COMPARING PETER SHAFFER'S *EQUUS* AND HAROLD PINTER'S *THE BIRTHDAY PARTY* THROUGH PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE THEORY OF THE SUBJECT

Jelige: "Whatever happens... you may think it all a mere bad dream."

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Abstract

Critical discussions of post-war British dramas do not usually select the two plays in my title for comparison, but my contention is that if we understand them as cultural practices that problematize the positions of human beings as subjects in society, these two dramas lend themselves to a valid and relevant comparative analysis. On its own, *Equus* is often analysed through psychoanalysis, but by comparing it to *The Birthday Party*, this analysis can be further crystallized. Therefore, in this paper, I compare Peter Shaffer's *Equus* and Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* in order to identify similarities and differences, which can be used to describe the inner conflicts of individuals who are represented as socially positioned subjects in post-war British society. I aim to use specifically the psychoanalytic approach to build the foundations of the analysis and connect the dramas through the theme of the inner pursuit of passion that is perhaps the most important common aspect they share. As a result, the plays, similarly to their contemporaries, propose the following question: can passion as a unique and authentic value stand in opposition to ideology and can it be a tool, a strategy to escape ideology? The poststructuralist theory of the subject will be the overarching theoretical framework of my investigation, which will enable me to show how both dramas throw light on how ideological technologies work to keep the protagonists of the plays in fixed subject positions.

1. Introduction

I structured this paper to move through four steps. First of all, the state and characteristics of post-war Britain will be explained, which serves as the basis for my claims regarding culture. Then, *The Birthday Party* is examined with a focus on its protagonist, Webber, along with *Equus*, and its dual protagonists, Dysart and Alan. The main thread of my argument revolves around these characters as heterogeneous, split subjects, and the healing mechanism that is applied by the mind to alleviate the effects of traumas. After a general analysis of the dramas, the seeking of passion as a constitutive activity of the mind is discussed. Finally, I argue that *The Birthday Party* and *Equus* complement each other, because through them, the social and ideological normalization process of society and the healing mechanism of the mind can be investigated from different perspectives. The results of the comparative contrasting of the dramas are explained in the final part. I also look at how the dramas work as a social critique, a cultural practice that helps the audience reach the core of their inner conflicts and gain a metaperspective upon their ideological embeddedness.

In order to carry out this comparative analysis, I rely on the theories of Freud regarding the complex nature of the psyche, that is, the interrelated structures of the Superego, the Ego, and the Id. In his endeavours, which led to the "Freudian revolution", Freud realised that the human being is a heterogeneous system, a split entity. This means that the subject's psyche has two modalities: the unconscious and the conscious. Psychoanalysis is an approach to explain the workings of the split subject, and the human being is understood to be formed by and through losses (Pope 2002, 96–101). As Freud explains, the Superego is the conscious level of the human mind that we are aware of, containing the social rules and laws that are controlling the subject. The Id is the unconscious level (inaccessible to the conscious), which hides the unacceptable sexual desires, instincts, fears (irrational fears included), violent motives, irrational wishes, selfish needs, immoral urges, shameful experiences, and imprints of traumas; which can break through into the conscious (Freud 1925, 177; Freud 1927, 1–66). The Ego is responsible for maintaining the communication and a balance between the two (Freud 1927, 1–66).

> The functional importance of the ego is manifested in the fact that, normally, control over the approaches to motility devolves upon it. Thus, in its relation to the id, [the ego] is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength, while the ego uses borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried a little further. Often, a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide [the horse] where it wants to go; so, in the same way, the ego is in the

> habit of transforming the id's will into action, as if it were its own (Freud 1975, 19).

When Alan rides Nugget during the night, Shaffer describes the horse ritual scene (Shaffer 1993, 93–94) similarly to how Freud describes the function of the ego. Therefore, this quote gave the ground on which I constructed my psychoanalytical approach for *Equus* and then for *The Birthday Party*. The symbolism in Freud's works and both in Shaffer's and Pinter's plays are comparable and serve similar purposes.

However, for a better understanding of the workings of the mind, the healing mechanism and passion, the psychoanalytical approach can be integrated into the more comprehensive poststructuralist theory of subjectivity. Psychoanalysis is a foundational constituent of this complex theory, and it will be more revealing to approach the two protagonists and the socially productive dramas through the category of the subject.

In addition to psychoanalysis, I rely on the theory of subjectivity through the works of Attila Kiss and Annamária Hódosy. The theory of subjectivity builds on the merits of psychoanalysis (combined with post-Marxism and post-Saussurean semiology) and takes it several steps further into the postmodern (Kiss 2010, 11).

> [The theory of the] enunciated, [studies] the mechanical relationship between signifiers and signifieds, and it considers the subject as the controller of signification. The subject in this traditional semiotics is a self-enclosed unit which is in possession of the linguistic rules, and always stands hierarchically above the elements of meaning production, as a guarantee and origin of meaning and identity. In short, this tradition is grounded in the phenomenological abstraction of an ego which is the heritage of the Cartesian "cogito" (Kiss 2010, 11).

In *Equus* and *The Birthday Party* this notion of the sovereign, self-mastering subject is put to the test, when outside constraints and influences, such as propaganda and institutionalized social expectations, interfere in the process of subject-formation. As a result, the theories of the enunciated in relation to subjectivity are questioned, leading to the status of the protagonists as split subjects.

> Theories of enunciation, […] investigate the constitution and production of the above elements of semiosis, which are no longer considered to be units or monads, but rather non-stable products in the heterogeneous signifying process (Kiss 2010, 11).

Kiss also argues that in the case of enunciation the subject is no longer alone in the meaning production process (2010, 11). This notion is supported in the dramas because in both cases there are identifiable marks that lead us to the conclusion of naming the outside

interference. Therefore, as Kiss states, this phenomenon is grounded in the relationship of language and hierarchy, alongside ambiguity (2010, 13–24).

