as “neither avant-garde nor stolidly conservative” (Elsom 1982, 709), but as being an independent liberal amongst his highly political colleagues. His plays do not follow fashions or divulge dogmatisms. It is how he uses different dramatic forms combined with similar content throughout his career that defines his work, rather than being part of any school of dramatists. As a result, his plays range “from farce to tragedy” and contain “recurrent images” (Morgan 1983, 243), so that Shaffer can be seen as both standing alone and as outstanding in his era and area of British Drama from the late fifties to the early nineties of the nineteenth century. Thus, his works are also called exciting and revitalizing additions to the contemporary scene (see Ryan 1991, 2674ff.). This scene is referred to as New Drama, which produced experimental and critical avant-garde works in Britain during the postwar period; it combines some of Shaffer’s coevals, like John Osborne and Harold Pinter or Robert Bolt and Brendan Behan. But once again, the author of *Equus* turns out to be an exception between his colleagues: being older than the former and younger than the latter playwrights mentioned above, he represents his own generation, his own style and does not fit in into New Drama norms but is called a “chronological accident” (Taylor 1974, 3).

So for critics, Shaffer’s style seems to be rather complicated to describe and even harder to define in terms of a movement. He is often associated with Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre or Antoine Artaud’s supernatural creations, since he employs both narrative means as well as theatrical techniques, especially when staging his own scripts. If anything though, most of Shaffer’s plays are linked with naturalism, realism or even social realism (Gianakaris 1996, 354ff.), mainly because of their written style, their text; the monologues, dialogues and directions are considered to cover first and foremost psychological and personal actions, structures and conflicts within families and societies. However, at the same time metaphysical matters always play a main part in his work; in the true sense of the expression when horses appear as gods on stage in *Equus* for example.

The prevailing view on all of Shaffer’s plays is to name three of them as his most important ones: *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus* and *Amadeus*. They are successful on both sides of potential reception, reinforcing “critical acclaim” (Rusinko 1989, 189f.) as well as being “sensational dramatic spectacles” (ibid.) consumed by a large theatre audience. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, which is the author’s second play and premiered in 1964, *Equus*, “which has been counted the most immediately successful
British play in stage history” (Innes 1992, 415), and Amadeus, which was also first staged at the Royal National Theatre in London in the year 1979, all have several things in common.

Not only have these three plays been released as commercial films, too, but they share – as mentioned above as a typical characteristic of Shaffer’s work – certain thematic and structural aspects. In the first place, they are all about a conflict between two protagonists, thereby also about a collision of different ideas, visions and values and end in ambiguities and dilemmas that the playwright leaves unsolved (see Rusinko 1989, 189ff.). In The Royal Hunt of the Sun, the Spanish Conquistador general Pizarro and the Inca Sun King Atahualpa stand for the opposition of Christianity and civilization against an Indian individual spirit and primitivity. The Austrian composer Mozart and his competitor Salieri form the antithesis of creative ingenuity, inspiration and originality against intellectuality, norms and morality in Amadeus. Equus, the only non-historical drama of these three, features several such conflicts and collisions, which will be shown later.

Secondly, all three of Shaffer’s most important works share a distinct religious bias and outline man’s search for divinity, creating polarities that equate each other eventually (see Innes 1992, 405ff.). In The Royal Hunt of the Sun, it is the atheist Pizarro finding deity in Atahualpa’s strong belief in himself, which shows the mutuality of ideas about a god. Though music is presented as god’s art in Amadeus, it is nevertheless also shown to be accessible by a mediocrity as well as by a master. These two instances, the worshipper and the worshipped, also form elemental parts of Equus; how and if they are genuinely human and represent the two sides of one medal, will be discussed later in the analysis.

So Equus can in a way be described as a typical Shaffer play: based on a realistic event, depicting it through the conflict of two main characters that represent opposing concepts of life, and adding religious ideas about divinity and devotion. Still, compared to the author’s other works, Equus stands out because of an even “more profound and searching conflict” (Elsom 1982, 710f.) and because of questioning not only “religious obsession with horses” (ibid.), but “the destruction of a guiding passion” (ibid.) and “holy love” (ibid.).

Throughout the play, Dysart functions as a narrator for the reader or the audience, while the action is partly happening in the here and now, like all the doctor’s conversations with the magistrate Hester Salomon, the nurse, the parents, or Alan himself during their therapy sessions; the other parts are re-enacted situations, like every-
thing that has happened in the past, Alan’s childhood, the Strang family or recently at the stables, the fields or the cinema. Shaffer’s stage directions tell all about the arrangement of the dialogues and explain some of the actions in detail.

1.4 Previous research
Since, as explained above, Peter Shaffer’s *Equus* is a really successful play on stage, most of the analysis or interpretations done with it are theatrical reviews, of which two – a rather old and a newer one – are presented here. They are representative, because it was especially at the time of its premiere in the nineteen seventies as well as during the most recent productions, that many critics’ attention was drawn to its performances, due to several spectacular reasons.

In Jere Real’s discussion of *Equus*’ first season on Broadway, the dramatic themes are described as nothing new and the play is simply summed up as a “psychiatric search for the reason for a specific violent act” (Real 1975, 114). The play’s main concepts are seen in the struggle between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, the thinking and feeling of the two protagonists. However, most important for the critique are the drama’s spectacular staging in form of a special on-stage seating of the audience and the “dazzling performances” (Real 1975, 115) by the actors Anthony Hopkins as Dysart and Peter Firth as Alan. A very up to date review by Ryan Claycomb has an even stronger focus on the actors: the 2007 revival of Shaffer’s play on the West End is thoroughly characterized by Daniel Radcliffe playing the disturbed boy and Richard Griffith in the role of the psychiatrist. Here, a class struggle is considered the key concept, partly within, and even more around the drama. As a performance text, *Equus* is said to have at first developed from an avant-garde event of the seventies to middlebrow entertainment today. Experiencing all aspects of postmodern culture industry, like commercialization and commodification, Shaffer’s play became embedded “into a late-capitalist system of integrated media” (Claycomb 2009, 112), coordinating its premiere with the release of the new movie starring the famous actor. Still, when Radcliffe and Griffith act in a father-son-like relationship as Strang and Dysart on stage, they are reconciled as the popular *Harry Potter* and his hateful *Uncle Vernon* in the audience’s fantasy. This association and the teenage star’s nudity let the performance appear in a mad and queer vanguard light again, namely in a really subtle and revived way, creating “its own theatrical language” (Claycomb 2009, 120).

There is other research on Shaffer’s *Equus* done in the field of humanities, especially literature, language and culture. But within this large area, it is rather few topics
that are particularly popular: religion and psychology. Exemplarily for each, one representative article is chosen and presented in the following. Both are from the nineteen nineties and therefore sum up and refer to what has been said about religion and psychology in *Equus* before; this way, they provide a good base for my new and further studies on identity and the human-horse-relationship in the play.

Leonard Mustazza analyzes religion in the play, and begins with the statement that most commentators falsely focus on the conflict of Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of the drama – as can be seen in Real’s review above for example. Claiming that “the larger religious context of the play has been ignored” (Mustazza 1992, 175), he proves that Alan’s ideas, behaviour and especially his rites are not impulsive, ecstatic or orgiastic like the Greek cult, but based on Judeo-Christian theology. The boy’s god is a horse, Equus, who watches and judges his actions just like the biblical god. Mustazza shows how different Alan is from the Dionysian, by explaining the boy’s mental illness and obsession in three steps: first, there is the “equation of Christ with the horse” (Mustazza 1992, 176), then the moment when Alan “himself becomes the Christ figure” (Mustazza 1992, 178), and finally the last shift when the teenager “no longer regards himself as the sacrificial victim but as something akin to God” (ibid.). The development is determined by his parents’ attitudes towards religion and sex, which eventually forbid any liberating passion, and is therefore the opposite of a wild Dionysian lifestyle. Still, Dysart is described as seeing only those primitive elements of his patient’s worship, because they are the most attractive to him, since he misses out on any passion in his life. Later though, the psychiatrist recognizes that Alan is trapped in between pleasing his parents and breaking out of their constricting limits; as a doctor he can solve this conflict with healing therapy. In the end, “Dysart still prefers Dionysian transcendence to the great god Normal, but he sees the change as necessary not only to society but also to Alan himself” (Mustazza 1992, 184). God, gods and divinity are also treated in works by Lounsberry (1978) and Gillespie (1982), comparing *Equus* with other plays by Shaffer, since those concepts are ever-present in the author’s works.

Psychological aspects of the drama are interpreted in Theodore D. George’s article; here, the too intensive concentration of academic studies on psychoanalysis and psychiatry in *Equus* so far is criticized. Instead, the author intends “to bring into question the purpose and validity of the mental health care profession” (George 1999, 231), which he thinks is the central issue of Shaffer’s play. Using the notion of normality as a key concept and also Foucault’s ideas about knowledge, power and sexuality, he discovers important discourses of mental health care and especially its relationship with
authority and valuation, and shows how Alan and Dysart are a part of this system. The psychiatrist recognizes that his therapy with the teenage boy results in a type of health, which is totally “in the service of nothing other than the ‘Normal’ and normalization” (George 1999, 240). Normalizing in Equus takes place especially in the realm of sexual behaviour, showing how the power of mental health care discourses not only has repressing effects, like on Dysart, but also producing ones, like in Alan’s case; while the psychiatrist lacks passion himself, his profession makes it possible for him to forge his patient’s desires to fit within the limits of what is considered to be normal for a young man. Finally, interpreting Shaffer’s work like this, “its capacity to depict the pretenses of the mental health field” and “the dangers associated with any blind faith in the authority of discursive truth” (George 1999, 245) become clear – and challenge the concept of health. Health is also a topic in articles on Equus by Beyer (1987) and Walls (1984), both consulting other notions, like the paradox of sickness, as well as another psychological philosopher, like Nietzsche.

Very common are texts about the dramatic and theatrical style of Equus in general, like its dynamics (Beckermann 1986), the position of the spectators (Chaudhuri 1993) and thoughts about its staging as a modern tragedy (Klein 1983). Some research interprets different motifs in Equus, for example name symbolism (Simpson 1993), gaze (Su 2006) or anger (Witham 1979), and some studies can be found on formal or structural aspects of Shaffer’s written drama, like narration (Han 2007), the reconstruction of the past (Brunkhorst 1984) or the use of imperatives (Akstens 1992). Identity and the human-horse-relationship in Equus have not yet been analyzed. Though the psychological interpretations touch the topic of identity, they never go beyond it as a part of the therapy. And the only article about horses in the play is just a very brief comparison with the ones in Swift’s novel Gulliver’s Travels (Hays 1987). So this thesis analyses very different aspects of the Shaffer’s play than the critiques before and innovatively discusses them together.

1.5 Motivation
Among the large variety of theories concerning the concept of identity, Stuart Hall’s thoughts stand out. Though they base on non-literary theories and are often used to interpret multicultural aspects of novels for example, their main idea of a third space in-between, the interstitial and hybridity in binary systems of hegemony seems also very useful to find out more about literary characters that are not primarily defined by their cultural identities, but special positions. Hall’s definitions make clear, how important
the concept of identity is both for understanding ourselves and characters within texts, but also for understanding our understanding of these works. He states, that the particular place and time of everyone speaking and writing form “the positions of enunciation” (Hall 1994, 392; original emphasis). So, this notion of positioning can not only be employed as a tool for the interpretation of Shaffer’s Equus, but also for founding and framing this thesis. Adding a lifelong personal interest in horses and the human relationship with them completes the academic motivation. It is backed up by knowledge about the established history mankind shares with these animals. Also, the presence of horses in everyday life as well as their ubiquity in literature make this choice of topic even more understandable. And as shown above, both topics have not yet been analysed and interpreted in Peter Shaffer’s Equus ever before, so that connecting these theories and historical facts is new and unique.

2. Method
In “A note on the text” (Shaffer 1977², 7), Shaffer explains that the book is “a description of the first production of Equus at the National Theatre in July 1973” (ibid.), in other words: an edited script. For him, writing down the words of and about the play is as important as the theatrical experience is for the audience. Both spheres are connected by imagination, making sure the expressive staging does not become flat and lost in the written text. The author stresses that the “visual action is […] as much a part of the play as the dialogue” (Shaffer 1977², 7f.), therefore he names and credits the producer and the actors that performed his work on that day in London. In the end, Shaffer states that staging a drama is a way to make words become flesh, and that publishing a drama as a book is the opposite process – decomposition?

Again, analyzing Equus shows its specifics, here in form of a dramatic text that has been written down after the first performance, instead of before. In this case, the text does not function as a guidance or direction for staging, but as a kind of report or depiction of its premiere. Consequently, analyzing it – dialogues and descriptions – as a piece of literature without considering any staging seems legitimate.

So some critics argue that Shaffer’s playwriting style really is rather narrative than theatrical, because he uses and experiments with “means for telling a story” (Gianakaris 1996, 355), which are the core in many of his dramas and the key to interpreting them. However, others stress how extremely visual and eminently theatrical Equus is, and that dramatization and stylization in the form of costumes and choreography excel the standard carriers of plays: language and characters (see Innes 1992, 406). Taylor
also emphasizes that the philosophical values and verbal eloquence in this special drama by Shaffer are far less skilful or striking than their visualization on a stage, where showing and playing makes Alan’s and Dysart’s story most effective (see 1974, 24ff.). But still, he admits that “to read and imagine on the stage of one’s own mind […] is far more satisfactory” (Taylor 1974, 26).

