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Mother-blaming Tradition and Middle-class Families of Post-war British Society in Peter Shaffer's *Equus*

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Abstract

Peter Shaffer in his play *Equus*, portrays Dora Strang, a mother who allegedly provokes her son Alan to commit the crime of blinding six horses. Critics have labelled her the prime agent culpable for Alan's misdeed. However, a proper analysis and investigation of the playtext reveals Dora as a victim of social pressures. The socio-economic environment of Shaffer's Post-war British society relied heavily on Sigmund Freud and his theories on family relationships. The mother-blaming tradition flourished in literature when authors and literary experts misinterpreted Freud's ideologies and employed them to degrade the mother's maternal commitments and efforts. They held her responsible for her child's misconducts. Early critics contended that Peter Shaffer was also following this tradition. However, this paper will show that he somewhat differs from it. Dora was frustrated because she adopted 'motherhood' as a full-time job like the majority of British middle class women, according to the contemporary social demands. She invested all her skills and energy in child care by discarding her intellectual and professional growth. Consequently, she became disappointed, and she infused her frustrations in Alan. This eventually showcased delinquency in him. In addition, her husband Frank is equally responsible for their son's misconduct. In light of Freudian psychoanalysis, this paper studies how Dora's frustration with her limited life provokes Alan's misdemeanors. Also, by analyzing Freud's concept of the Father, it shows how Frank as a father drives Dora towards frustration and Alan towards delinquency.

Keywords*:* Mother-blaming tradition, stay-at-home mother, Freud, post-war British society, father

During the post-war era, Freud became an enormous influence on art and literature; popular cultural narratives relied heavily on Freudian ideologies. According to Aidenbaum (2006), contemporary writers like Philip Roth, Myles Connolly, Irving Shulman, Philip Wylie, Dr. Edward Strecker, A. L. Weiner, and Richard Condon diverted their attention from the war devastated external world to look more inside the domestic spheres and family relationships. They employed Freud's ideas of Oedipus complex from negative perspectives to give special attention to the figure of the mother (Friedan, 1965) and transformed her into a villain. This mother is the wife of a middle class man, but more importantly, she is the stay-at-home mother of his helpless, dependent son. She devotes her life to nurture her son and lives her life through him. Literary texts of the era highlighted her negative traits by degrading her maternal commitments and efforts (Lloyd & Johnson, 2003). In addition, this mother came to be considered as the prime factor

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behind her child's misconducts. In this way, the tradition of mother-blaming was formulated and prolonged in post-war western literature.

In his play *Equus* (1973), Peter Shaffer (1926-2016) remarkably portrays a mother character, Dora. The mother-blaming tradition holds her responsible for transforming her son Alan into a dysfunctional individual. Nonetheless, a thorough analysis of the playtext exposes Peter Shaffer to be different somewhat from this post-war, literary convention of mother-blaming. It shows that the leading cause behind Dora's frustration is the social demands of the post-war British society. As she tries to meet these demands, she becomes frustrated and executes her frustrations on her son, Alan. Consequently, he becomes delinquent and commits a heinous crime. Apart from the social demands, another reason for why she becomes dominating and repressing for her child is the child's father, Frank Strang. He casts a negative shadow over her through his emotional unavailability and authoritativeness.

Shaffer shows that it is not only Dora's frustration with her limited life that drives her child to misconduct; it is also Frank's inactive role in childcare that drives his child's mother towards frustration, and his child towards delinquency. Therefore, this paper studies how Shaffer exposes the stay-at-home mother Dora as a helpless victim of Post-war social pressures, and how Frank increases those pressures on her. By doing so, it investigates how Frank's words and actions frustrate Dora and causes Alan's dysfunction. In both cases, it employs Freudian psychoanalysis to investigate their family relationships.