Furthermore, I reference the works of Foucault (1980) and Althusser (2004) as well, in relation to ideology and values related to them. Their work is the foundation to view the plays as ideological processes. In addition, the theory of the Ideological State Apparatuses and the concept of power/knowledge support my claim regarding the modelling of the ideological processes in the plays. Moreover, based on Foucault (1980) and mainly on Althusser (2004) I propose that in connection to passion, ideology works as an opposing counter-force. In other words, passion in the dramas acts as an authentic and unique value, which is not yet claimed, muted, assimilated by ideology. Therefore, the general workings of ideology are also heavily present in the plays.

Finally, it is necessary to underline already here at the outset that it might of course be a question for further research whether passion is only of one sort, or there are several kinds of passions. This paper is not intended to answer this question. However, I acknowledge that there might be different forms or kinds of passion and, as it is explained in *The Passions: A Study of Human Nature*[1] written by Hacker, there is a wide range where passion could form or originate from, while another question is how it relates to emotions (2017, 3–37). For the argument to remain focused, throughout the paper I refer to the different passions as simply 'passion'.

[1] I recommend for further reading regarding the topic of passion Hacker, P. M. S. 2017. *The Passions: A Study of Human Nature.* 1st edition. Oxford. John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

2. Historical and Societal Background

In order to establish a view of the socio-historical context, the post-war state of Great Britain and its society has to be discussed and explained. As it is established and discussed by Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas, the post-war period is a transition between modernity and postmodernity. Before and during this era, the heritage of the Enlightenment and the project of modernity (Habermas 1997, 1–38), which were the foundation of the grand narratives of Western culture and the fundamental truths (Lyotard 1984, 31–41), became evident to be unfinished and impossible projects to be achieved by humanity. The main reasons are that the grand narratives are unsettled, questioned, and deconstructed (Lyotard 1984, 31–41). The trauma of the two World Wars, the horrors of the Holocaust, the military adaptation of nuclear power that was threating with total extinction, and the ensuing Cold War opposed the grand narrative of the gradual self-perfection of society. In addition, the grand narrative of the technological, positivistic epistemology of modern science was opposed by the discoveries within the field of quantum-mechanics, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and the realization of the limits of empirical observation. Moreover, we are still witnessing today the aftermath of the critical turn that initiated the questioning and opposing of the grand narrative of the self-mastery and self-perfection of the human being by the "Freudian revolution" and the emerging new poststructuralist theories of the heterogeneous and decentered subject (Habermas 1997, 1–38). As a result, within the post-war period, a crisis arose and society experienced uncertainty and a need for change, because the old aspirations and values were no longer reliable and operational. Therefore, a void is created within the individuals, because they lost many qualities that had been part of their civilized lives before. For instance, social security after the war years (which improved during the 1960s), and the values of the pre-war world were lost, the national identity and the myth of the superpower of the colonial empire were shattered and questioned. As a response to this inertia, crisis, and cultural vacuum, the dramas are foregrounding the idea of passion as something valuable and authentic against the artificial and materialistically constituted values of postindustrial consumerist society, as something productive against the deadlock of social stagnation. This notion is not explicitly addressed and named in the dramas, but it is present and embedded in the thematic and metaphorical structures of the two plays.

However, before moving on and discussing the dramas in detail, it is important to note that *The Birthday Party* was written in 1957 and *Equus* in 1973. Therefore, in 1973, for Peter Shaffer the social dilemmas and the crisis of the British society were more evident, while Harold Pinter was only looking in the shadows, trying to explain, or establish a generic, allegorical

model for, the process of the rebirth and the normalization of the subject, but he did not elaborate on the actual reasons for them to occur. At the same time, the imprint of the historical and social processes are already present in Pinter's drama, which is discussed and detailed further within the paper – in *Equus*, Shaffer only extends and elaborates on these themes and ideas according to his own experience. Therefore, one of the most important socio-cultural aspects of the post-war period is the transition between the modern and the postmodern. Consequently, the authors reflected on the unstable and confused state of their world and the experience of the lack of passion in the postmodern.

Britishness and the place of Britain in the world were fundamentally questioned after the two World Wars, which led to the need of a new identity for the British people. Furthermore, (during the Cold War) the Suez Crisis and the Oil Crisis's aftermath dispelled British imperialist endeavours, where this heritage needed to be put to the rest. However, the British still kept the notion of being supreme to others in themselves. "For some there could be no doubt. Britain's place in the world was what it always had been" (Levin 1993, 389). On the contrary, decolonization sealed this struggle and that brought not only economic crisis, but also identity crisis. What does it mean to be British? What is our place in the world? Where is the source of our identity, and what is the relationship between us as individuals and the social system that surrounds us? Where is the passion that drives the future? These questions brought by the above mentioned two events are represented in *The Birthday Party* and in *Equus*, respectively.

Moving on to the dramas, I discuss them in chronological order, starting with *The Birthday Party*, followed by an analysis of *Equus*, before comparing them. Then as a result of their comparison, a social criticism in relation to passion is drawn, which unites the two plays. This social criticism is also present in other plays written by Pinter and Shaffer during the same historical era. For example, the "one room" notion, which is the black mirror of the mind presented to society, as argued by Kirby is also present in Pinter's *The Room* (1978, 158–162) and as Cohn presents it, "simply 'A room'" in the *Caretaker* (1962, 56) written in 1957 and 1960, respectively. Also, the same theme appears in Shaffer's other plays, such as *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* written in 1964, which also approaches the lack of passion through religion (Stacy 1976, 325). Therefore, as I argue in the next two chapters and in my comparison, this paper serves to unite *The Birthday Party* and *Equus* through the same social criticism that they present to the audience in regards to passion and the social constitution of the subject.

3. *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter

As a key to understand Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party,* I propose to interpret the text as an allegory of the human mind and to use the theme of the descent into the Id by the individual. As mentioned before, Freud's model about the human psyche can be described as an iceberg; it has three levels, the first being the Superego, which individuals are conscious about, the second level is the Ego and the third level is the Id, which resides deep in the unconscious (Freud 1925, 177–179). The Id is a psychic dimension where the Superego has no control and loses the ability to decide what the person really desires and wants to do or not. This echoes with the main theme of *The Birthday Party*: the cavalcade of desires and inner mechanisms.

Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is revolving around an uncertain event in an unknown place and during an undefined age. According to Ruby Cohn, Pinter often uses the characteristics of a fugitive seeking refuge as a model for his main characters (1962, 55–68). In addition, Pinter does not show any vision of the future in his play; instead, he turns inside and presents the audience with the great unknown, leaving us with only speculations of what the fate of Stanley could be.

Therefore, there are only hints within the drama as to the historical period and social environment, which would or could give a different dimension to the play. For example, McCann and Goldberg sometimes give hints about their Jewish heritage via impressions and words (Visser 1996, 330). It is also suggested that they were part of the Irish Republican Army[2]. It seems evident that they know Webber, however, there is no exact evidence for it. Seemingly, they hunt Webber for being a traitor or a collaborator (Visser 1996, 330). This initial setting is deeply emotional and force individuals to react, which gives the tone of the beginning of the post-war era in Britain that is haunted by the past and the losses of the people. These examples highlight the fact that Pinter based these features of the drama on his own experiences regarding the political situation in Europe. This idea is mostly supported by an interview with Pinter in 1988 made by Anna Ford, where the playwright reflected on his early dramas, including *The Birthday Party*. During this interview Pinter underlines that the political aspects of his plays are very important and within *The Birthday Party* it is the most evident during the interrogation scene, a carefully constructed dialogue – a form of communication – where the psyche is tortured by Goldberg and McCann, which scene was structured from his own fears (Ford 1988, Par. 1–2, quoted in Visser 1996, 329–330). Therefore, alongside the psychoanalytic analysis, it

[2] Irish Republican Army (IRA) – In its political and military aims, one of the great threats to Britishness during the 20th century.

is critical to mention these aspects as well, because they help to draw the social aspects that affect the play and cannot under any circumstances be divided or discarded from it.

As a counter argument, Pinter's critics often claim that within his plays, he fails to communicate or his characters are failing at communication (Visser 1996, 339–340). However, I propose that this is a testament to Harold Pinter's ability to convey the characteristics of his environment, experience, and era. *The Birthday Party* is a play that is loaded with mystery and uncertainty on purpose. All of these feelings of uncertainty characterise and represent the atmosphere of the early post-war era within Britain, and they also lend the play a generalizing, allegorical nature. As Marinela Saraci-Terpollari argues, Pinter in his absurd drama translated and conveyed the essence of being at the border between existence and non-existence (2013, 384).

The Birthday Party is carefully constructed by Pinter so as to make it difficult to interpret – the deeper meaning is only suggested and hinted at (Visser 1996, 328). This sets the theme that the whole drama in fact takes place within the mind of someone unnamed. Furthermore, the different characters are either part of the same mind or they are the materialised presence of outside forces that try to affect the mind of this individual. In addition, as Saraci-Terpollari states, Pinter's play uses mystery, menace and humour alongside the specific use of language to reveal the state of isolation, the inability to listen and communicate, the feeling of emptiness and meaningless life, a state without passion, in order to invite the audience to create their own wide range of possible interpretations (2013, 388).

I propose that it is possible to interpret the drama in both negative and positive ways. On the one hand, the "negative" interpretation focuses on the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA)[3] or ideology in general and it will be metaphorical in the sense that the characters of McCann and Goldberg are seen as invaders. In this reading, the normalization process is initiated by the ISA and carried out by the invaders, as a result, Stanley is a victim: stripped of everything and reduced to a blank state.

> STANLEY *concentrates, his mouth opens, he attempts to speak, fails and emits sounds from his throat.* / STANLEY. Uh-gug… uh-gug… eeehhh-gag… (*On the breath.*) Caahh… caahh… / *They watch him. He draws a long breath which shudders down his body. He concentrates.* / GOLDBERG. Well, Stanny boy, what do you say, eh? / *They watch. He concentrates. His head lowers, his chin draws into his chest, he crouches.* / STANLEY. Ug-gughh … uh-gughhh…. /

[3] After Althusser, the idea of ideology and ISA was developed further by other poststructuralist philosophers, for instance by Michel Foucault, who established the concept of power / knowledge. See Foucault 1980, and Gutting 2005. The critical concept of ISA is used for the sake of simplicity.

> MCCANN. What's your opinion, sir? / STANLEY. Caaahhh … caaahhh…. / MCCANN. Mr Webber! What's your opinion? / GOLDBERG. What do you say, Stan? What do you think of the prospect? / MCCANN. What's your opinion of the prospect? / STANLEY'S *body shudders, relaxes, his head drops, he becomes still again, stooped.* PETEY *enters from door, downstage, left.* / GOLDBERG. Still the same old Stan. Come with us. Come on, boy. / MCCANN. Come along with us (Pinter 1959, Act III).

In this sense the play outlines the invasive nature of society, which can intervene anytime in the conflict of the Superego and the Id. In addition, as Attila Kiss argues in regards to the concept of the subject of enunciation, society alters and predetermines the outcome of this process (Kiss 2010, 11–13).

On the other hand, the "positive" interpretation views the drama as an allegory of the mind, in which Stanley, McCann and Goldberg are different parts of the same mind. The normalization process is initiated by Stanley, where he is the regressive Ego, who fails to communicate between the Superego and the Id. McCann and Goldberg in this interpretation represent the Superego that aims to restore order in the psyche by controlling the Id. As a result, by going through the rebirth process, Stanley completes the normalization and receives a blank version of himself to start reconstructing afterwards. However, it is a task given to the audience to decide how to interpret the drama.

In addition, the team of Goldberg and McCann stand in place of every ideology in the sense of Foucault (1980) and opposing them is Stanley, who is the embodiment of everyman. This is the foundation of the social criticism that is built by the drama. The rebirth process in this sense sheds light upon the fact that passion is either found in the subject or not, but eventually passion is separate from ideology. Therefore, the lack of passion enables the ideological processes in general to reform the individual into any subject they wish.