The method used in the thesis is based on Mick Short’s argumentation about the analysis of drama. Here, the problematic relation between text and performance as a unity is abandoned, in favour of the text; it guarantees constant stability, whereas performances are defined by being not only “infinitely variable” but also by having to be treated “in a radically different way” (Short 1996, 159; original emphasis) than other literary art. Since it is not possible to study each and every performance of Equus, the focus is placed on its written version only, and is therefore a textual-literary and not a dramatic-theatrical analysis. However, a general understanding of the conventions and configurations of the theatre are considered when looking at a text framed by passages where the characters are not only talking in monologues and dialogues, but their actions are described – and happen on stage as well as in the reader’s mind, in the form of a story. In Equus, this story is told in two acts with altogether thirty-five scenes, and the action mostly takes place in the doctor’s office, where also some events of the past are re-enacted by his patient and the other characters.

Stories or narratives are characterised as representing an event or the unfolding of several events, which are themselves defined to be made of actions and characters. So characters and actions are two principal components in most narratives, and can be seen as two inseparable phenomena (see Porter Abbott 2002, 123f). By their actions, characters both reveal and realise themselves and their identity is shown and shaped. Analysing what the two protagonists – the psychiatrist and his patient – say and do can explain who they are, and how they do it exhibits what identity is about. It is necessary to add theories about identity to categorize what appears in Equus, and to finally interpret what it means. Who are Alan Strang and Michael Dysart?

Another decisive aspect of narrative stories are themes and motifs, of which the first are rather abstract and the latter make up more concrete thematic units; when, where and how they show up in literature must be analysed to establish an idea about the work and its focus (see Porter Abbott 2002, 88f.). Certain motifs and their repetition constitute a text and endorse or eliminate themes. Identifying the appearance of horses, as natural animals or as symbolic gods in the play, can explicate the relation between them and the human characters, and also exemplify the realistic human-horse-
relationship. Naturally, facts about the common history of those animals with men are needed, to reach a coherent reading of Equus. Why is Nugget a kind of god?

The main sources for the theoretical framework of this thesis are one basic work for each topic, identity and horses. For the concept of identity, Du Gay’s book Identity: a reader contains important texts of well-established theorists like Hall, plus introducing other writers and their interesting ideas about the connection of identity with notions like language, psychology or gender. This eclectic anthology provides the information for chapter three. Horse by Walker is a fairly new publication, presenting and illustrating the history of the horse and its development together with human beings. This book covers facts about many aspects of the named relationship and is therefore a helpful background for chapter four, together with a variety of articles about for example veterinary subjects. Naturally, articles about similar topics, namely characterisations of horse lovers in literature for instance, are used to discuss own analysis results. Of course, dictionaries and standard texts on literary analysis as well as interpretation are used to assure the thesis’ correctness and coherence.

3. Analysis: Identity

3.1 Theoretical framework

Just like many other concepts, identity is a complicated term to define and is taken up and used differently by different disciplines. But since it refers to something deeply human that concerns everybody and that everyone has, its definition becomes even more problematic.

Looking at prevalent dictionary entries, a paradox in the meaning or rather meanings comes up: while at first, identity is paraphrased as "who or what somebody/something is" (Wehmeier 2005, 770), the second item describes it as "the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from others" (ibid.). In other words, identity is in a way both about sameness and difference. The idea of identity, so to speak, ends up being something in between those two poles of being the same and being different, namely "a close similarity or affinity" (Pearsall 1998, 908). As a consequence, there is another kind of incongruity, and that is about the instance who determines identity – oneself or the other, or most likely, oneself compared with the other. Identity seems to be a phenomenon that can either connect entities together or keep them apart. Thus "the state or feeling of being very similar to and able to understand somebody/something" (Wehmeier 2005, 770) can result in sharing parts of personality and qualities or in the separation of people and things.
In the field of psychology, this somehow inconsistent aspect of identity appears again, defining it as "a deep relationship between elements that is assumed to exist despite surface dissimilarities" (Reber S. 2001, 338). So there can be identity — in the form of sameness — within, even though there is no identity — but difference — on the outside of people and things. In a logical sense, being identical can be right for two or more elements that can replace each other without altering a true value (see ibid.), which shows that identity is inherently also about worthiness and usefulness. Furthermore, the study of personality and character describes identity as something essential, continuous and internal; summarized, it is the "subjective concept of oneself as an individual" (ibid.) and is most of the time not objectified.

Thoughts about the subject and its representation are the initial point of Hall’s theory about identity as a concept, too. It serves as a background for the author’s work on cultural identity and diaspora (see Hall 1994), and also as a statement and reaction to several considerations and requirements in different disciplines, especially the concept of deconstruction and Foucault’s deliberations about the significance of discourse, psychoanalysis and politics for identification (see Hall 2000). But since this thesis — as explained above in the methodical chapter — is about analysing and interpreting a literary text, only Hall’s very basic definitions of identity and identification are important. They are useful tools to find answers to the research questions asked in the introductory chapter about the two main characters and partly also about the role of horses in *Equus*.

The first and foremost definition Hall gives for identity is that it is a kind of production “which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation” (Hall 1994, 392). That means identity is not a fixed fact presented by practices (of culture, of an individual etc.) and not an unproblematic unit, but quite the contrary. With this view, the problem of the worth and the warranty of any type of identity (cultural, psychological etc.) arises. Here, what and who determines identity is less relevant than when and where it is embodied. According to Hall, most important are the specific points from which we speak, write or in however way express ourselves; he calls them “the positions of enunciation” (ibid., original emphasis). To speak is to say something in one’s own name and that means to enunciate one’s own experiences, but it must be considered that the subject speaking is never the same subject about which something is said — they are not exactly identical. What changes are the positions, the “particular place and time” (ibid.) and finally, the context — the specific discourse for example, like the large-scale knowledge of culture or history, or like detailed parts of conversations in a psychologist’s office or like conflicts within a family.
Everything presented through language is also represented and therefore “positioned” (ibid.; original emphasis).

So for Hall, identity “is therefore not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional” concept (Hall 2000, 17); it is not about being firm, but rather flexible. There is no never-changing core of the self, above which parts of the identity develop, because identities consist of fragments and fractures. Fittingly, the process of enunciation or articulation is specified as “a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption” (ibid.). This means there is always too much, but at the same moment also too little about the positional practices and specific strategies that constantly form an identity. Actually, it is this lack, this difference, this exclusion and the play of its powers, and “only through the relation to the Other” (ibid.) that identities are constructed and constituted. Everything an individual does not have in common with others makes up her or his identity, everything that marks a persons´ distinction from another, sets up her or his exclusiveness, so: we are what we are not, we are what others are not. These thoughts culminate in the idea that identities need to exist in polarity, establishing a hierarchy of two poles, whereof the second one only serves as an opposition to the first one and thus makes it more important (see Hall 2000, 18). An example is the doctor-patient-relationship, in which each patient in a way just has the function to confirm the doctor’s ability to cure and help healing. This special relation and these roles show how “[i]dentities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (Hall 2000, 19), when articulations become a successful part of the actual discourse among other subjects and objects.

Other key terms in Hall´s theory are suture and interpellation: the former entails that there is never a perfect fit in the construction of identities, and the latter stands for a form of hailing or being hailed in(to) the context of practices and discourses wherever and whenever subjectivities are assembled. So after all,

[i]dentities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always ‘knowing’ […] that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a `lack`, across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate -identical- to the subject processes which are invested in them. (ibid.)

As a last consequence of declaring identity as deriving from a two-sided action, the author likes to use the expression of identification instead. Similarly, it is defined as a never completed process and even more of a construction in this discursive approach, which once again shows the contrast to the rather naturalistic common sense perception
of identity as something shared between persons and ideals (see Hall 2000, 16). Moreover, the whole process can also be called subjectification, and constitutes the self by relying on recognition, reflection and the relations to rules and regulations; all these actions in turn, result in a kind of performativity (see Hall 2000, 26), which is shown in all sorts of discourses, from institutional to linguistic to theatrical, from private to professional life.

Logically, the first step to find out more about the identities, the strategies of identifying and the subjectifications of Martin Dysart and Alan Strang is by doing a thorough characterisation. They can both be considered as the main characters in the play, but Dysart stands out a little bit more, because he takes part in almost every scene and additionally has the function of a narrator in the play, while Alan indeed appears in a few more scenes, but never interacts on a meta-level with the reader or the audience.

3.2 Characterisation: Martin Dysart
Basic facts about Martin Dysart are firstly given in the paratext and stage directions of the play: he is a psychiatrist (see Shaffer 1977, 11; from now on E), in his mid-forties and smokes (see E, 17), but there is no description of his look and no summary of his characteristics. Furthermore, some dialogues with others inform us that he is married (see E, 37), has no children (see E, 61) and cannot beget children (see E, 82). In several monologues and conversations, Dysart tells about his interest and admiration for Greece and the Greek culture and mythology (see E, 24f., 61f., 82f.).

A lot of details are presented about his job as a psychiatrist. Hesther Salomon, a magistrate and friend who adjures him to take care of Alan’s case, thinks he is the only doctor who can understand and handle the boy (see E, 20), and also take his pain away (see E, 81). She finds that he does “superb work with children” (E, 25) and also accredits him not to be disgusted or revolted by the incident, and not to be “immovably English” like the other psychiatrists (E, 19); she considers him a special doctor capable of mastering this extraordinary case. Dysart on the other hand, describes himself as “an overworked psychiatrist in a provincial hospital” (E, 18), who has too many patients to cope with (see E, 19). He even comments on them as “freaks” and “customers” (E, 21), calls his job “adjustment business” (ibid.) and his office a “torture chamber” (E, 19); he has a negative image of himself in his job and talks sarcastically about it.

Despite these practical complaints and the ironic indifference, he sees himself in a “professional menopause” (E, 25) which makes him feel that his job cannot fulfil him. This mixture of discontent, insecurity and doubt results in a repeating nightmare: Dysart
kills children by carving them up with great surgical skill, being the chief of a ritual ceremony in a Greek mythological setting; he wears a mask to keep his professional look in spite of his inner disbelief in the job, but his distressed face makes the mask slip, his assistants see his failure and want to cut him open (see E, 24f.). While his past cases were just “one more dented little face” (E, 21) to the psychiatrist, Alan actually appears in all the children’s faces in his nightmare. During the boy’s stay at the hospital, Dysart keeps thinking about this special case; after a very intense session where Alan re-enacts his worship to the horse god Equus in hypnosis, he reflects on his competence as a doctor, and also the general basics of his profession. He realises that he – and any other psychotherapist – can only trace those moments in a child’s life that disturb its behaviour, but can never answer why this happens exactly (see E, 76). These fundamental questions, these whys he has avoided in his career so far seem to go beyond his job and leave him thinking that this experience is “more than menopause” (ibid.).

Alan’s problem, his disease or disturbance, make Dysart recognize his own dysfunctions: he compares the boy’s world of worship with his own passionless, painless life and feels jealous. Regarding his slack existence, Alan’s vitality becomes an ideal and makes him realize that “[e]xtremity’s the point” (E, 81). Dysart’s professional as well as private crises appear as or actually even more disturbed than Alan’s state of mind, so that the fact that an unhappy boy is treated by him, an even unhappier doctor, for insanity seems totally illegitimate (see E, 81ff.). Though he uses all the psychiatric methods naturally and with professional accuracy, doubts about their effects appear facing Alan’s case. The direct interviews get out of control when the teenage boy begins to ask questions himself (see E, 36ff.; 59f.) and the indirect sessions through tape recording (see E, 52f.) and hypnosis (see E, 64ff.) leave the doctor indeed closer to cure his patient, but at the same time also confirm his negative attitude towards this or any therapy. Culminating in the application of a placebo pill, Dysart’s disbelief in his work as a form of helping the child become obvious: talking to Hester, he constantly uses words like “pretence” (E, 80), “alleged” (ibid.; original emphasis) and calls Alan a “[p]oor bloody fool” (ibid.). Finally he admits, first to the magistrate and friend (see E, 80f.) and then to the patient, the artifices or rather deceptions he uses: “Everything I say has a trick or a catch. Everything I do is a trick or a catch. That’s all I know to do. But they work […]” (E, 85).

So even though Dysart knows about the functional and faithful aspects of his work, the declaredly delicate tools and honest compassion with which he can talk away terror and relieve agonies (see E, 65), it is the result of these techniques that he detests.
Curing children and making them normal again is like “cut(ting) from them parts of individuality” (ibid.), and in Alan’s case it means to take away his passion for horses, the job at the stables, secret night-time rides and his worship of his self-made god Equus, – “the core of his life” (E, 81). After the last therapeutic re-enactment, the one where the boy blinds the animals brutally, Dysart seems to be successful: Alan has a hysteric break-down due to the renewed confrontation with his deed, but calms down and steadies himself again, which is like a first step to get over Equus. Still, the psychiatrist states his ambivalent attitude about the phenomenon of this cure by separating his desire, “to make this boy an ardent husband” (E, 107), from his actual achievements, which is “to make a ghost” (ibid.). The doctor sees the treatment as a normalisation, a way to a sort of painless but at the same time also lifeless life, and feels as if he can only destroy but never create passion in young people (see E, 108). Finally, a goodbye to the sleeping Alan as a patient and another comparison with the boy and his behaviour lead Dysart to surrender and say, that he cannot know what he is doing, but does it anyway. The psychiatric way in which he helps the children to get better is ultimate, essential, irreversible and terminal, but does not enrich his own life with life.