Freud and the mother-son relationship

Freud (1972) in his essay, "The Psychology of Women: Biology as Destiny", explains the castration complex. According to this complex, the male genitalia is a highly prized organ; as soon as the male child becomes aware of his possession of a penis, it gives him power and authority. He starts considering himself superior to girls. In contrast, the girl child views herself as a castrated being because she lacks the male organ. She gets jealous of male privileges and develops certain feminine traits to attract the male; afterwards, she desires to come under a man's control, and become subservient to him, only to bear children with male genitals (Freud, 1972). Here, Freud seems to suggest that marriage and motherhood should be the prime concerns of a woman's life.

In addition, Freud in his *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1995) argues that a male child, as he becomes sexually aware, reckons his mother as the subject of his most intense sexual curiosity; he imagines love-affairs with her. Freud calls it the Oedipus complex because it imitates the myth of Oedipus where Oedipus marries his own mother. According to this complex, the mother becomes aggressive and exploitative, as she wants to live her life through her son. Thus, she bars her son's liberation from her.

However, Samuel Slipp (1995) contends that according to the nineteenth century social customs, women were dependent on their male companions to sustain their lives. Moreover, social prestige, in the middle classes, generally depended on the 'achieved' status of their husbands; thus, women were unable to achieve success on their own, and thus, relied on their husbands' and sons' status. Often she showed preference for her

gifted male child (social achievement was not for girls) to feed her self-esteem, and thereby, created pressures on this child for achievements. This was the case with Freud's own mother Amalie, and his relationship with her as well as his self-analysis and personal conflicts functioned as the basis behind his theories.

Freud's theory was widely applied in post-war British theater and Freud himself predicted that modern dramatists would continue to achieve a similar tragic effect in their plays like *Oedipus Rex*, because it "moves a modern audience no less than the contemporary Greek one" (Freud, 1995, p. 279), and *Equus* being Peter Shaffer's most celebrated modern play, focuses on similar aspects of the mother-son relationship.

Freudian influence in Shaffer's plays

Critics of Peter Shaffer have discovered that Freudian influence is very strong in his plays. Madeleine MacMurrough-Kavanagh (1998) admits that, Shaffer's plays *Five Finger Exercise* (1962) and *Equus* (1973) depicts the aberrations in parent-child relations discussed by Freud in his Oedipus complex. For example, in *Equus* when Alan commits the atrocious crime of spiking the eyes of six horses, he is taken to Martin Dysart, the psychiatrist for his treatment. Later, it is discovered that Alan's mother's influence on him has given birth to this bizarre obsession with horses in him (Chaudhuri, 1993).

Block (2004) argues that Shaffer's play *Equus* deploys an extreme case of parental authority affecting children in mid-twentieth century British middle class families. Similarly, Chaudhuri (1993) suggests that Alan is basically a victim of his parents' conflicting standards of choices. Moreover, as Alan's model of worship becomes aloof, judgmental, and intimidating, he starts resenting his father, but continues to be enthralled by the image of the Equus that embodies his mother's values (Block, 2004). Alan becomes happy to nurture the creature he admires when his acquaintance, Jill, gives him an opportunity to work at a stable. Later, as he tries to have sex with Jill inside the stable, the strict morals of his mother, that constructs the concept of Equus, prevent him from attaining sexual satisfaction.

According to Chaudhuri (1993), Shaffer seems to reinforce the Oedipus complex in Alan's worship of Equus. She contends that Shaffer demonstrates Equus as a jealous deity who demands Alan to be exclusively loyal to him only, and Alan's blind obsession towards Equus leads to his desperate attack on the accusing gaze of this omniscient god. Thus, the play's focus (on the eye and the binary, between sight and blindness, which creates the horse archetype) is much related to Freudian analysis (Chaudhuri, 1993). Furthermore, Alan's blinding six horses is a conflation of Oedipus' blinding (Block, 2004). In *Equus*, the combinations, of Alan's entangled sexual desire and religious passion, are considered as a form of his anxiety that is infused in him by his mother (Safak, 2016). It is also an indication that Alan's over attachment to his mother leads him to commit the crime.