According to Cohn, it is important to underline that the characters are intentionally filled with symbols representing the Judaeo-Christian tradition. For example, they have Jewish-Irish names and dialects. This tradition is not only present in the western civilization, but makes one of its standing supporting pillars. Goldberg is filling the role of the order and the senior partner. Therefore, he represents sacred clichés of family and class. His partner, McCann is playing the role of the yes-man whose purpose is to reinforce Goldberg's ideals. Finally, Stanley Webber's character is the fugitive, who might be hiding from his pursuers or from his own self (Cohn 1962, 55–68). These characteristics are fundamental parts of the Superego.

To a degree, Petey represents the father figure for Stanley and Maggie represents the mother. However, in the case of Maggie an unexplained forbidden sexual desire is suggested

as well. It is not clear whether the relationship between Stanley and Maggie is really sexual on both parts, in the sense of Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex (Freud 2010, 278), or just one-sided by Meg. However, according to Freud, the Id hides many uncontrollable and taboo desires (Freud 1927, 37). Therefore, the different sexual desires are explored through Maggie and the other female character, Lulu, who represents the young and burning lust. In addition, through Lulu's character rape is also explored. As a result, these side characters are representing the outside forces that affect the Superego and the hidden desires and taboos of the Id, respectively.

On the contrary, and in line with my "positive" interpretation, E. T. Kirby depicts Stanley as a paranoid person who fantasizes the whole event (1978, 157–164). Eventually, the identity of the characters or the place and time when and where the events are occurring do not really matter. Consequently, these little pieces of information are just parts of the bigger picture that the audience can witness, because they only set the tone of uncertainty and try to distract the audience from seeing the agency and operations behind the events. Therefore, the real focus shall be put on Stanley: as if everything was inside his head.

However, it is possible to take Kirby's idea a step further and to suggest that Stanley is just the character that represents the regressive Ego; then through applying the psychoanalytic approach, the play becomes an invitation to the audience's mind to pry on the current state of their Id and their relation to society, which is heavily affected by these outside processes. In addition, the drama becomes a tool to heal society through providing an alternative to the processes and changes. The tool provided is the critical perspective to evaluate the rebirth process. As argued earlier, Stanley undergoes the process of rebirth during his descent into the Id, which is one of the healing mechanisms that the mind may apply when the environment changes drastically and it wants to adapt. McCann and Goldberg's characters in this case represent the Superego and they enter into the Id to restore order. Within the play, the grand narratives are questioned and even concluded to be lost or exchanged with false idols; therefore, the rebirth process could serve as a mechanism that could provide the individual with new values. In this sense, by completing the rebirth process Stanley becomes blank in order to be reconstructed as he is taken away by the intruders, who represent the social mechanism (which is suggested by my "negative" interpretation). However, as I have pointed out before, the audience is not reassured about the outcome of the further events, therefore it is up to them to interpret it in a "positive" or "negative" way.

In the “positive” interpretation, it can be argued that the audience is catered to be able to see only certain events and locations in order to help them to place the drama into the mind of the individual. It cannot be determined how the Id acts outside the view of the prying eye of the Superego; namely, it is hard to substantiate whether the characters of the play are only affecting forces or real people in the life of the individual. Therefore, Pinter’s play can be interpreted as a way of disturbing the inner mechanism of the Id, when the Superego descends into the Id to restore order (Freud 2010, 503).

However, in a “negative” interpretation of the drama, it can also be read from the play that the Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser 2004, 693–702) do not allow the individual to stray away from becoming a subject within the newly constructed society. Pinter presents a criticism of the mechanisms and technologies of the normalisation process. In this sense the characters of Goldberg and McCann represent the invasive nature of society to shape and make a subject out of the individual, where Stanley is only a victim of the events. Petey comments on this with a final cry at the moment of realisation – but then it is already too late: “Stan, don't let them tell you what to do!” (Pinter 1959, Act III). Nothing happens, except that Petey is also threatened. This quote also suggests that other subjects might try to reject the outside intruders, but they are easily silenced. As a result, the audience might be provided with a meta-perspective from which they may better understand themselves and their social positioning, and they might even develop a subversive critical attitude. Perhaps the audience will not rest in silence.

The audience is purposefully denied witnessing the past and the background of the characters and the events. Linking this aspect to the “negative” interpretation, this makes it possible to view Goldberg and McCann as existing subjects, who are trying to invade the mind, and who are not only part of the same mind, which eventually leads to Stanley being unable to resist ideology. With this analogue, Pinter’s play is able to convey the broken state of society in his time, which was bound to uncertainty and in desire of a change, because the old values and beliefs had been shaken and lost and how the individuals were stripped of passion – at the same time, it is also conveyed that these sought-after “new” values are not yet defined in Pinter’s time.

In addition, the audience does not encounter any heroes, not even anti-heroes, only ordinary people with some secrets. One of the reasons for the absence of the hero and anti-hero in the dramas of the period is the lack of the classic dramatic character. Instead, the characters assimilate into the plot. These characters are partly de-substantiated, meaning that their human identity is shown to be composite, not self-identical, and dependent on external factors and

discourses, in order to shift the focus from the unfolding of the characters to the various abstract interests of the authors (Fuchs 1996, Chapter I). During the post-war period, the fundamental elements of the universal drama start to be questioned. Among these was the fundamental dramatic concept of the character, which was traditionally expected to be the representation of the self-identical, sovereign human being. This process indicates a post-humanist thinking within the nascent postmodern world. Characters are starting to lose individuality and exist only to serve the plot, eventually, to only exist as a gear in the machine of ideology (Fuchs 1996, Chapter I).[4]

Therefore, without any real characters in the classical sense of the word, there is no one to root for, which makes the play even more difficult to interpret. The audience is confused on purpose to not get comfortably satisfied or overcome with feelings regarding a protagonist that they can identify themselves with. From the behaviour and acts of the characters it is possible to assume that every one of them has something to hide. The only thing that is truly presented is the conflict between the team of Goldberg and McCann and Webber. This once again leads to the political element behind Pinter's play, where the audience, although uncertainly, can assume that behind the curtain sins were committed. The only evidence in the play for this are the words of the characters, because they are not clearly conveyed; only referenced by them. As a result, Pinter constructed a failed communication model on purpose to successfully convey how people outside of his play truly fail at communicating.