Apart from the doubts about the weight and value of his everyday work and qualification, Dysart also struggles with his private life situation: his marriage. There are three scenes in which this topic and its depressing force dominate. Firstly, it is Alan’s provoking questions about dating, sex and cheating in the seventeenth scene of the first act that upset Dysart and make him react “sharp” (E, 60), “exploding” (ibid.) and “unnerved” (ibid.), because his wife is his “area of maximum vulnerability” (ibid.). In the following scene, he talks to Hesther and tells her about the beginning of the relationship with his wife Margaret and the current situation. Basically, he conveys that there is no real understanding between him and his wife and that they were just compatible at the outset of their relation, when they still “worked for each other” (E, 61) and she gave him inaccessible briskness and he gave her antiseptic proficiency. Since they have turned away from each other, they live in different worlds or “separate surgeries” (ibid.): she knits clothes for orphans while he indulges in books about Greek art and culture, symbolically speaking, she is in a church while he is in a temple (see E, 62). In the twenty-fifth scene in act two, Dysart even declares himself as the pagan, in contrast to his wife the puritan when talking to others (see E, 82) – but at the same time he denies himself this position, since he knows that his life lacks extremity, imagination and wildness and is characterized by timidity, certainty and orderliness only. His yearly trip to Greece is neither passionate nor ferocious but just cautious and civilized. After all he
understands that he is just as “pallid and provincial” (ibid.) as Margaret is, and what is the worst for him, just as “[u]tterly worshipless” (E, 62). An interesting play on words stands out when comparing what the psychiatrist says about his wife in the first act, and himself in the second act: initially, he calls her “the Shrink´s Shrink” (E, 61), explaining how she observes and comments on his behaviour like a psychiatrist would, and later he describes his envy of Alan´s vitality, claiming that “without worship you shrink, it´s as brutal as that… I shrank my own life.” (E, 82; original emphasis); and Margaret was probably a part of this lowering of life power. Finally, Dysart suffers from a combination of erotic and emotional problems, both because he is infertile and hides it and because he has not been kissed by his wife for several years and therefore is jealous of Alan´s sexual experiences with horses and with the stable girl Jill.

Generally, Dysart describes himself and diagnoses some of his emotions, for example that he feels “lost” (E, 18) or “desperate” (ibid.) and that he has an “educated, averaged head” (ibid.) which is full of “old language and old assumptions” (ibid.). Moreover, he observes his own sensations, for example when “the feeling got worse” (E, 64) with the visit of the stable-owner, or when analyzing his depressive work overload and speaking of his “present state” (E, 26). Often the stage directions give more information about Dysart´s behaviour, sometimes it is, however, more about hiding what he really feels: “controlling himself” (E, 37) and “trying to conceal his pleasure” (E, 84) are examples of that.

Dysart relates to two things in the play, which tell more about his identity: the first is Greek mythology and the second are horses. His affection for and interest in Greece and its culture become clear when he talks about his nightmare (see E, 24f.). It is set in Homeric Greece, more precisely in Argos, which the doctor recognizes from the red soil. Other details of the dream are for example the golden, clumpy, characteristically big-eyed, bearded masks of Agamemnon he and his two assistants are wearing and of which he knows that they were originally found in Mycenae. The sacrifice ritual taking place is led by him – since he has the role of an officer – and decides about crops or military coups but is not declared to be typically Greek. When explaining his dream together with his job frustrations to Hesther in the following scene, the protagonist not only calls it nonsense, but also mentions that he wants “to spend the next ten years wandering very slowly around in the real Greece” (E, 15; original emphasis).

Dysart brings up this topic again in another conversation with the magistrate, by picturing a typical scene in his home, where he tries to “trail a faint scent of [his] enthusiasm” (E, 61) about Ancient Greek art and literature across to his wife, but fails. She
denigrates the Cretan acrobats and the *Iliad*, calling these things absurd and ruffian, since everything Mediterranean, that is not a kitschy souvenir, is repulsive to her. Dysart then also utters the wish to have “[o]ne instinctive, absolutely unbrisk person [he] could take to Greece” (E, 62) to experience and with whom he could share the spirituality and the will to worship something. In yet another talk with his friend Hesther, the psychiatrist expounds his lack of vitality and spontaneity by giving his perfectly planned low-risk Greece vacations as an example, where everything is booked and paid for in advance; finally, he states that he, just like Margaret, uses Greek memorabilia in his everyday life and somehow practices a fake passion consisting of photos and cheap reproductions only (see E, 83).

Horses are the second motif Dysart relates to, for example right at the beginning of the play in the first scene which is chronologically set at the end of the first act: he introduces the reader to Alan’s case by presenting how the boy and his favourite horse Nugget embrace intimately. Strangely, or in his words, “of all nonsensical things – I keep thinking about the *horse*!” (E, 17; original emphasis), instead of pursuing his job as a psychiatrist and analyse his patient, the teenage boy who is attracted to horses. Dysart keeps asking himself questions – although he knows that he will never find the answer – about what might be going on in the horse’s head, its desires, its sufferings, its grief, its existence as an animal wanting to become human. Stating that horses’ minds are inaccessible for him or any doctor or human, the fact that he nonetheless works with even more complicated childrens’ heads worries him. He even compares himself to the animal, saying that he is wearing the horse’s head like a mask representing the ignorance of psychotherapy (see E, 18); he cannot see what changed with having met Alan in a few sessions, and he cannot move on and change his boring, meaningless life, because his “basic force”, his “horse-power” (ibid.) is not strong enough. In another scene later, after a visit of the boy’s mother Dora Strang who tells him about the horse poster in her son’s room, the horse’s head recurs: not only is it described hung up on Alan’s wall staring down at him, but it somehow seems to be casting a shadow on the psychiatrist’s desk (see E, 46).

In the opening of the second act after an intense re-enacting with his patient, Dysart feels left alone with Equus when Alan takes a rest from experiencing one of his secret rides on Nugget again. The doctor can hear the creature calling him “out of the black cave of the Psyche” (E, 75), asking and mocking him “Why Me? […] Do you really imagine you can account for Me?…Poor Doctor Dysart!” (ibid.). Bringing Greek mythology and horses together in one thought, is Dysart’s comment in the twenty-fifth
scene: he compares how Alan tries to become a horse by riding naked in the night, while he himself is just looking at pictures of centaurs in books about mythology (see E, 83). In the end, the comparison almost becomes an adoption in a way, when the psychiatrist explains how he cures and changes his patient’s life by trying to make Equus leave, and then recognizes that the horse god has become a part of his own life. This makes him hear Equus’ voice all the time and feel frustrated about his unfulfilling, illegitimate job; working with children and changing their minds even though he can not penetrate them reminds Dysart of Alan and leads to the statement: “I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking at heads” (E, 108), which means: killing what he can never truly comprehend.

As a narrator, Dysart appears especially at important points of the play, like the beginning and the end, as well as at the transition from the first to the second act – both of which he starts with the same words. This way it is made clear, that the whole first act is a flashback consisting of re-enactments of what happened during the last month, and that the protagonist’s function is to narrate everything in a proper order and to make sense of it (see E, 18). He addresses the audience several times and mostly talks to them about himself or Alan’s case in detail (see E, 17f.; 24; 60; 75f.; 107ff.). Sometimes, these utterances are used to reveal personal thoughts, like his expectations before meeting the boy (see E, 21) or a certain foreshadowing during his research about his patient’s past (see E, 46). There are also parts in the text, where the psychiatrist only gives the reader short explanations or comments on the story and what is going to happen next, for example: “That same evening, his mother appeared.” (E, 44) before Dora airs, or “His tape arrived that evening.” (E, 47) before he gets Alan’s recording. Both examples are just a normal reply within a dialogue, but most of the time it is clarified that he really speaks on a meta-level because it is mentioned in the stage directions (“to audience”, “addresses the audience”, etc.) and because he uses the pronoun “you”. One exception occurs, however: Dysart’s exclamation “Normal!...Normal!” (E, 63) is marked to be addressed “to himself – or to the audience” (ibid.). Elaborating his thoughts about the Normal, the doctor speaks to the audience while the disturbed teenager is in hypnosis, but since the lighting changes and there is no explicit address, this speech really seems more like an inner monologue. Also, when understanding a crucial part of Alan’s disruption, Dysart speaks “almost `aside´” (E, 51) in this conversation with the father, Frank Strang. What is striking about the narrator’s first and last utterances is, that there is only a small development or progression throughout the play. In the beginning, the psychiatrist is already one month further in the story, but he asks about Alan’s case and
questions his abilities to handle it (see E, 17f.); in the end, similar questions and doubts reappear and the only answer Dysart finds, is something like a repetition of what he already states in the twenty-second scene — the only change is that he says “I don’t know [...] what am I doing here” (E, 76) then, but finally he surrenders saying “I cannot know what I do in this place” (E, 108). From initially just wearing the horse’s head and feeling the restrictions of a mask, Dysart eventually somehow becomes one with the animal, feeling the painful chain and bit in his own mouth. And while at first claiming, that “this has nothing to do with this boy” (E, 18), the doctor directly addresses Alan in the end, gives a detailed report of how he cures him and ultimately connects his therapy with his own transformation (see E, 108).

So Dysart’s relationship with Alan develops from having no special expectations about the boy as just another “usual unusual” (E, 21) patient to absorbing his passion and adopt his worship — even though it is painful (see E, 108f.). While not being particularly shocked by the boy’s deed and just doing his magistrate friend a favour (see E, 18ff.), he gets more interested in his new patient right after the first meeting (see E, 23), and is finally very intrigued. The fascination with the person is mentioned several times (see E, 21; 31; 33) and grows stronger with every session. It is most notably Alan’s strange stare (see E, 26; 62) that strikes Dysart, and that is the reason why the teenage boy’s face appears on every child victim in his nightmare (see E, 26). Generally, the psychiatrist perceives the treatment as rather negative and unsettling, but is captured by the extremity of his patient’s behaviour (see E, 18; 81). The meaning Alan has for Dysart, the doctor himself supposes to be “a last straw? a last symbol?” (E, 18), though he wonders if any other next patient would have collapsed him into the same professional and personal crisis — or rather, intensified those already existing problems the same way.

The therapeutic sessions also change with the evolving relationship: while using his experienced question routine at first (see E, 21ff.), Dysart lets Alan ask him back his questions soon (see E, 36ff.) and later even lets the boy take over with his own questions (see E, 59f.). Though the patient manages to deprive his doctor of the control a few times, and the powerful roles of asking and answering are switched, he generally gives in to his asking and the other methods, and slowly but surely answers. For example when telling about the first time he met a horse as a child (see E, 38) or when Dysart suggests using the tape recorder (see E, 43); at both events Alan first resists but then cooperates. It seems like the two of them know, that this therapy is a group effort, when Dysart uses the plural pronoun and says “[w]e got on to it this afternoon” (E, 28) or
when Alan commands him “[a]sk me a question” (E, 88). This thought is summed up in Dysart’s utterance: “It’s my job to ask the questions. Yours to answer them.” (E, 36). For the psychiatrist, the teenager is not an ordinary patient, but special: finding a religion in psychiatry for instance is “[t]oo conventional, for him” (E, 83). And even though Dysart considers Alan not necessarily educated, in any way talented or socially appreciated (see E, 33; 81), he still experiences how “brilliant” (E, 60) and “wicked” (ibid.) the boy can be at playing with him, and he still accepts how vital and intensive his secret night rides on Nugget every three weeks are (see E, 81) – and envies him for that.

There is a tension between Dysart and Alan, consisting of things and thoughts they share and differences in their being and behaviour. An example for the first case is that they are both basically unhappy and know it (see E, 88). Only the ways they handle this bad feeling and their wishes vary; while Dysart wants nothing more than to leave the clinic and go to Greece, Alan wants to stay in the doctor’s room because he has no home to go to (see E, 87). After four sessions, the psychiatrist has a rough idea about the teenager’s deed and disease, and his duty to restore him to normal and his doubts about normality – especially his own normality – get into conflict. From then on, in the last sessions using hypnosis and placebo, two things are clear for Dysart. One about Alan: “He’s trying to save himself through me.” (E, 62); and one about himself: “What am I trying to do to him?” (ibid.).

3.3 Interpretation: Martin Dysart’s identity
When connecting this characterisation with Dysart’s constitution of identity, it is more important to look at how he develops it and not only what he says and does, since it is the context and the discourse that count when using Hall’s theory. The aspects analysed above help clarifying how this protagonist is constructed as a subject by acting with the other characters and talking to them.

As we have seen, questions and questioning pervade his whole being and behaviour, especially when it comes to his profession. Actually, most of Dysart’s speaking happens in the form of questions: there are many passages when he talks to Alan, and all they do is exchange short questions and answers (see E, 28ff., 36ff., 43, 53, 58, 70ff., 79). Mostly, the psychiatrist’s way to ask is so to the point, and already implying answers, that his patient simply replies with a curt yes, and sometimes just no (see E, 66ff.). This way, the questions appear like a pure formality, since the doctor most of the time already knows what answer he will get and what’s behind his patient’s behaviour. Every time this pattern is broken by Alan asking Dysart, the latter refuses to answer
quickly (see E, 59f., 85ff.). He stays closed and controlled when face to face with the boy. It seems to be his position as an English doctor in a rural clinic handling a special patient that not only determines his action – asking –, but also his reaction – not answering –. His identity is “constructed within, not outside, discourse, […] produced in specific historical and institutional sites […] by specific enunciative strategies” (Hall 2000, 17).