In addition, Case (2014) explains that Freudian influences describe the condition of the female character from a misogynistic view. Freud's psychoanalysis promotes a sense of female inferiority in modern theatre, and his influence has been so great that theatre practitioners have staged, interpreted and viewed female characters in modern plays, from the Freudian paradigm. According to Case (2014), the model of the Freudian

mother is employed by Shaffer as he creates the character of Dora Strang: she "is portrayed as a frustrated and unfulfilled wife and mother; she depends on men to take the initiative in her life" (Case, 2014, p. 122). Dora uses Alan to fulfill her desires and infuses her own infatuation for horses in her son.

These critics have approached Shaffer's portrayals of mother-child relationship, in *Equus*, from the angle of Freudian psychoanalysis. They have viewed Dora under a strong negative light, and labelled her as the prime agent culpable in the dysfunctionality of her son. However, MacMurrough-Kavanagh (1998) asserts that "the development of female presence in Shaffer's work" (p. 124) has been previously an ignored area of debate; moreover, Shaffer's drama is characterized by its mutability: "a constant search for new theatrical forms and dramatic directions" (p. 124). In addition, Shaffer's mother characters are basically the victims of the social pressures. The following section of the paper will provide the background to examine how the character of Dora has been distressed by the post-war social expectations.

Middle class mothers in post-war Britain and the mother-blaming tradition

In the post-war British middle class society, mothers were victims of immense social pressures. Betty Friedan elaborately discusses this issue of social expectations causing frustration among mothers in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1965). Friedan (1965) contends that Freud's ideas are not universal facts, since he has invented his theories by observing his white, middle-class, female patients in Vienna, during the Victorian era. However, contemporary women have already realized their abilities and can ensure their own survival, and they are different from these women Freud tried to cure, she adds.

Moreover, Freud himself has confessed that his argument about women does not necessarily define their proper character, and his observations on women are nothing permanent (Freud, 1972). Therefore, uncritical acceptance of Freud's ideologies can lead to confusion and danger. Friedan (1965) acknowledges a debt to Freud for his insights, regarding women's condition and mother-child relations, but she discovers that the misinterpretation of his ideas, rather than the ideas themselves, are adopted by the post-war social and cultural experts to create an image of the happy housewife who is concerned only about her husband, children and home (Friedan, 1965). This image has infiltrated in the mother-blaming tradition.

Glazer-Malbin and Waehrer (1972) suggest that women's experiences during wartime (when men were mostly engaged in warfare) led women to reassess themselves; they became aware about their potential for various professions and higher education. Nonetheless, women became unemployed as men came back from the war; simultaneously, it was difficult for them to go back to their pre-war economic and social status. This condition created an enormous pressure on their mental health as they learned to adopt their limited role as housewives. Lloyd and Johnson (2003) also suggest that as soon as women lose their power and fail to achieve individual development, they get depressed; moreover, they become dissatisfied with their capacities and responsibilities of housework. Therefore, post-war stay-at-home mothers suppressed their true abilities and conformed to their society's expectations. Gradually, they became frustrated.

When these women fail to deal with their disappointments, they channeled their depression towards their children. As a consequence, dysfunction occurred among the growing generations of children whose mothers were always there with them at home; being dysfunctional, these children exhibited low self-esteem (Friedan, 1965). They also resorted to misconduct, depression and falsehoods. In addition, the Father in the family aggravated the situation as he joined the rest of the society in mother-blaming. Rowbotham (1976)'s book reveals certain traits of a white, middle-class father that matches with this father. Since his wife does not earn a salary, and she as well as the children financially depend on his income, he maintains his authority by creating psychological and economical pressure on his family.

Therefore, in order to understand the concept of this authoritative agency in a child's life, it is important to know about the other component of Freud's Oedipus complex: the father. Freud in his essay "Mental Functioning" (1957) discusses our conscious and unconscious mind. He states that human behaviour, thoughts and actions, are developed by our psyche or mind. As the mind internalizes cultural rules, mainly taught by parents; it represents the guiding agency that controls and supervises a person's thoughts and actions (Siegfried, 2014). According to Freud (1957), this agency is the father.