Furthermore, if we only focus on the seemingly greater sinners, then, on the one hand we have Webber with a dark past, probably he is a traitor. On the other hand, we have the hunters who are exacting revenge on Webber through obscure means and probably by ulterior motives. However, none of them can be clearly viewed in a morally acceptable or reproachable way. The drama shows that nothing is in fact black and white and instead it presents us how grey society really is. This leads to the conclusion that Pinter could use his plays as tools to deconstruct the binary oppositions in the moral rendering of characters in the drama.

If the conflict between the team of Goldberg and McCann and Webber is viewed through the lenses of psychoanalysis, then it is possible to interpret the play in both "negative" and "positive" ways. It is suggested that the Superego is either under siege by outside forces, namely, the ideologically determined normalization process of the social mechanism, or it is

[4] Within these two plays, the desubstantiation of the subject is not as prominently present as in more experimental and more characteristically postmodern dramas, for example, in Adrienne Kennedy's plays; instead, only its initial state is explored as it only started to appear.

split, as it is pointed out by Kirby (1978, 157–164). The normalization process can occur by force from outside, namely, by the effects of the Ideological State Apparatuses, or it can be an inner process as well, because the Superego is striving to create control.

In conclusion to the analysis of Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, the real context is purposefully not presented in the play, which is used to place the play into the mind of the individual, who goes through the process of rebirth–a process of descent into the Id–or to interpret it as a metaphor of the invasive nature of the ISA. Therefore, the drama presents the audience with different viewpoints, which results in the notion that everything is just the matter of perspectives and thus the binary system is only a frame that limits human perception. Pinter described the individual, whose losses led to a regressive state, which is in pursuit of passion, because without passion the Id is in chaos. In addition, as Cohn argues, Pinter is trying to deconstruct the individual just as well as society (1962, 55–68). Furthermore, Pinter is doing this successfully, because at the end of the drama the Stanley the audience got to know is no more and a new individual or subject can be constructed from a blank state. However, the reconstruction is not shown, and the ending is left open for interpretation, and to the audience to complete according to their interpretation.

4. *Equus* by Peter Shaffer

Before moving onto the analysis of *Equus*, in my opinion it is important to note that Peter Shaffer provoked the audience with this play. The drama openly and straightforwardly criticises religion, its aspects, and religious cults, fanaticism, as well as the act of religious sacrifices. However, at the very end, it is heavily implied that faith or passion is needed in some form. Institutionalised religion itself can be the cause of negative and undesirable events for the individual. However, its fundamental aspect, namely, faith, which is also a form of passion, is quintessential for the human spirit to work properly and within the bounds of "normalcy." Therefore, this notion of normalcy is used as the key to interpret the drama as a searching for passion, because religion is an integral part of the drama, and in a sense, religion was always a form to reach the human spirit. In addition, as Alice Rayner argues in the case of Pinter's play, there is an inner drive to unfold the events and a wishing for the end, which originates in the build-up of the narrative structure (1998, 482–497). However, this theory is more prominent in the case of *Equus*.

Therefore, it is critical to note that the most prominent difference between *The Birthday Party* and *Equus* is the dramaturgy of the two dramas. The synopsis is clearer and easier to interpret in the case of Shaffer's play. In fact, it is tailored like a detective story, for example, as those written by Dame Agatha Christie or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. However, in the case of *Equus* it is only the first step in a more grandiose project. The mystery of Alan is slowly unfolded and put together by the psychiatrist Dysart, together with the audience. In addition, the audience receives the events of the past in the form of flashbacks. As a result of the flashbacks and Dysart's investigation, the audience slowly puts together the case of Alan and his madness by design, which implies that the audience has a key role within the drama.

Alan has a special pre-condition, which dominates his life, prior to the tragic event. On the one hand, Alan is an introvert; he has no friends and is not comfortable around other human beings. On the other hand, however, his condition can be a result of a very strict and religious upbringing, or of the tension between his atheist father and extremely religious mother, partially combined with his early experience with raw passion, which is represented by Alan's experiences with horses that reaches its pinnacle in the horse-riding ritual.

> DYSART (*from the circle*) Is it a big field? / ALAN Huge! / DYSART What's it like? / ALAN Full of mist. Nettles on your feet. / *He mimes taking off his shoes – and the sting. /* Ah! / DYSART (*going back to his bench*) You take your shoes off? / ALAN Everything. / DYSART All your clothes? / ALAN Yes.

> *He mimes undressing completely in front of the horse. When he is finished, and obviously quite naked, he throws out his arms and shows himself fully to his God, bowing his head before Nugget.*
>
> […] DYSART How does it feel now? / ALAN (*holds himself*) Burns. / DYSART Burns? / ALAN The mist!
>
> […] ALAN Course. Sacred stick. Keep it in the hole. The Ark of the Manbit. / DYSART And now what?... What do you do now? / *Pause. He rises and approaches Nugget.* / ALAN TOUCH HIM! / DYSART Where? / ALAN (*in wonder*) All over. Everywhere. Belly. Ribs. His ribs are of ivory. Of great value!... His flank is cool. His nostrils open for me. His eyes shine. They can see in the dark... *Eyes!*-
>
> […] ALAN Give sugar. / DYSART A lump of sugar? / *Alan returns to Nugget.* / ALAN His Last Supper. / DYSART Last before what? / ALAN Ha Ha. / *He kneels before the horse, palms upward and joined together.* / DYSART Do you say anything when you give it to him? / ALAN *(offering it*) Take my sins. Eat them for my sake... He always does (Shaffer 1993, 93–94).