Furthermore, Dysart’s character is not only all about asking, but also about questioning in terms of doubts concerning his job and his marriage, as shown in the analysis above. When talking to Hesther especially (see E, 19ff., 25ff., 60ff.,80ff), or Alan, or the audience, he uses rhetorical and real questions to express his insecurities. Different variations of wondering about his own identity are scattered throughout the whole play, about what he is doing (see E, 76), what he can and cannot do (see E, 18; 76). Interesting is his utterance, saying that there is no place for him and that he feels displaced (see E, 76). It seems like the protagonist is lost, though he has his home and his office, his wife and his career. Facing Alan’s extreme case, the basics of psychiatry and his wannabe-brisk marriage lose stability and are not sure anymore. Dysart is on a quest for identification, looking for a point, a place and time, and would rather be a Hellene in ancient Greece than a psychiatrist in modern England. Here, a certain “antinomy between subject positions and the individuals who occupy them” (Hall 2000, 23) can be seen, and how Dysart is one of the persons that struggle “with the `positions´ to which they are summoned” (Hall, 2000, 27).

Most striking, however, is the passage where Dysart sends Alan away angrily after the boy asked him very intimate questions. He diagnoses that the teenager attacks him because he gets defensive – but basically just wants to know: “What am I then?” (E, 60; original emphasis). There are parts in other scenes shown above, where this need of the doctor, to compare himself to his patient, becomes clear, too. It is especially Dysart’s way of repeating his conversational partner’s answer, rephrasing them as questions and asking back, that tells more about his identity:

“DYSART replies in the same manner.” (E, 28; original emphasis) […]

“ALAN: Suddenly I heard this noise. […]
DYSART: What noise?
ALAN: Hooves. Splashing.
DYSART: Splashing?” (E, 38f.)

“ALAN: The Manbit. […]
DYSART: Manbit?
ALAN: The stick for my mouth.
DYSART: Your mouth? […]
ALAN: Hurts!
DYSART: Hurts?” (E, 71f.)

This can be described as mirroring, since Dysart copies Alan in a way. At first sight, this makes both persons share something, but at the same time it shows a division between the two; just as a child that sees and recognizes itself in the mirror for the first time, there is a loss of the self and a founding of the subject happening simultaneously, via the “dislocating rupture” (Hall 2000, 22) of the mirror.

The few times Dysart speaks in statements and provides information about himself are, when talking to Hesther or the audience – it seems like there is no real monologue at all, just mock-monologues, since the protagonist always addresses somebody. In these conversations, the doctor reflects on his job, his marriage, and particularly the problems he is experiencing in both parts of his life. Sometimes, he even takes a step back and describes himself in a third person formulation as “the fellow on the other side” or “[t]he finicky, critical husband” (E, 82). It seems like the dialogues, the confrontation with another instance, with a character or an anonymous group of characters, help Dysart to find “internal homogeneity”, “a constructed form of closure” (Hall 2000, 18), which is not a “naturally constituted unity” (Hall 2000, 17). An even stronger partner for this process is Alan: Dysart’s identity forms by “naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it ‘lacks’” (Hall 2000, 18), in this case: everything that Alan is or has and he himself is not or has not: vitality and passion.

This leads to Dysart’s doubts about normality, that are found in his speeches to the audience (see E, 65), mainly in the last one at the end of the play (see E, 107ff.). Explaining how he can cure Alan reveals, first of all, the two sides of being normal: being painless on the one hand, but also being passionless on the other. Secondly, this shows that there is no real opposition between normality and abnormality, but rather normal, less normal, more abnormal etc. The therapy as a form of normalization “sustains and kills” (E, 65). It seems like Dysart understands the mutual conditioning of the two poles normal/abnormal, which are really just normal/not normal. Facing the alleged extremity of Alan’s case and comparing it to his own case, an approved normal life, the concept of normality blurs, “its complexity exceeds this binary structure of representation” (Hall 1994, 396).

Though Dysart sounds and looks like he is finally still as lost as in the beginning of the drama, in need of “a way of seeing in the dark”, typically him, according to his position of enunciation, still articulating questions like “What way is this?...What dark
is this? [...] DYSART sits staring. BLACKOUT” (E, 109; original emphasis), he is not. He speaks from another point in time and place, and then and there accepts “this play of ‘difference´ within identity” and seems to know about “the differential points along a sliding scale” (Hall 1994, 396).

3.4 Interlude: telling names

The two main characters are somehow connected by the fictional names given to them by Shaffer: Martin Dysart and Alan Strang. Both of their last names arouse associations of similar words, namely dysfunction or dys-art and strange. The doctor practices the art of psychotherapy and is interested in Greek art. Also, he obviously sees some dysfunctions in himself, and the boy is brought to the mental hospital because of his strange behaviour. The latter is analyzed in the following, again, to elaborate the character and also to find out more about Alan´s identity.

3.5 Characterisation: Alan Strang

The facts given about Alan are very few: he is seventeen, looks lean and wears a sweater and jeans (E, 17). Every piece of information about his past is mediated through the re-enacting of certain events. These flashbacks start when Dysart asks Alan to tell him about the first time he met a horse (see 38ff.). He is about six years old and at the beach, when a horseman with his animal comes closer, talks to him and takes him for a short ride; his parents stop this in panic even though their son enjoys it. They are in fear, while Alan just has fun and is fascinated by horses from this day on. He loves the stories his mother tells him about a horse called Prince (see E, 48) and always wants her to speak the animal’s voice (see E, 30), and despite the fact that his father bans TV, the boy likes to watch Western movies. The concept of equitation – and the Latin word for horse, equus – is introduced to him by his parents, too, but in a very divided way: while his mother considers it an elegant part of a lifestyle (see E, 32), his father discounts it as a conceited amusement of upper-class people (see E, 42); but both of them think that horses are dangerous animals. In contrast, Alan develops a really tender relationship to horses (See E, 17; 57; 75), which actually becomes a sexual connection. About his secret rides at night time he says: “It was sexy.” (E, 47; original emphasis), and in the re-enacting of his hidden horse-riding this physical experience of sex becomes clear (see E, 73f.). Somehow, pleasure and pain are a joint phenomenon for Alan, so being naked in the cold fog and putting “the Manbit” (E, 71) in his mouth before mounting Nugget is a way to delay his orgasm. Feeling – and smelling – horses, especially their bodily strength reminds him of his first experience sitting on a horse on the beach as a child,
which he elaborates on a tape he gives to Dysart. Here, he also reveals that the horses’ power and his having the power to direct such a powerful animal himself is arousing for him, as well as that the horseman’s horse talked to him (see E, 48). Alan longs for unification with the horses, so he hears Equus say “Two shall be one.” (E, 67) and he himself screams “Feel me on you! On you! [...] I want to be in you! I want to BE you forever and ever!” (E, 74; original emphasis); the idea of a possible merging with the animal is primarily mentioned by his mother, telling about how the Christians on their horses were considered as one person, or one god by the pagans who first saw them (see E, 31). Because of this, the world of horses and the words of the Bible somehow mix for Alan, which leads to his own worship rituals, as told by his father (see E, 50f.).

So the parents are important for Alan’s characterization. Most of the time it seems as if the boy favours his mother Dora Strang over his father, enjoying her stories, respecting her knowledge and being proud of everything she teaches him (see E, 28f.). But despite that they are “thick as thieves” (E, 33), as his father Frank Strang puts it, the boy mimicks her annoying threats about God observing his every move (see E, 49), they have a fight because she thinks her son is possessed by the devil (see E, 76ff.), and in the end Alan admits that he changed his opinion about his mother when he realised that she treats his father unfairly by not fulfilling his sexual needs (see E, 96). The relation with his father develops contrariwise during the play: at first, his father is the one banning television because it is “a dangerous drug” (E, 27), and preaching the communist slogan that “Religion is the opium of the people” (E, 29). When Alan surprisingly meets him in the porn cinema he secretly visits with Jill, they are both embarrassed and guilty. As Frank makes up excuses, the teenager recognizes his father’s fear, refuses to follow his rules and gets angry (see E, 92ff.). But suddenly Alan understands that most people have secret sexual desires – including himself –, that “they all do it” (E, 96; original emphasis), and that his father “was nothing special – just a poor old sod on his own” (ibid.). Finally, he sympathises with Frank, finding that “[t]here’s no difference – he’s just the same as me – just the same!” (E, 97).

Despite the different and changing relationships Alan develops with his parents, a common phenomenon is that he repeats their words. From his mother Dora, as mentioned, he saves everything about horses and the Bible, and then uses her exact words when talking to Dysart (See E, 30f.). From his father, it is not only content, but his way of speaking he copies and, again, integrates in his conversations with the psychologist. Especially two phrases appear several times, uttered by Frank as well as Alan: "Mind your own beeswax" (E, 29), when he does not want to answer anymore, and "If you
receive my meaning" (E, 53), when stressing a statement. This extreme imitation shows how Alan - who does not have friends his own age - is attached to his parents, and somehow collides with his wish to be free as a cowboy, or as an orphan (see E, 49). The boy longs for a freedom, that he only feels when riding a horse and a wellness he only feels when being with the animals. The scene in which Jill and the owner Dalton introduce Alan to the stables and explain the basics of his new job to him shows him like that: silent, "sunk in this glowing world of horses" (E, 56), "[l]ost in wonder" (ibid.), "in reverence" (ibid.), "fascinated" (ibid.), "[e]mbarrassed and excited" (ibid.) at the same time.

Within the therapeutic relation that Alan and Dysart have, the teenager also displays a development of very different types of behaviour. At their first meeting, the boy does not react to any of the doctor’s inquiries, after a while and opening up, he embraces the role of a patient, although a stubborn one. In the next sessions, however, Alan starts asking Dysart back the same questions (see E, 36f.) and demands a secret from Dysart because he told one himself (see E, 43). Establishing it as a game, Alan claims his turns in their exchanges of asking and answering, firing intimate questions at Dysart, who refuses to give any information about his private life (see E, 59f.). This can be seen as a reaction to Dysart’s questions concerning Jill in the scene before, where Alan explodes and repeats the psychiatrist’s pestering words "TELL ME! [...] Tell me, tell me, tell me!" (E, 58) and then storms off. This seems to mean, at first sight, that the boy does not want to explain himself and his deeds to the "Nosey Parker" (E, 87) doctor. However, behind this lack of cooperation lies a strong inner will to talk and to get help, despite all the outer protests and boycotts. A lot of times, Alan gives in and finally provides answers (see E, 38), or accepts therapeutic methods like the tape or the hypnosis, though he says it is stupid or a trick (see E, 43; 64). Moreover, he regards it as his right to have a long session with Dysart, and considers it "not fair" (E, 37) when it is once cancelled after a short time only. He even takes back his statement that he lied during hypnosis when telling about his horse experiences in writing a letter (see E, 84), and readily tells more about being attracted to Jill (see E, 89f.) or his sexual arousal while they watched the adult movie together (see E, 91f.). Towards the end of the therapy, Alan not only "accepts the situation" (E, 87), but even demands further inquiries of Dysart: "Ask me a question." (E, 88). The strongest sign of the boy’s need to talk and tell is his very subtle way of requiring "truth drugs" (E, 79), for he has the idea that they will help him to open up and let go. Still hiding his wish to take such a pill behind glares, suspicion and defence, he only "hesitates for a second - then takes it and swallows it"
Alan appears in many, very different moods towards Dysart: from acting “depressed” (E, 85), “subdued” (E, 63), or almost affectionate like a son to a father (see E, 106), to the complete opposite, namely aggressive and hostile. Mainly verbally, but sometimes also slightly physically violent and “belligerent” (E, 28), he insults the doctor, and also the nurse by telling her to “[f]uck off!” (E, 24), or his father by calling him a “[f]ilthy old bugger!” (E, 95), or even his mother by flouting her and labelling her as a prude woman (see E, 96). Towards Dysart, he (re)acts additionally wild and “truculent” (E, 36) or in rage (see E, 58) in many of the therapeutic sessions. His stare can almost be described as his most typical trait and absolute distinctive characteristic, affecting people around him the most (see E, 21; 23; 36; 79). It is also definitely a part of his strange behaviour, his psychological breakdown that brought him to the mental hospital. Initially, Alan does not even answer any of Dysart’s questions, but just sings television commercial jingles (see E, 21f.), which is a form of protest against his father’s ban on watching television, and directly debunked and diagnosed as that by the psychiatrist. Obviously, the boy also suffers form nightmares concerning his relationship to horses, but claims not to remember them when facing his doctor (see E, 35f.); furthermore, he lies about riding horses (see E, 43), about hearing them talk (see E, 53) and about basically everything he tells Dysart by any means of psychological method or trick (see E, 79).

Surely, the strangest part of Alan´s behaviour is his relationship with horses. He creates a very individual type of worship, which consists of idolizing a poster, showing a horse’s head, a “beautiful white one, looking over a gate” (E, 30), appearing “most remarkable”, “interesting”, “extraordinary” (E, 45) and with big staring eyes. It is a photograph given to the boy by his father, to replace a picture of Jesus Christ on his way to the crucifixion, which looked brutal, showed blood and was all in all “a little extreme” (E, 45), as Dora puts it. The parents removed it after another fight they had about religion in their house, and comforted their son with the horse poster instead. Frank explains how he secretly heard his son reciting modified Bible texts using horse names instead of the original Genealogy, and saw him kneeling, bridling himself with a string and beating himself with a coat hanger (see E, 51). Other than violence, sexuality and therefore guilt is also always a part of Alan´s worship of horses, as can be seen in every scene where others are about to realize his relationship with the animals: caught worshipping by his father (see E, 52), surprised by Dalton while bowing in front of the horses in the stables (see E, 56), embarrassed by Jill’s question if he finds horses sexy (see E, 90).
The word equus is special for Alan. He learns it from his mother and starts saying it, savouring its pronunciation (see E, 32), screaming it at his climax and in his nightmares and addressing horses with this name when doing his rituals with them (see E, 72f.). Equus is further called the “only begotten son” (E, 51), “Godslave” (E, 73), “the Mighty” (ibid.), or just “Him” (E, 102; original emphasis) throughout the play. It — or rather he — can basically and most likely be compared to Jesus, and his spirit can be found in all horses, according to Alan (see E, 66). The names show, that power is his main characteristic, and the boy experiences him most of the time as “the Kind…the Merciful” (E, 104) forgiving god. Sometimes, however, he experiences his god as a negative force, that does not help him to find his way, and therefore he even calls him “a mean bugger” (E, 67). Generally, Alan likes to add his own words to his worship, and makes up several in context with his rituals: “chinkle-chankle” (E, 51) for the horse’s bridle, “Straw Law” (E, 67) describes the rule of riding or falling off a horse during the ritual ride, the place or field of “Ha Ha” means the area or grassland where Alan takes Nugget at night, and the “Manbit” (E, 71) is a sacred stick the boy keeps in “the Ark” (ibid.) and puts in his mouth to prevent a too early orgasm during his ride. Interesting in this context is that Alan speaks of how even only words like reins, spurs and flanks that came up in his mother’s stories made him feel full of passion and aroused (see E, 48f.).