Also, the way he rides Nugget in this scene can be read in the light of how Freud describes the function of the Ego as quoted above. Instead of controlling the Id totally, the Ego here almost surrenders to, identifies with the Id, as Alan himself posits: the horse and the rider are one. These notions command the focus of the audience in the first half of the drama and make them construct an interpretation while experiencing the story.

In addition, Alan and his family's behaviour and experiences with raw passion and faith are the first signs that suggest that Shaffer criticizes institutionalized religion for its fanatics and cult like dogmatism. However, the case is further unfolded in the second act and by the end it becomes evident that the problem is not believing in something, but rather the fact that the method and the value system that come with religion, if mishandled, can lead to shattered minds, shattered hopes, such as in the case of Alan's mother. Opposing this, Alan is an honest believer, which gives value to his faith, but ultimately due to the lack of guidance he is being hurt by uncontrolled, burning passion. As a result, when this is viewed together with the historical and social aspects of Shaffer's era, the drama heavily implies that the old values present within Western culture are not in line with the human needs anymore.

Furthermore, it is also implied that in the broader picture the drama is about religion. Faith that is controlled by the Ideological State Apparatus–the institutionalised religion–is lost due to the horrors of the past and the revelations of Shaffer's present. The feeling of longing for something fundamental and untouchable, namely, passion is present within the drama from the very beginning until the end. Alan's Calvary or Passion is similar to Jesus' not only spiritually but in meaning too. While Dysart may represent the doubt and the chaos within the

post-war subject (as modelled by Shaffer within the play), Alan represents humanity and how shattered and lost everyone is. The following quote from Shaffer's *Equus* spells out the social crisis that is more evident in his time than it was in Pinter's: "Modern citizen for whom society doesn't exist" (Shaffer 1993, 104).

At the same time, the theme of being angry at religion or faith because God or the Church failed us, which is evident if we look at the Great Wars, is also heavily present within the drama. Science, history, philosophy, and even the everyday person have questioned faith. Therefore, this leads Dysart to a personal and professional crisis where he questions his acts. Namely, can there be any institutionalised method, which could have the right to enter the mind of any individual? As a result, the protagonist is filled with doubt, anger, and frustration. However, this anger or frustration is overshadowed by the theme of searching for something to believe in, which is identical with the human desire for passion. "Passion, you see, can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created" (Shaffer 1993, 133). Which leads to the conclusion that the real focus of the drama is concentrated on its social and ideological criticism.

The uses of very direct symbols and language to communicate what Shaffer intends to say about society and religion is extreme. The scene and picture of the blinding of the horses, the open approach or attitude towards sex and sexual symbols within the *Bible* and the symbolism with which Shaffer criticizes blind, suppressive religion are very upsetting. Furthermore, the scene with Dora's religious outburst on her son suggests that Alan himself is only responsible for his actions due to being possessed by the devil or being the devil itself.

> […] The Devil isn't made by what Mommy says, or what Daddy says. The Devil is there. […] You've got your words, and I've got mine. You call it a complex, I suppose. But if you knew God, Doctor, you would know about the Devil. You'd know the Devil isn't made by what mummy says and daddy says. The Devil's there. It's an old-fashioned word, but a true tiling... I'll go. What I did in there was inexcusable. I only know he was my little Alan, and then the Devil came (Shaffer 1993, 101).

It is hinted by the drama that the nature of the Christian value system, which Dora represents, is in denial. Dora thinks that it is easy to blame the devil for every bad things that transpire around the people. This openly questions the role of religion and the Church. However, the case is not that simple and instead of the social level, it has to be discussed on the level of the individual. The drama proposes a question on the notion and existence of the devil. Especially, in consideration of the historical and societal background for the play. For example the Second World War and the post-war state or the Cold War. This question is communicated through Shaffer's criticism about religion and passion, because while experiencing any of the

two we have to face the cruelty of the Superego and the hidden aspects of the Id in relationship with the world. As a result, I think, this hypothesis is the gateway to apply Freud's theories and the psychoanalytic approach to Shaffer's *Equus* – this hypothesis is going to be discussed by this paper later on.

In addition, there is one more aspect that has to be analysed in the case of religion: the character and the role of Jill. She represents the outside force that penetrates Alan's world and faith, eventually putting him to the test, forcing him to undergo the extreme process of reformation in religious terms. This process can be compared to a crisis that occurs during a paradigm shift. Therefore, Jill had unwillingly created an inner crisis within Alan, which led to the shattering of his image about God – his Equus. So, he was in conflict with himself and his own God. As a result, he committed the heretic act of defiling the holiest temple, which was in other terms "sacrilege". In the very end, the pantheon of Equus was destroyed and, the ever-watching eyes that prevented the boy from executing his animal instincts, which he so deeply desired. This act can be interpreted in various ways: on the one hand, it was seen as a defiling act – so the eyes had to be carved out and thus Alan tried to free himself from his cruel God. On the other hand, it can also be interpreted as a desperate way of keeping his God by carving out the eyes of the horses in order to rid the memory of his sinful act that they have witnessed. Moreover, here the audience is presented with Shaffer's interpretation of the exodus of humanity from the Garden of Eden, which suggests that the drama represents a perverted version of the Bible's myth, because unlike in the *Bible*, *Equus* shows that any sense of ultimate good and universal truth is questioned.

Furthermore, one of the fundamental aspects that is present in *Equus* is the normalization process, which can be interpreted as a failed attempt, or a realisation of a missing link, or the deny of carrying out the process, because the person who was responsible for this realised the errors and the blank spots in the process of normalization that occurs between Dysart and Alan. However, the person, Dysart, who performs this act, realizes that the normal is not defined properly or at all. In the post-war era, even the normal state was questioned and there was no consensus about it due to the rapid changing of society. Therefore, Dysart at the end questions even his own self in relation to normalcy, because what was called normal before does not exist at the moment, or is yet to be defined.

James R. Stacy argues that the figure of normalization, Dysart, in fact stands for the emptiness of the people (1976, 325–330), which supports my claims about Dysart's desire for worship; he wants to find something to have faith in. Also, Dysart's life lacks communion,

unity of holiness and humanity. Alan's communion with his god is in fact, as Mustazza argues, rather sexual: Alan rides his God to Communion (1992, 179). Moreover, Stacy argues that within *Equus* religion and religious aspects are depicted as intertwined with sex and sexual desires (1976, 333). This can be seen as a rather primitive form of religion and the execution and materialization of faith. Mustazza further implies with the perverted Christ-like figure that Alan can be aligned with the role of the Antichrist (1992, 181–183). Especially, as it is suggested that the institutionalized faith is the repressed form of sexuality. This interpretation puts the two characters in total opposition to each another. However, in the light of psychoanalysis this opposition can be translated to Dysart being the Superego, who is striving for control and understanding, and Alan being the raw and burning passion that generates faith, the unstructured drive energies of the unconscious which can be hurtful and hard to tame.

Finally, to sum up the symbolism of the drama, it is important to note that Shaffer carefully operates with the founding pillars of Western culture and society and these speak for themselves. Mainly, the analogue between the crisis of the ancient Greeks and the shattering of beliefs of Shaffer's time, which symbolises the loss of faith–passion–in both periods that leads to the redefining of the "normal". Dysart's inability to have children with his wife symbolises the failure of the holy process of creation. The "Passion" of Alan is mirroring the Passion of Christ. All of these symbolic elements in the play lead to one precise conclusion: we have to have faith, we have to believe in something – this is the realization of the drama from the surface level. The old gods are all dead, the old world and believes are shattered. Therefore, my own interpretation is concluded as follows: *Equus* is the failed attempt of creating something to believe in. However, this only sets up the ground for the psychoanalytic approach of the drama, in which passion may be posited as something authentic, but ultimately as something that can devour the identity if it is mishandled, in opposition to the artificiality and ideological determination of social existence, since passion is something that can be taken away from the subject, but it cannot be created, socially fabricated, or replaced.

5. Comparing the Plays

Now that the questions raised by *The Birthday Party* and *Equus* are defined (such as the "one room" theory, the rebirth process, the creation of the subject and the question of passion), a comparison and joint interpretation can be established with the help of psychoanalysis. My aim is to outline the seeking of passion within both dramas with the analytical tools used for this process and suggest that the two plays complement each other in this regard.

> Harold Pinter was also achieving widespread recognition with plays such as *The Birthday Party* (1958) and *The Caretaker* (1960), both of which focused on the relationship between language and power as well as on the gap between what people say and what they really mean. Here, language becomes a tactic, a means of avoidance, and only in silence does true communication occur. These dramatic emphases are clearly detectable in Shaffer's earlier work and place the plays within an identifiable cultural moment, but this playwright's concern with the vagaries of language arguably extends further than either Osborne's or Pinter's work implies. In Shaffer's plays, words and their limits become an obsession as the need for communication, and the impossibility of it in verbal terms, is placed centre stage (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh 1998, 36).

There is no direct intertextuality between *Equus* and *The Birthday Party*, despite the similar focus and the use of language as a tool. However, it must be underlined that Shaffer knew about Pinter and probably about his play, *The Birthday Party*, as well, as it is implied by the above quote. Pinter's dramas were political in nature as it has already been stated in the third section of this paper, but Shaffer refrained from including direct political messages or from being revolutionary in his own plays, because as MacMurraugh-Kavanagh states, "he seems to have realized, [categorization was] essentially reductive and was based on stereotyped assumption," therefore, the author of *Equus* did not care about "the new drama" (1998, 10). Nevertheless, as of today there is no evidence which would clearly and directly indicate that Shaffer based his plays on, or reacted to any drama that was written by Pinter.

One of the most evident similarities that we can observe is the dramaturgical element of the "one room" tradition, upon which I argue that both dramas are set in the mind of the subject. Moreover, in *Equus* Shaffer took this aspect one-step further by presenting the play as a sequence of flashbacks that are part of Dysart's act of remembering about the whole story. *The Birthday Party* is more mysterious in this aspect, because the narrator is unknown.

The inner drive energies acting within *Equus* are the workings of the Id. As has already been argued regarding the symbolism of the drama before, Dysart and Alan are two sides of the same mind. Dysart represents the Superego and Alan represents the wounded Id. They are not enemies, but the Superego has difficulties in understanding the primitive and desire-driven Id.

Therefore, in *Equus* the Superego has to face the hidden desires of the Id, and, instead of fighting it, understanding is the real goal. On the one hand, this descent can be a result of the burning passion that hurt the descending individual or the Id itself, who now has to go through a healing process in order to cope with this trauma. On the other hand, this individual might be pursuing passion to fill the void within, because it was either stripped from the Id or was never present. In the latter case, the individual realises that it cannot come from the outside world, and can only be found within, thus, the individual has to descend.

The burning passion can arise from hidden and taboo desires of the Id, which can be frightening and damaging for the Superego. However, the Superego has to face this trauma in order to move on in life and shape this into a beneficial experience. The fight with the Id is part of us and instead of destroying it, it shall be controlled and integrated. Otherwise, the human individual may suffer great losses and cannot operate as a whole any longer. In this case, the character of Alan represents the burnt Superego that approached the burning passion and reached out to it. For an individual it can be a very traumatic event, because at the moment when the Id takes control through passion, it carries out its primitive desires and acts that seem horrible for the individual. The uncontrolled burning passion can be as damaging as the non-existing passion that creates a void.