Alan’s relation to Jill is also characterized by a rather disturbed sexuality. Meeting her first as a customer in the hardware store where he works, he just stares at her and seems rather shy (see E, 54). Later, when the girl introduces him to the job at the stable, Alan is fascinated because she is his new riding-master and shows him a very practical and not symbolical or ritual way to take care of horses (see E, 57f.). To Dysart, the teenager denies having any interest in Jill at all; he even pretends not to know what she looks or is like and generally plainly refuses to talk about her to the doctor (see E, 58; 88). When giving in to tell about his feelings for and his experiences with her in another re-enactment, Alan develops from moving away from her embarrassedly to embracing her closely, from “outraged” (E, 90), to “grinning” (E, 91), from “bewildered” (E, 95) to “grappling with it” (E, 96) and from not looking at her to kissing her (see E, 99ff.). But even though there is physical attraction between the two teenagers — for example it is Jill’s eyes Alan is especially fascinated by (see E, 89) —, and even though they undress together, there is no sexual intercourse in the end. The boy first firmly argues that he slept with the girl when Dysart asks, but then collapses and admits that he could not do it, because he sees and feels Equus instead of Jill (see E, 102).
From this moment of telling about the sexual failure on, Alan takes up the strange, aggressive behaviour that he shows at the beginning of the therapy – which chronologically comes right after this event. It enhances even more and escalates in an attack in which he scares away the girl, takes a metal hoof pick and blinds the six horses that watched the young couple in the stables. During this dysfunctional moments, Alan is described as cumulating in his rage: he begins acting “like a little beast in a cage” (E, 103), “distorted – possessed” (E, 104), “in terror” (E, 105), “in hysteria” (E, 106) and then finally is “in a dreadful frenzy” (ibid.) – but healed.

3.6 Interpretation: Alan Strang’s identity

Taking Alan’s character traits into consideration, the development of his identity throughout the play can be followed. Again, it is rather important to see how he acts and a little less to look at what he is actually doing or saying, since the form as well as the content of behaviour make up who one eventually is, according to Hall.

First of all, most of what can be known about Alan is told in re-enactments in Dysart’s office: their first conversation (see E. 27ff.), Dora’s report about telling him stories (see E, 30ff.), his own account about meeting a horse as a child (see E, 38ff.), Frank’s report about seeing his son worship the poster (see E, 50ff.), a scene about his hated job at the hardware store (see E, 53f.), the experience of his first fascinating day at the stables (see E, 56ff.), telling the doctor about his secret rides at night (see 69ff.) and the episode about his date with Jill, meeting his father in the adult cinema, being intimate with the girl at the stables and finally his brutal deed to the horses (see E, 89ff.) – everything is mediated indirectly. When other people speak about Alan, he acts out what they say, and when the boy himself tells his story, he speaks in two directions. This is most extreme in the scenes where “ALAN acts directly with her [Jill], and never looks over at DYSART when he replies to him” (E, 89; original emphasis), so that following this mixture of a conversation with the doctor and a meeting with the girl is complicated – for the characters as well as for the reader. This interlooping structure depicts the boy’s identity vividly; it seems like “a suturing, an over-determination […], but never a proper fit, a totality” (Hall 2000, 17). So Alan and especially his speaking are always split up and directed in different ways.

Looking closer at this phenomenon, it becomes clear that Alan constantly speaks from different positions, being a part of the here and now as well as the there and then, and both is acted out at the same time and place, namely the psychiatrist’s office. This complex form of enunciation in the play is in a way congruent with Hall’s theory, say-
ing that “though we speak […] of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless, who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical” (Hall 1994, 392). Alan’s identity is just as opaque and problematic as any other, but the way it is shown in the play makes this especially apparent.

Next, it is Alan’s way of mixing his parents’ views of life and ideologies with events that happened during his formative period as a child and as a teenager in puberty that stands out. Christianity and the rituals expressed by his mother, strict rules and class-consciousness embodied by his father, as well as his own experiences of liberating independence and awakening sexuality are all mixed up and create the basis for his worship of Equus. When these very different ideas get into conflict and also when the boy fails to complete any of them, he is crushed, but his identity is shaped; he is neither an elegant equestrian nor a satisfying boyfriend, neither a prude Christian nor a correct communist, since he just has secret sexual experiences riding a horse, inspired by forbidden Western movies and impressive Bible stories. This shows, that it is not possible to find unity or closure in identity, “but as that which is constructed in or through différence and is constantly destabilized by what it leaves out” (Hall 2000, 18). Alan is instable, or rather: the natural instability of a constantly self-forming identity takes over Alan and leads to his strange deed in the end.

Alan is also determined by his parents Dora and Frank, his doctor Dysart and his friend Jill; as shown above, he lives and embodies the different roles of a mysteriously complicated son (see E, 77f.), a wicked patient (see E, 60) and a nervous teenager (see E, 98). It seems as if Alan’s being and behaviour can be identified as a meeting point, the point of _suture_, between on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’. (Hall 2000, 19; original emphasis)

His relationships to these shaping persons, as others, create what Alan is, and what he is not, therefore his identity – to elaborate the same metaphor – is sewn together and consists of different material, so to say. As analyzed above, Alan mirrors the people that talk to him and influence him in a way. Repeating verbatim what they say when he speaks to others in turn, and thereby including ideas that do not come from his inside, but can be called his “constitutive outside” (Hall 2000, 17; original emphasis) – relating to this by copying it, constructs the boy’s identity.

Specifically, the boy’s relationship to Dysart reveals how he develops an iden-
tity: the essential part of their therapeutic conversations is that the patient is supposed to answer the psychiatrist’s questions, each of them has a “job” (E, 36), a position, a function. During these conversations, Alan makes attempts to refuse (see E, 21ff.), escape (see E, 58), provoke (see E, 88) or invert (see E, 59) this system – still, he always gives in, and provides the doctor mostly with simple and monosyllabic yes or no answers (see E, 65ff.), or plainly gives the exact required information in short sentences; here, it does not matter if a psychological method is used to make him speak – like hypnosis or the placebo – or not, like in the first sessions they have together. A real exception to these intense verbal games are the scenes, where Alan records a monologue on tape for Dysart (see E, 48f.) or the ones when the doctor withdraws and the patient is so lost in the re-enactments of his past, that he talks nonstop. So their relation works, because they can only stay – although going to the limits – within their individual roles. This is reminiscent of the idea of “the play of specific modalities of power” (Hall 2000, 17) as a consequence of “specific enunciative strategies” (ibid.). However Alan behaves and whatever he says, he will still be a patient and articulate himself like that, and this way give Dysart the information he needs as a doctor, for example to heal him.

The strange behaviour Alan shows before the therapy and that finds its climax in his brutal deed against the animals at the stables is considered criminal by Hesther’s bench, and the boy is supposed to be sent to lifelong prison for it (see E, 19). The reason why the magistrate argues in his case and insists on letting him be treated in a mental hospital instead, is because she feels that there are special, startling “vibrations” (E, 20) about him. So the transition from criminal to sick is made easily, since those two characteristics belong to a general pattern of strangeness, in being and behaviour. In this context, Hall’s idea about polarity as a constitutional part of identity can be applied. The objective normality – riding horses for fun or sport and treating them like friends or sport tools – is based on “repressing that which threatens it” (Hall 2000, 18), namely Alan’s abnormal act of injuring those animals brutally or being sexually aroused by their physique. It is affirmed that the teenager must be healed and can be healed; according to “a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles” (ibid.), he is just on the wrong side and can be talked, interpellated or summoned back into normality; he is just a sick accident, as opposed to the essential health.

Finally, there is Alan’s change from the beginning to the end of the play, his constant development, his healing. The way he relives important events of his past and how he appears in the present in between, shows that identification is built on an “unconscious processes of formation” (Hall 2000, 15) and results in an “endlessly perfor-
mative self” (ibid.).

3.7 Results
For both Dysart and Alan it can be stated that they are “round characters” (Porter Abbott 2002, 126), full of intensive complexity and inner as well as outer conflicts are noticeable. Clearly, the doctor’s and the boy’s actions, thoughts and emotions show how formative the relation to others is for an individual’s identity, whether it exists as a comparison – like between Dysart and Alan – or is expressed in a way of mirroring – like from Alan to his parents –, whether they articulate themselves – like Alan when he invents his words of worship – or are summoned in a certain discourse – like Dysart has the function of asking. They are speaking from their specific positions and they use the strategies of enunciation that result from the practices of power surrounding them: within a hospital as a doctor, within a family as a son, for example. Furthermore, their relationship is in particular positioned and embedded in a certain context: they are psychiatrist and patient. As individuals and as therapy partners, Dysart and Alan go through changes and a development, which definitely demonstrates the essence of identity as a permanent process.

Hall’s theory of identity and all the concepts evolving from it seem to be applicable and available for literary characters, and especially for those analyzed here. This is true due to the facts that, firstly, character is a narrative idea imposed on human beings and therefore an object of filling gaps and accepting excess (see Porter Abbott 2002, 127f.), and secondly, due to the irreducibility and reconceptualization of identity (see Hall 2000, 16).

4.1 Historical framework
Like some other animals, horses are considered special by human beings and the relationship with them has become a very close one. Consequently, the horse is an animal, whose definition is strongly determined by its relation to humans and also rather complex.

Consulting a dictionary of zoology, it stands out that unlike for other animals, several entries can be found for the horse: one about its general classification in biology, the family *equidae* and the genus *equus*, including asses and zebras, and another one called *equus caballus*, the domestic horse (see Allaby 1999, 191f.). In fact, the horse is the only animal of which most forms are extinct today and just a small number is left un-domesticated and still lives wild nowadays – namely the Przewalski’s horse in cen-
tral and western Asia, as well as some other species in Africa. This creates a special status for the horse, because it somehow stands between being a production or farm animal used for food, material or transport, and being a domestic animal accompanying humans in their sport and leisure activities and existing in a variety of breeds for different purposes – or no other purposes at all than just being a specimen of their breed. Probably, their rather large brain and their highly developed senses of sight, smell, touch and hearing (see ibid.) differentiate them from cows, pigs, goats or sheep. Noteworthy is, that the biological cognation between horses and livestock or cattle is closer, than their connection with the most common pets who live together with human beings in their houses, like dogs, cats or caged birds and small rodents – which is most concrete and clear looking at their size and physical power. Still, they are often kept next to their owners’ houses and are treated like friends, family members or sport partners. So the fact that there are barely any other animals of this size that Western human beings allow to be that close to themselves, let alone ride, makes them special.

Interestingly, common dictionary definitions mostly just cover what a horse is used for, and that is “riding, racing, and to carry and pull loads” (Pearsall 1998, 885), and also what it looks like, namely “solid-hoofed” (ibid.) and with “a flowing mane and tail” (ibid.). These two aspects, the practical purposes and the absorbing appearance, can be found important from the beginning of the common history of human beings and horses onwards. About one million years ago, the first ancestors of today’s equus caballus developed, in prehistoric times about ten thousand years ago were mainly eaten and “had become an important part of the human diet” (Walker 2008, 27). They adapted, just like the first human beings to the different climates all over the world and their skins, furs and bones served as material for clothes, tools and weapons. Around 4000 B.C., the horse was not longer the main hunted animal, but began to be used for hunting other animals instead, because of “the attributes of speed and power [that] offered more use to humans” (Walker 2008, 37) than their meat. Their natural qualities fulfilled specific requirements and people started to breed precisely for which they needed the horses. From this time on, the horse became domesticated and so “facilitated the development of the human civilization by providing the means of effective transport, agriculture, industry and warfare” (Chua 2004, 149). Interacting with these animals showed their tameability, and together with their adaptability – to climates and to the human community – founded the base of a close relationship. It even turned into a partnership, in which horses lost their wildness and freedom indeed, but gained safety instead; also their mixed role of a servant and a companion began (see Walker 2008, 39ff.).
Even though it is hard to separate those two functions horses had for humans, it can be said that as servants, they were used for work like drawing chariots and pulling loads, whereas they rather became companions with the beginning of riding. The invention of the bit and other bridles and harness was essential for this development (see Anthony 2004, 366f.). Horseback riding was a logical consequence of domestication. It commenced as a practical skill – for hunters and herdsman, knights and cavalry soldiers, mailmen, tradesmen and any workers who needed transportation and mobility – and then advanced into an art. Something that nomadic people like the Mongolians have always learned from childhood on because it enabled their survival became a culture of luxury in Central Europe from around 1500 on (see Walker 2008, 90ff.). Noblemen and royalty bred horses, trained them and therewith also themselves, and became horsemen. Taking the natural movements of horses, sharing their balance and dynamics, and putting them under their dressage transferred exactly these qualities to the riding king, prince or conqueror in a way. This “initially offered a metaphor for the control by man of his own animal passions and also supported the biblical imperative for man to have dominion over nature” (Walker 2008, 96). Many rules and regulations were formed, that finally determined a whole lifestyle, a cult. Artists illustrated the special relationship in “equestrian portraits” (Walker 2008, 95) and books about horsemanship were written in England, France and Spain (see Walker 2008, 94ff.). Especially on the island, a “peculiar ‘Englishness’” (Walker 2008, 116) rose together with the rise of riding as a recreational activity for upper-class people. From the nineteenth century on, another, rather relaxed style developed alongside the classical one, namely that of the American cowboy; it, too, became iconic through portraits, but not until the new media of Western movies on TV and in the cinema spread them decades later (see Walker 2008, 103ff.). It was all about “maintaining status and position in a way that was a far cry from the gentle art of the European” (Walker 2008, 110) elite. So both styles of horseback riding appeared parallel during post-war times in Britain, the setting of the analysed play, one as an active culture, the other one as a perceived image.