Regarding both interpretations, it is evident that passion is desperately sought by the individual, whose mind split into Dysart and Alan. On the one hand, based on Mustazza's argument, it partially transpires through extreme cult like religion and the experience of barbaric and burning faith (Mustazza 1992, 175–176 & 183). On the other hand, as Stacy suggests, it develops through the hidden desires and instincts of the Id, which manifest in raw and barbaric sexual acts (1976, 333), therefore, Alan experiences passion in the form of "a worshipful sexual ecstasy" (Stacy 1976, 325). As a conclusion, I propose that faith, passion and sexual drive or desire cannot be separated from each other. Therefore, they all come from within and regarding them, it is the Superego's duty to keep the balance between these elements. Otherwise, the mind can split, as it presents itself in the case of Alan and Dysart, or it is also possible that the Superego experienced the workings of the Id without the filter and control of the Ego and thus became frightened and hurt by it.

At the same time, the descending Superego might be seeking passion that can fill the void, because the individual wants to live a full life. This state without passion could be best described with the word "robot", the soulless working machine, which the Ideological State Apparatuses intends to create as their subjects (Althusser 2004, 693–702). This is represented

by the urge of normalization with the characters of Dysart or Goldberg and McCann. This process is masked to seem as an inner generated need, but at the end, Dysart questions his role, so for the descending individual it is possible to be aware of this phenomenon. It is very difficult to become aware of this, though, and *Equus* ends with an open closure, which can be interpreted in a number of ways. Consequently, it is impossible to determine whether the fight against the normalization process, against the supposed infiltrator, was successful or not, just as in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*.

The two playwrights, similarly to their contemporaries, question the ideological processes of their time. *The Birthday Party* is purposefully written to not reveal any context to create an allegory, which enables it to operate with the idea of everyman, who is Stanley, standing in opposition to every ideology, represented by Goldberg and McCann. However, *Equus* is more grounded in the contemporary context, which makes it less flexible in this nature. In comparison, *The Birthday Party* proposes the question whether passion can be the key to exist outside of ideology, mainly because it is missing from the regressive ego of Stanley, which results in the blank state of the protagonist at the end of the play. This is further supported by *Equus*, which presents the audience with the polar opposite, where Alan has passion, but it is taken to the extreme, and the same question is realized through the personal crisis of Dysart, who lacks passion, yet realizes its importance. Therefore, it is underlined by both plays that passion is either there or not, and most importantly, it is not yet claimed by ideology.

Based on the arguments of Attila Kiss regarding the macro-dynamics of the subject, we can witness in both plays the intervention of culture and ISA into the Id (Hódosy–Kiss 1996, 14–17). By this process the ISA deceive the Super-ego into accepting the 'new' or 'outside' ideas as its own, and thus force it to create a subject from itself that is subject to these ideas. On the one hand, this process can be understood as a form of censorship that is applied to the protagonists of the plays, and simultaneously to the audience. On the other hand, this leads to the healing mechanism, which can be argued to be a beneficial impact on the forming subject by leading to the finding of passion, in the case of my positive interpretation as I discussed in chapter three. The healing mechanism therefore transpires both within the subject and by the drama as social criticism and a method to equip the audience with a metaperspective upon their ideological embeddedness.

Together with *Equus*, *The Birthday Party* is the representation of the mind and the Id and both plays operate with the representation of the tool of normalization. While the rebirth of the character is more evident within *The Birthday Party*, the ending of *Equus* is just as open for

interpretation for the audience to draw a conclusion. Stanley is yet to make the step towards reconstruction; however, Alan is already going through this process. In the end, the audience can witness a blank state of both characters, and no safe closure or conclusion is granted: the audience can only speculate about what might come next.

6. Conclusion

To sum up the similarities and differences of the two dramas interpreted through psychoanalysis, both plays operate within the same "one room" (Kirby 1978, 162), namely, the mind of the individual. Also, Pinter and Shaffer use the theatre as a tool to heal society, but they attempt to do so from the bottom, from the level of the individual. This is done through the theatrical representation of the process of subject-creation – similarly, as it is argued by Attila Kiss (Hódosy–Kiss 1996, 11–17). In the case of *Equus* and *The Birthday Party*, the dramas serve as the injection which is applied to the audience. Therefore, forming their point of view – which can be met with rejection or acceptance.

Compared to *Equus*, *The Birthday Party* has to operate with more mysterious tools, while in Shaffer's drama the audience has a clearer view upon the synopsis of the events. This difference is the result of the different state of society at the time of Pinter and Shaffer, respectively. Clearly, Shaffer had a more extended and deeper view on the matter. In addition, in both dramas sex is a common theme. In *The Birthday Party*, it is explored through the taboo desires of the Id. Also, sex is part of the rebirth process, and the sexual nature is evidently present between the mother (Meg) and the child (Stanley), which to a certain degree creates a tension. However, in *Equus* it is a path to find and define passion. The normalization process, in *The Birthday Party* is more aggressive and differs from the rebirth process, while in *Equus* they are nearly equal. This is suggested by the open ending of *Equus*, because even the universal normal is questioned.

As for the pursuit of passion, *The Birthday Party* is only implying the void that exists within the Id, while *Equus* takes it a step further with a totem of passion (the god Equus) and its more detailed synopsis that nearly spells out everything for the audience: indeed, as Dysart realizes it in his professional and institutional crisis, there is something missing from the countless lives that are slowly being turned into docile subjects of an unknown new system.

In conclusion, the scarred society of the post-war period is represented trough *The Birthday Party*, written by Harold Pinter and *Equus*, written by Peter Shaffer. The two dramas are written about the same social crisis the individuals suffered from. However, they are not the same and can be compared to a flight of stairs; where both plays are part of and making the same structure, but they are different steps in it. Furthermore, the healing mechanism of the dramas is executed through the descent into the psyche and the representation of the formation of the subject. These literary works of art act as the means to make this descent, because both

of them will finally play out within the minds of the audience, regardless of whether they are aware or unaware of it. As a result, the healing nature of the dramas is present on different levels: the first level is the individual and through it, the second level is society. Both the individuals and society lack passion and with it, goals, directions, and a future. Therefore, passion of all sorts is desperately sought after. However, it is crucial to underline that it can be neither created, nor found on purpose. And this is exactly the process which both plays were written to explicate.

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