After the Industrial Revolution, the horse has lost its role as a breadwinner or tool, and has rather become a performer or toy; or put differently, went from working to racing and rodeo riding, from slavery to artistry and partnership (see Walker 2008, 143ff.). However, the animal has not become redundant or irrelevant at all, since the essence and core of any equestrian culture is still linked to the primary roots and old traditions, so that everything “the horse symbolizes still has value” today (Walker 2008, 117). Clearly, horses are an image in many cultures and form crucial elements of myths
and legends. Being a source of inspiration and aspiration (Walker 2008, 45), the horse can stand for various values, such as the spiritual world, male energy or wisdom. A special role plays “the horse-human hybrid” (Walker 2008, 51), who shows up in Celtic and above all in Greek mythology in the form of the Centaur for example, a man’s torso on the body of a horse, resulting out of love affairs of gods with people. They – and in a way also unicorns – not only personify perfect riding skills and becoming one with the horse, but symbolize a balance between the physical and the spiritual worlds and reflect the conflict of human and animal nature (see Walker 2008, 52). Furthermore, the horse’s role in all these narrations, whether they are antique or modern myths, is mostly that of the hero’s ally. Speaking to him and being heard only by him is considered crucial for the protagonist’s growth and survival, because “the horse embodies the life-force, acting as a bridge between the inner and the outer worlds” (Walker 2008, 57).

Therefore, analyzing the human-horse-relationship as a motif in Equus can tell more about the type of connection between them and the literary characters. To look at how horses are presented – as animals, as riding partners, as images, as figures in myths and stories, as bodies – in the play and how humans refer to them clarifies their meaning for this particular text. Historical facts as well as mythic aspects come up, from the actual costumes to the effects on the main characters.

4.2 Audio-visual horses

First of all, it is important to see that in this text the horses play a special role – in the true sense of the expression. The animals are introduced as being embodied by actors, who are not hidden behind costumes that look as much like horses as possible and “no attempt should be made to conceal them” (E, 15). They only wear big masks over their heads and metal hooves on their feet; putting on the masks is a ceremony visible for the audience. Animal effect is created by simple and sensitive mimicry and gestures, to avoid pantomiming a horse clumsily, but to rather achieve “equine wariness and pride” (ibid.). Like this, no impression of “the cosy familiarity of a domestic animal” (ibid.), or in a word: any “literalism” (ibid.) is shown. At the end, this style of the beginning and during the play is even described as naturalistic, compared to how the animals look and behave when Alan stabs them in their eyes: archetypal, dreadful creatures, out of a human’s nightmare (see E, 106).

To the way the horses are seen could be added how they are heard: as a choir creating the “Equus Noise” (E, 16). Its function is to mark the presence of the horse god
and it consists of humming, thumping and stamping, but “never of neighing or whinnying” (ibid.). The choric sound appears in rather positive contexts, for example when Alan first meets a horse as a child and is directly attracted to it (see E, 38ff.), when he visits the stables for the first time and is fascinated (see 55ff.), or when he re-enacts his secret rides in a therapy session with Dysart (see E, 68; 73). But the Equus noise is also a part of negative situations, like Alan’s nightmare watched by the doctor (see E, 35), like the night when Jill takes the boy to the stables and seduces him (see E, 98; 101), or like the final moment of hysteria when Alan blinds the six horses (see E, 104; 106). There is only one occasion, when Nugget, Alan’s favourite horse, expresses a real animalistic sound: he snorts after a wild ride of worship, just when his rider says “AMEN!” (E, 74; original emphasis).

So, the horses are heard in a way, even though they do not communicate with their own, natural sounds. Both protagonists are connected with the animals on this level: Alan hears Equus speaking to him throughout the whole play, and throughout his whole life actually, and in the end even Dysart listens to “the creature’s voice” (E, 75). As a boy, Alan “loved the idea of animals talking” (E, 30) when his mother reads him stories assigning different voices to different parts, and meeting the first horse in his life, he easily asks it a question and gets an answer (see E, 48); though the teenager denies that type of conversation in the therapy sessions with the psychiatrist (see E, 53).

4.3 Horses made by humans
It is in several varying systems or contexts that horses exist and speak or are spoken of in the play: the Christian Bible, Western television movies and the English culture of equitation. Dora is the character who introduces the passages of the Book of Job that she read to Alan when he was still a child; here, the horses’ god-given physicality and strength are stressed, and their “fierceness and rage” (E, 31) are combined with nobleness and splendidness. Another anecdote his mother shares in a re-enactment scene with Alan as a boy and Dysart the psychiatrist at the same time is about Christian cavalry: “when [they] first appeared in the New World, the pagans thought horse and rider was one person” (ibid.), considered “A god!” (ibid.) as the amazed boy adds, but exposed as man and animal in the case of falling. Those ideas appear again when Alan acts out his passionate rides for Dysart. Calling it “Straw Law” (E, 67), the teenager is aware that falling off Nugget is a failure, because the “[t]wo shall be one”, not only one beast, but even rather one person (ibid.). His rituals of preparing for the secret night ride take strong care about the physical features of the horse, and at the climax of this trip, the
boy’s own bodily pleasure is in the focus. It lies in Equus’ power that both creatures amalgamate as one, which is clear when Alan begs to “Make us One Person!” (E, 74).

The motif of horse, rider and their unity comes up in more and slightly different religious and spiritual contexts, for example when Dysart refers to Greek centaurs (see E, 83). This fantastic, fascinating creature is made of a man’s upper body and head and a horse’s belly, back and legs and the doctor admires it in his favourite books as a desirable, ideal life for him. In a way, this vision is de-idolized in form of the kitschy “china condiment donkeys labelled Sally and Peppy” (E, 62) which his wife got as a souvenir from Greece.

Popular culture is another important context of horses in the play. The bedtime story about Prince, a wild horse that no one but his “young Master” (E, 30) can ride, influences Alan’s view and worship of horses, too. He blends it with the Biblical Genealogy, making Prince the prime father of a long row of male horses, closing with Equus, the only begotten son (see E, 50f.). Both ideas – the untamed, un-ride-able horse and the godly, genealogical master-ship – are combined in Alan’s comment when he mounts Nugget for a ride: “Here we go. The King rides out on Equus, the mightiest of horses. Only I can ride him.” (E, 73). Another type of horse-human-story has a certain effect on the boy: Western movies. He consumes them on forbidden television as a child, and adores cowboys and their animal partners. In fact, Alan wishes to be a cowboy because they live like orphans – free from all sorts of restrictions and rules made by parents, or even equitation or religion (see E, 49). In his worship, he creates his own rituals, from the admiration of a word (see E, 32) or a poster (see E, 44f.), to the secret rides at night (see E, 68ff.) or to the reverence of the horses in their holy temple, the stables (see E, 56f.).

In the context of the latter, many practical facts about horses and the way how humans take care of them as animals and tend to connect with them as friends or partners are presented. The stable owner Dalton and the girl Jill teach Alan how to groom and clean a horse, especially how to use the hoof-pick and the other tools (see E, 56f.). Massaging the animal with brushes and combs rubbing through its coat is considered an enjoyment, and such a reaction is also shown by Nugget, who “moves very slightly in pleasure” (E, 57). The information that “[t]he harder you do it, the more the horse loves it” (ibid.) is essential for Alan, and he directly expresses his anger about Dysart’s questions in brushing Trooper while re-enacting this stable scene. Jill, however, shares a more typical tender relationship with the animals, talking to them directly and calling them with pet names like “baby” or “boy” (ibid.). After Alan sends her away and blinds
the horses, she is shocked and even suffers a nervous breakdown, also, Dalton finds the boy´s deed terrible, and thinks he will never get over it (see E, 46).

4.4 Riding
Concerning riding, which is in a way the ultimate connection between horses and humans, the play tells a lot about horsemanship or equitation. Alan is born into a “horsey family” (E, 32), as his mother puts it; her grandfather from Brighton used to be “indulging in equitation” (ibid.), which means dressing up wearing a bowler hat and jodhpur pants for riding. Dora also stresses that she always wanted her son to ride himself, but he showed no outward interest in it – not as a child and still not as a teenager. Alan even shows a strong dislike for this typical aspect of English culture and its attitude and accessories, claiming that putting special clothes on when riding a horse is “filthy” (E, 49) because a horse is “the most naked thing” (ibid.) and therefore pure life. Also, riding in paces and just following rules in “bloody gymkhanas” (ibid.) is the opposite of the free and wild style of cowboys in his eyes. In his own riding ritual, Alan describes jodhpurs, bowlers and gymkhanas as Equus´ foes, against which he must ride; instead of the freedom, passion, friendship and worship he himself practices, equestrians only show the horse off or tie rosettes on his head “for their vanity” (E, 73). The boy even transfers this classy culture of equitation to another topic, namely his mother´s reserved sexuality, saying she prefers Ladies and Gentlemen with jodhpur trousers and bowler hats to naked people (see E, 96). Frank has different reasons to detest equitation; he considers it a way for upper-class people to “trample on ordinary people” (E, 42). So Alan´s parents agree on seeing the horse that their son encounters on the beach as dangerous, because of its physical power and strength (see E, 41). The mother additionally fears its wildness and the fast running outside a marked-off paddock, the father also feels his social and individual status in danger, compared to the horseman whom his son admires at once. For Alan, this initial ride on Trojan on the beach neither has an aspect of being classy, nor class-conscious: he has a rather natural, liberating experience. Learning to “always mount a horse from the left” (E, 39), to “hold onto the mane” (ibid.) and to “grip with your knees” (E, 40) for example, brings him closer to and in control of the horse with the help of the young horseman. This way, Alan can just enjoy himself and the wonderful ride.

4.5 Horse bodies and minds
From this first experience onwards, horses fascinate the boy and “[e]very time [he] heard one clop by, [he] had to run and see” (E, 48). Hearing helps his fantasies, but especially
the visual perception of the big animals is important to Alan and his type of worship. He uses a photograph out of a calendar showing a beautiful white horse, looking over a gate (see E, 30). What is special about this poster hung up on his bedroom wall is the design: Frank explains, that “[y]ou very rarely see a horse taken from that angle – absolutely head on. […] It comes out all eyes.” (E, 45). Obviously, it is not a typical image of a horse, which is usually shown completely. In the play, however, the animals are most of the time presented in fragments. Literally, it is just body parts that play a role. Looking at which details of the horses’ bodies appear mostly and are awarded meaning, the head, the eyes and the hooves stick out from the rest.

The heads of the horses is made important right from the beginning, when the masks are introduced, that are made of silver wire and leather, and put on the actors’ heads (see E, 15). Going further into the first scenes, it is Alan fondling Nugget’s head (see E, 17), and Dysart wondering about the horse’s head kissing the boy (ibid.); then the doctor states, that “a horse’s head is finally unknowable to me” (E, 18). Moreover, there is the poster of the white horse’s head (see E, 45), that is a key for the psychiatrist to understand his patient’s disturbed passion. At the stables, the actors embodying the horses throw up their heads and are tethered by them, as if to greet the teenager’s first visit (see E, 55f.). The importance of the masking ritual is stressed throughout the play, when the actors lift their horse heads up high every time before they put them on (see E, 98). Dysart even uses the picture of the great animal’s head when hypnotising Alan, and reminding him of their encounter on the beach (see E, 66). And in the end, it is the horses’ heads that get attacked by the boy in his rage (see E, 106).

When Alan finally stabs out Nugget’s eyes, because they were rolling and watching him while he was intimate with Jill in the stables (see E, 105), it is the climax of the motif of the horse’s eyes that developed from the beginning. On the costumes of the six actors, they are emphasized with leather blinkers (see E, 15), and later even flare, when the horses confront Alan and try to trample him (see E, 106). As mentioned above, the huge staring eyes are the extraordinary feature on the photograph his father gave to the boy (see E, 45; 50), and inspire Alan’s ideas about Equus. During the ritual preparation of riding Nugget, the teenager describes that “[h]is eyes shine. They can see in the dark…Eyes!” (E, 71; original emphasis). A little later in another re-enactment with Dysart there is a scene between Jill and Alan, which is all about eyes (see E, 90): the girl states that she is not attracted to boys’ bottoms, like everybody else, but rather finds their eyes fascinating and suspects Alan to feel the same. Upon his defence, she understands that it is only horses’ eyes and admits that she spied on him “staring into
Nugget’s eyes yesterday for ages” (E, 90). Jill herself then declares what Alan secretly thinks, too, namely that she loves the animals’ eyes, because of “[t]he way you can see yourself in them” (ibid.) – just like in a mirror.

The third body part of the horse that is mentioned a lot throughout the play are the hooves. Obviously, they are considered a decisive characteristic of these animals, because they are part of the sparing but glaring costume: the actors wear light strutted hooves with real metal horse-shoes (see E, 15). Walking with these gadgets makes distinct, delicate sounds on the wooden floor of the stage, the rooms and the stables (see E, 17). Especially within the latter location, hooves are the component of the horse, of which the humans take special care of. From the moment on when Alan hears “[t]heir metal hooves stamp on the wood” (E, 55), he immerses into Equus´ empire, in contrast to Jill and Dalton who are not in the horses´ world, but in a horsey world, and show the boy how to clean a hoof. Anatomic knowledge about the V-shaped shock absorber on the horse’s sole that is called frog, and how to scrub it carefully with a sharp hoof-pick – which becomes Alan’s weapon for blinding later – is given in these scenes (see E, 56). The teenager also pays special attention to Nugget’s feet, when getting ready for their secret ride: for practical and symbolical reasons, he ties “[s]andals of majesty! ...Made of sack” (E, 69) around the animals´ hooves. This way, nobody would hear them walking out and the horse stays completely silent – since any vocal sounds are already to be avoided according to the stage directions. During the ride it is a climax for Alan to think of the animal’s body as his own body, its feet as “[m]y hooves!” (E, 74; original emphasis). Another close connection of animal and human is mentioned, when Dysart remembers an observation of horses about which his patient told him: “how they’ll stand one hoof on its end, like those girls in ballet” (E, 75), which refers to a shared gracefulness. Sometimes, not even the horses as a whole are regarded, but only their hooves smashing on the ground (see E, 101) or their “relentless hooves” (E, 105) stamping angrily or “[t]heir metal hooves join in the stamping” (E, 106) in the final confrontation – all that makes the animals appear as creatures of negative physical strength only.

Other parts of the horses´ bodies that Alan is also attracted to are the neck and the skin, and he describes that on the tape he records for Dysart, saying he feels pulled by “[t]he way their necks twist” (E, 48) and has to “watch their skins” (ibid.). It is clear that the teenager associates the neck, presented to him as “clothed […] with thunder” (E, 31) with power and control, that is why he likes to touch it (see E, 40; 57; 75; 103). With the skin, the fur, the hide, it is rather sensuality and a soft and warm feeling and “[n]ot flesh” (E, 103) by which he is aroused. Together with those aspects also goes the
mouth, which is considered huge and full with cream (see E, 48) and in pain because of the bit, that Alan ritually takes in his own mouth first before bridling Nugget (see E, 69). Flaring mouths and also flaring nostrils communicate the horses’ suffering and energy (See E, 106). They are “open for me” (E, 71) according to Alan, and characterized as glorious and terrible at the same time in the Bible text (see E, 31). The animals’ shoulders (see E, 15; 39; 57), flanks (see E, 48; 71) and mane (see E, 39; 107) are more attributes named and used, for example when Alan rides Nugget and screams “My mane, stiff in the wind! My flanks!” (E, 74; original emphasis) at the top of his climax.

The largest parts of the horse body, the chest (see E, 75), the back (see E, 57; 74) and the rump (see E, 56; 58) do not have such a strong meaning in the play. Furthermore, there are only three episodes, where the horse’s body as a whole is mentioned: first, it is when Jill shows Alan how to clean Nugget, brushing him from the ears to the tail (see E, 57), secondly, it is when the teenager stands naked in front of his favourite horse and touches it all over its belly and its “ribs […] of ivory” (E, 71) before jumping on it, and thirdly, it is when they finish their passionate ride and moments of worship, and Alan kisses Nugget’s body lovingly (see E, 75).

Apart from the mainly physical mentioning of horses, their minds are also of interest in the play. The two protagonists are concerned with what and how these animals think and feel: Dysart imagines – or tries to imagine – what is going on in a horse’s head, whereas Alan is intrigued and absorbed by it. Questions about Nugget’s desires occupy the psychiatrist, and if this horse wants something “absolutely irrelevant to filling its belly or propagating its own kind” (E, 17), for example: “[n]ot to stay a horse any longer” (ibid.). Especially the physical part of this change, the aspect of “particular genetic strings” (ibid.) that force the horse to be a horse, bother the doctor. He also wonders, if a horse thinks about its everyday experiences, suffers from them and feels grief about its life – and finally, if such feelings are useful to the animal. Dysart comes to the result that there are moments about a horse that cannot be imagined and known by humans at all in any way (see E, 18).

Alan, however, has a different, rather spiritual connection with Nugget and horses in general. As mentioned above, he talks to them and hears them answer to his questions, especially about their pain; for example when Trojan – the first horse the boy ever met – tells him that the chain in his mouth hurts (see E, 48). Sometimes the horse’s behaviour explained in the stage directions gives hints about what it thinks and feels, for instance when Nugget “picks his way with care” (E, 69) or “follows obediently” (ibid.) after his young master Alan, which shows both own will and conscience as well as trust
in his human companion. The horses are attributed positive characteristics, like tenderness, when Nugget “nuzzles” (E, 17) Alan’s neck. But most of the time, their manners are described as not only fond and loving, but also powerful and strong: every time one appears in the play, there are swaying heads and stamping hooves, at least. During Alan’s attack, the horses show feelings and opinions in a way, and their counterattack and defence are described as agony and anger, judging, punishing and pitiless (see E, 105f.). They are in fact damaged but not really defeated in the end: Dysart resolves Equus` power over Alan, but is now connected with the horse god himself.

4.6 Interpretation: the human-horse-relationship in Equus

Horses and the human-horse-relationship as a main theme with several motifs in Equus are strongly connected with many historical facts about the common development of people and their animals – the animals they have chosen to be close to for several reasons. Naturally, the traditional anthropocentric perspective (see Walker 2008, 184) on these reasons has to be considered, but as the historical matters mentioned above show, there are facts why humans relate to horses in the special way they did and do. In general, it is “similarities and differences in […] natures that draw” (Walker 2008, 13) people and animals together, making companionship possible.

Analogies are for example the family and gender structures with protecting parents and male-female-pairs supporting the herd (see Walker 2008, 14), similar social structures (see Walker 2008, 34) and deriving from a common ancestry (see Walker 2008, 28). Besides adaptability and sociability there is also a supposed natural curiosity on both sides (see Walker 2008, 37). All this can explain why a horse world is created in Equus to show Alan´s and Dysart´s struggles and is easily accepted by its characters – as well as the audience and the readers. It is simply possible, because everyone can relate to horses in some way, horsey or not. Differences between horses and humans are just as obvious – the sheer physical facts like size and look and diet are striking strongly (see Walker 2008, 182). However, many representations of the animal in written or filmed stories “play down the physicality of the horse [and] reveal the most about our human desire for contact” (ibid.) with them. Parts of this desire can be traced in Alan´s sensual, sexual touching of Nugget´s hide and treating him like a lover, culminating in the refusal of his human lover Jill´s skin. The incapacity to accept that such a large body can be loved intimately and closely can also be the reason for not seeing or showing horses as a whole in Equus, but rather focusing on fragments that are considered important or typical for a horse, like the hooves. Decisive elements on the animals´ feet are
the horse shoes – on the costumes of the play as well as in reality – that create the clapping and stamping which are almost associated as the natural sounds of approaching horses, though they are man-made features. The non-natural presentation of the horses in the drama, both audible and visual, conventionalized with mask rituals and the humming choir is an indicator for the desire of humans to shape the world for special uses (see Walker 2008, 64). The exaggerated appearance as creatures out of a nightmare also shows how much influence the human perception of horses has on their looks, for example the characteristics of the different breeds and their business (see Walker 2008, 86). Mankind has made horses become what they want them to be, a diversity spread from practical breeding – speed, strength, stamina – to creating pure beauty (see Walker 2008, 70f.), or even terrible types of non-animalistic animals like they are found on stage in *Equus*.

Another way to shape and use horses according to special needs or a particular perception is horseback riding. The classical version employs movements that are based on natural expressions of the animal, yet they are “stylized for human comfort” (Walker 2008, 100). Tools like bridles and saddles as well as special clothes show how people try to make riding a pleasant experience, reining the animal’s power and cushioning its pace. Breaking the natural relation of horses as prey and humans as predator – the former lives and the latter transforms life into a lifestyle – the interaction relies on mutual characteristics of each species (see Walker 2008, 17). Horses “seek safety in numbers and to follow confident leadership” (Walker 2008, 36), both guaranteed through the culture of horsemanship. Here, the stables keep horses together among the likes of them and under control and care, both of which corresponding to human nature. In *Equus*, Duncan and Jill teach Alan how to clean Nugget, Trooper and the rest, but the boy does not have to learn how to caress the horses and the six horses in the stable trust and follow him just like they do with the other people.

Alan’s mother, coming from a horsey family and his father, representing the working-class, illustrate another historical fact: horse riding as a status symbol. Sitting on a horse, dressed up – note the etymology of the verb `to dress´ deriving from the act of putting on gear to get ready for riding – and with a certain attitude and atmosphere works like “a cultural mirror” (Walker 2008, 100); it reflects not only the position of the rider on the horse, but also his place in society and of course also in the hierarchy of all living things. While the elite sit on the beautiful bred horse, workers usually walk next to or behind their working animal, and in both cases a very different type of picturesque image results. Whether it was horsemanship in leisure or hard labour,
The horse has enabled many aspects of human development, shaping physical and cultural landscapes […]. [And] a similar role has been played by the horse in the establishment of civilizations across the world […] for which the horse became a feature of personal and cultural identity so intrinsic that the relationship, changing and mutating over time, has survived to the present day (Walker 2008, 89f.).

So the different types of training and dressage have changed during the shared history, due to what people needed, wanted and especially, due to how they understand themselves and as a consequence: how they understand the horses. Therefore, classical or relaxed riding is often “reflecting changes in humans´ minds” (Walker 2008, 19). For Alan, who wants to rebel against his parents, the cowboy style of riding is the proper opposition to his mother´s English tradition of equitation, and to his father´s attitude against horses as bare, brutal beasts of burden. The boy feels typical “Centaur longings” (Walker 2008, 188) and yearns for communication with the animals (see Walker 2008, 190), wanting to be at one with them physically and connect with them spiritually. Dys-sart shows similar feelings and thoughts of unity or at least a possible understanding between human and horse, the animal embodying wild passion and himself as a man feeling lifeless indifference in his case. The motif of the horses´ head appearing throughout the whole play and the doctor´s questions and worries about its inside remind of the fact, that during their domesticated times there has been an “influence of the horse upon the human thinking at an instinctive level” (Walker 2008, 63), touching at a very deep level (see Walker 2008, 181). But while the rational psychiatrist experiences a crisis when confronted with the doubts of understanding and even healing another being – comparing the horse´s and the boy´s mind – the rebellious teenager handles those insecurities and disbeliefs about bonding by saving his very own belief and form of worship.

Referring to the horses´ eyes, how mysterious they are and how one can see oneself in them, is reminiscent of another aspect of the human-horse-relation through history: the horse as a reflecting mirror (see Walker 2008, 190), showing its human counterparts their perceptions of themselves and the world. In Equus, it is especially Alan, who sees and seeks something in or behind Nugget´s eyes. Taking the mythic and legendary aspects into account, it is clear that the horses in the stable are needed to bring out the boy, since he is a protagonist in the play. The horses traditionally “reveal the nature of the hero” (Walker 2008, 182) and reflect him (see Walker 2008, 193). It seems like since the time the animal got rather redundant in reality due to machines fulfilling its functions, the new role as an ally, partner and eventually mirror of a human hero has
developed with the rise of Western movies and stories like the one about Prince, that Alan likes so much (see Walker 2008, 172). An aspect of this role is that horses always retain their specific horse spirits but also assimilate useful human attributes in the interaction (see Walker 2008, 175), guiding – or in this case rather carrying – the protagonist through his or her changes and to the final solution. The re-enactments of Alan’s first meeting with a horse and of the secret night rides help him to be cured in the end.

While a horse is a soulful, equal partner for the boy, Dysart, however, sees the animal as a wild, passionate being, whose mind can never be read. These complex thoughts represent two ideas about the human-horse-relationship: they are either perceived as “non-human” (Walker 2008, 185) or as “other-than-human” (ibid.). The former is based on the biblical directive of man’s dominion over nature, and the latter is formed by several indigenous peoples that consider animals as gods, for example. In Equus, it is easy for Alan to relate to his others, whether they are horses or humans, yet Dysart and the other characters have trouble seeing something else than an animal: Jill likes to take care of them as charges, Dora considers them splendid sport partners, and Frank suspects them as status symbols. Either way – everyone has a kind of relation, connection, distance or at least opinion about horses.

All these examples make clear, how horses and humans “form and inform each other” (Walker 2008, 20), their concurrent changes in the shared relationship from domesticating times on (see Walker 2008, 34) and the “profound impact upon one another’s lives and essential developments” (Walker 2008, 40f.), be it due to practical, aesthetical or psychological reasons. But even though the horses’ contribution to both characters and their identification is crucial, they are just used, suffer and get blinded in the end, while Alan becomes normal and healed from what is considered a dysfunction and Dysart reaches a point in his depression from where he can only get better. This illuminates the human-horse-relationship and shows that “ultimately, the experience of the horse is always less important than the human’s view of themselves” (Walker 2008, 166). Summed up, there are historical facts and also mysterious feelings that bind humans to horses, just like Alan worships his god and Dysart doubts but wants and needs to believe in Equus, too. The play presents the ways, “in which we gain reflection of ourselves through the horse that pleases us [and] reveals us at our most psychologically naked” (Walker 2008, 193). And finally, it is the setting of rural England in the nineteen sixties, home of the Pony Club and era of the gymkhanas (see Walker 2008, 177), that surrounds and supports this story persuasively.
5. Discussion

The analysis of identity and the human-horse-relationship in *Equus* has shown how the protagonists are formed in endless processes of identification and how horses and humans are presented together due to a long shared complex history. Some of these aspects of both interpretations obviously overlap and somehow support each other, as will be shown.

The two main characters undergo major crises and changes of personality throughout the play, in which horses mean different things. Dysart mainly asks professional *questions*, whose answers he already foresees, and *questions* his private life, which feels lifeless to him. So the doctor’s depression can maybe not only be described as full of doubts but also as a deep *boredom*; he longs for moments in which he does not feel sure and safe. The psychiatrist wants to be wild and free, and that is why he is fascinated by the horse god, who stands for these values. Alan *mirrors* what his parents say and do, and says and does the *same*, and since he has no peers to mix and match with, there is no way for him to break out of his family and be *different*. So the boy’s strange behaviour can not only be seen as a disturbance but also as a type of rebellion; he longs for experiences where he does not have to copy his mother or his father. The teenager wants to be independent and free and that is why he is attracted to horses and everything they stand for. Both characters require the other or the others to define themselves – whether it happens in the form of mirroring, comparing or revolting. They are constantly constituted from the outside, having their inside shaped according to the systems of positions, polarity, performance as well as strategies of similarity and difference that build identities. But while Dysart desperately seeks for something other than human, Alan rather naturally finds the other in an animal god; while the doctor longs for a different form of life, the boy craves for difference.

The psychiatrist, on the one hand, is an example of how “animal nature in the human being was to be rigorously repressed” (Scholtmeijer 2000, 371) in most times and places, especially in England during the nineteen fifties, the setting of the story. For him, it means suppressing his deep wishes for his profession, where he has to stick to therapeutic tricks and tools instead of using his instinct or accepting that he can not heal a mind anyway, and for his private life, where he is stuck in a marriage without passion and children – note the naturally important meaning of reproduction for animals. Dysart is aware of the fact “that we [humans] do not know the truth about animals” (Scholtmeijer 2000, 379; original emphasis), which is one of his main questions or rather, a central element of his ken. It is also the problem of knowing the same about humans, who are
also animals, that causes his long-held deep depression and initiates his open crisis facing Alan, who shows him that a mysterious mind does not matter and that it is possible to have a connection with something or someone who is not absolutely like oneself. In the end, the doctor accepts that humankind can not survive without the other, without others, without animals (see Scholtmeijer 2000, 389).

His patient, on the other hand, reminds him of a young cowboy, who experiences several types of tensions, for example between the individual and the community, nature and culture as well as freedom and restriction (see Doyle 2008, 282). He is considered strange by his parents, who overprotect him, by his peers, like Jill, and finally by magistrates and doctors, bringing him to the hospital for therapy. There is no time or place, nor any position for Alan to stand out or to be different, because he only knows his parents and their ideas and values; he has no other points of friction, over- or under-determination in his life. That is a reason why horses can become his other, and might also be the motivation for him to consider them – just like cowboys connect to their four-legged allies – people, characters (see Doyle 2008, 284) and in his extreme case, even a god. The spirit of Equus can not only be found in Trojan on the beach and Trooper or Nugget in the stables, but in every horse and also in the stables, the only world Alan knows besides the home where he lives and the hardware-store where he works. Yearning for the experiences of the young men, who are often called masters, he gets to know in the stories he reads and the Western movies he watches, a horse becomes a multifunctional counterpart and companion; it can play the role of a friend or a lover, but is also a “developmental catalyst to the boy hero” (Doyle 2008, 300).

A crucial insight in the play, which clearly shows the overlapping of identity processes and human-horse-connections, is that Dysart looks at centaurs in his books on Greek mythology and Alan sits naked on the animal and tries to become one (see E, 83). So, riding seems to be essential: like Game shows in her article, it can be called “Embodying the Centaur” (2001, 1). As soon as the horse was domesticated, humans gave it a special status, due to biological, practical and social, but also due to unknown, unfa-thomable reasons. What happened during this process and the following shared history is that humans found the animal in themselves in making them familiar (see Game 2001, 11). Mounting the animal, using its speed, strength and spirit, is then very natural. According to Game, “there is no such thing as a pure horse or pure human [because] humans are always forever mixed” (2001, 1), put differently: human identity is created when meeting, or in this case, riding the other. The mythic archetype figure of the centaur is all about this imagined connection, the “seams between horse and rider” (Game
2001, 3), shaping a type of suture. The latter can be experienced differently and both ways are shown in *Equus*: while Alan, particularly physically, “collapse[s] in identification” (Game 2001, 6), Dysart feels a rather spiritual, severe sympathy, involving a “capacity for otherness and difference” (Game 2001, 7). Thus, though both characters seem to be lost in strangeness and dysfunction, they are actually found and fixed in the positions and processes of identification: kneeling in front of a horse, listening to it, riding on it.

6. Conclusion

The thesis at hand is about the two topics of identity and the human-horse-relationship in Peter Shaffer’s *Equus*, a play written and premiered in 1973 and revived in 2008, causing some commotion due to its spiny subject and celebrity actors then and today. Not exactly adhering to genre borders and also attracting attention as an outsider to the group of playwriting peers, Shaffer describes the story of a case of therapeutic treatment where a dysfunctional teenage boy meets a depressed psychiatrist, and discloses horses as victims of violence and as graceful gods. The author deals with the two main characters and their ways of thinking, feeling and behaving or lifestyles, or in a word: their identities. Additionally – the title *Equus* names it – horses appear in costumes, as stable animals, as gods and as dreadful creatures, all the time revealing characteristics of the protagonists and of humans in general. This thesis tries to discover how those processes of identification of Dysart and Alan are linked with the dramatic Equus, and therewith referring to how human identity is linked with the historical equus.

How do the main characters in the play develop their identities? Analyzing Dysart and Alan first of all reached factual characterizations, which led to more profound interpretations, using Hall’s theories as a background. Dysart’s depression is caused by a professional and personal crisis, but working on Alan’s case both intensifies and disintegrates it; that does not mean, that the doctor’s questions about the worth and value of his job or marriage find answers, but rather that he accepts his questioning and experiences a different perspective. At the same time he can diagnose what is wrong with him, he also detects that there is no wrongness, just difference. His doubts about mental health and normality are confirmed when comparing himself to his patient, and finding sameness. In consulting his Greek ideal and finding in it a similar passion that Alan features in his worship, Dysart understands Equus as a god – psychologically and culturally. The former made possible because of his Un-Englishness in his profession attributed by Hesther, the latter because of his background as an English citizen among the
culture of horsemanship and equitation. Hall’s ideas of discursive strategies and the struggle with summoned positions explain Dysart’s specific style of questions and his general way of questioning, as a doctor and as a person. Constantly asking his patient and wondering about his life and wishing to exist in another time and at another place is a part of Dysart’s ongoing process of identification. Also, the psychiatrist’s mirroring of his patient shows a certain loss and simultaneous finding of the self in a dislocating rupture, just like his mock-monologues show that there is no homogeneity, closure or unity about his identity, which is defined as what he is not, by a lack, or rather lacks – Alan’s passion and pain, his worship and worries. Dysart seems to be lost from the beginning to the end of the play, but has actually found himself in accepting the differences he needs within identification, to actually have an identity.

Alan’s dysfunction has its roots in his upbringing by a Christian mother and a communist father instead of peers, copying their restricting words and values and blending them with one early, single experience of freedom with a horse. His worship of the horse god Equus develops and forms his childhood until he is a teenager, labouring in a meaningless job and longing for the stables. Immersed in the material reality of his ideal belief, the boy experiences blissfulness but also breaks, failing to sexually satisfy Jill and finding out about his parents’ prude relation. Confronted with this, blinding the horses is Alan’s way to handle his secret, suppressed, sick, strange passion and brings him to the ward. Still, or rather, finally rebelling against his parents and the doctor, too, the therapy confronts him one more time with his past and heals him, meaning that he probably will not need Equus anymore – but the gods of normality that will form him. The way of re-enacting important events that shaped his identity and indirectly giving information about him reminds of Hall’s theory of suturing, which denies that there ever is a proper fit about who or what somebody is and how he became like that; Alan is split. His different speaking positions throughout the play are never identical, but make up his complex identity. Mixing up the others’ ideas might seem strange but through being different and destabilized, he creates his own worship. What looks like he is helplessly determined by others and mirrors them is in fact the regular process of suturing and interpellation according to Hall, the constitutive outsides of Alan. Especially with Dysart, the modalities of power and enunciative strategies function within their mutual completing roles, just like the system of polarity and normality, which makes the teenager a strange, sick person. His change and development during the play once again confirm Hall’s idea of identity as a never-ending process and endless performance.
What type of relation between humans and horses appears in the drama? Analyzing how horses are shown in the text and how humans relate to them eventually reveals a complex companionship. The interpretation employs historical facts to elucidate Alan’s and Dysart’s deeply rooted longings and what role horses play in their lives. The animals are presented as not very naturalistic, especially as they appear on stage; they do not look and sound like real horses, but are creatures fulfilling the symbolical part of a life power, or rather horse power in the play. There is communication with the protagonists on a level just as profound and primary as their ideas about horses. Equus tells Alan what to do, and asks Dysart who he is. Connected with the Christian ideas of Dora, the horses’ strength is stressed, but shown to be tamed and reined by human riders; together then, such a creature can be considered a god, if it not falls apart. Centaurs are the doctor’s ideal creatures and Alan’s secret night rides on Nugget make him feel close to the unity imagined by this Greek figure, that accompanies many myths and lots of legends throughout the common history of humans and horses. In a modern version, the idea of merging with the animal one rides is presented in Western movies and book stories, where horses and cowboys are a free and spiritual unit. In the stables, however, the rather practical care of horses is important, since it is a part of the English culture of equitation. Here, the traditional rules and regulations, the attitude and accessories coming along with horseback riding are familiar to all characters. Still, there are different perspectives: while Dora refers to horseyness of the family, Frank rejects riding culture as an upper-class luxury and Alan refuses to dress up and saddle a horse because he wants pureness and passion.

Within the long shared history, images of horses have always been important and typically they are shown full-size. Alan, however, adores a strange picture that only shows a horse’s head and especially its eyes, which together with the hooves are depicted as the main characteristics of the animals in the play. The mysterious head and the mirroring eyes stand for the horse’s mind and vision that have always fascinated human beings, whether they used the animals as tools or considered them companions. Putting shoes on the horse can be seen as the ultimate and historically newest form of human control, changing how the horses sound and pace in the play and in reality; putting a bit into the animal’s huge but huffy mouth was one of the first acts of domestication. This way, the dangerous but delicate feet and teeth of horses can not really harm or hurt humans’ bodies or their balance during riding. For the teenage boy, both organs are rather linked with pleasure, and the least typical animal organs, namely the eyes, are the ones that disturb him, since he believes in a mind behind them. Moreover, Alan’s obses-
sion with Nugget’s hide and fur is probably not only considered strange because it is sexual, but maybe also because humans used to employ it as material, so their practical connection with it is long gone and the horse is not seen as naked, but as natural – and naturally different from hairless human skin. Wondering about the souls of horses is also as old as the horse’s common history with humankind; just like Dysart comes to the conclusion that he will never know what the animal thinks and feels, but still asks the question, this realization does not hinder humans from being with horses and treating them well or badly, using them to lift weights, fight wars, entertain, train or relax.

Do the two aspects analysed interfere and influence each other? Surely, domestication, use and abuse, as well as loving and leaguing up with the horse have definitely influenced the historical identity of humans. And naturally, literary works like the analysed play depict these developments and make it even more clear that the human self-image is responsible for the way horses are treated by them. Shaffer picking this real event, designing this setting and story, Dysart worshipping centaurs and Alan worshipping Equus – all this is based on positions and processes of identity and identification. Riding especially illustrates how a connection is made by mounting a large animal, merging with it and moving together with it. The final question raised in the introduction is: Do these characters use horses to built their identities? Yes, they do. Hall’s theory, historical facts and this analysis and interpretation of Equus prove this: Martin Dysart and Alan Strang are all about a “forgetting of human self in a between-human-and-horse way of being” (Game 2001, 8).

The methods and theories chosen for the analysis seem to be adequate and provide answers to the questions raised in the beginning. Furthermore, the results of the two analysis, identity and the human-horse-relationship, give new insights into Shaffer’s play, and the interpretation that those two aspects actually are linked even go further beyond the previous research done on Equus. However, the thesis at hands presents two topics that are defined by being processes, and therefore always preliminary in a way. Just as identity is a concept which is constantly under construction, or rather subject to “deconstructive critique” (Hall 2000, 15), so is the contemporary complex companionship between horses and humans, of which “[l]ittle is still known though on how the reciprocal bond builds and what each partner puts into the relationship” (Hausberger, 2007, 8).

As the idea of a closed and fixed human identity crumbles, so does the anthropocentric perspective in general, and its borders become accessible for analysis. This is why this thesis could be a fitting source or initial point for further research, for example
moving away from the angle of man – here in the sense of male and not only human – and looking at how female identity and the horses’ history are linked. After all, possible questions on Equus could be: Why is it the character Jill, a stable girl that can openly admit to find horses sexy substitutes? And why are there no female centaurs?

7. Works cited

Primary Sources

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