Freud (1957) mentions that when the male child learns to abandon his desire for his mother after the resolution of his Oedipus complex, among his two parents, it is the father who is internalized within the child's personality. The child adopts the father as his role model and conforms to be disciplined by him (Slipp, 1995). However, Freud (1995) also admits that in modern, white middle-class families, fathers do not allow their sons to be fully independent; this fosters the hostility inherent in their relation. The father imposes his restrictions on the son; in contrast, the son rebels. Moreover, being unable to bear the authority of the father, the son becomes delinquent.

In light of these studies, this paper analyses *Equus*, and explores how the Post-war British society created enormous pressures on the mothers of middle-class families. As the mother dealt with these social pressures, she became frustrated. Consequently, she channeled her frustrations in her child and turned him delinquent. The mother-blaming tradition only accuses the mother for her child's dysfunction. However, a thorough and proper study of Freudian psychoanalysis shows that the father in the family is equally responsible for this situation.

Dora: The mother in Shaffer's *Equus*

Gianakaris (1992) investigates that when Shaffer was writing his plays, during the 1960s, the memories of the Second World War was still fresh among the people of Great Britain, but it was a time to forget those sufferings; the English society became more stratified, in terms of wealth, as people resorted to pursue their pre-war dream of making money. Shaffer hinted in his plays that old social, economic and philosophical perspectives, on opulence and prosperity, need to be abandoned for a fresh new start. The playwright's thoughts are expressed through Alan as he discovers his passion not in wealth, but in the beauty of a magnificent creature. Alan rebels against his father Strang's acquisitive principles, and he is clearly shown to be digressing from his father's path of obsessively chasing money.

Nevertheless, because of the financial security Frank could ensure, Alan's refined mother Dora was interested in getting married with his affluent father. She was more learned and cultured than Frank; she was professionally and intellectually more competent than her unpolished husband. Unfortunately, when she became a housewife, leaving her education and career, she was frustrated as she increasingly got crippled due to her dependence on her husband's money and status. Therefore, husbands like Frank who are obsessed and driven by money-making motives, are an awful mismatch for their sophisticated and educated wives, and Shaffer (1962) presents the outcome of such mismatch in his plays. Frank, in his brutal efforts to earn more money, bear a ruined cultural and aesthetic sense. Men like him are married to wives who consider themselves culturally superior to them. On the other hand, it is difficult for their wives to reconcile with their husband´s humble backgrounds, devoid of any finesse.

For example, Dora is obsessed with her family pride (Stošková, 2013). When Dysart, Alan's psychiatrist, comes to her house to investigate his family relationships, she says, "We've always been a horsey family. At least my side of it has" (Shaffer, 1962, p. 32). Being 'horsey', in English society, is equated with being upper class. Dora's statement makes Frank cringe; "*he moves away from them and sits wearily*" (p. 32). His uneasiness gets revealed in his conversation with Dysart:

> Frank: My wife has romantic ideas, if you receive my meaning.
>
> Dysart: About her family?
>
> Frank: She thinks she married beneath her. I daresay she did. I don't understand these things myself. (Shaffer, 1962, p. 33)

According to Dora, Frank lacks taste and refinement, but how, that is never clear to him. Compared to Dora, he has a very little sense of aesthetics. However, her husband resembles the commonness and coarseness of country people; he lacks her sense of style and sophistication.

Alan's mother Dora is intellectually superior to her husband Frank because she is an ex-school teacher, and Alan is proud of that; he thinks that his mother knows more than his father. He spends more time with his mother when his father is away at his printing press. He obsessively listens to his mother's stories of horses, as Dora herself has been influenced by them. When Dysart meets her for the first time at her house, she gets very nervous and "*holds her hands tightly together*" (Shaffer, 1962, p. 30). As he asks her about Alan's love of horses, Dora says, "My grandfather used to ride every morning on the downs behind Brighton, all dressed up in bowler hat and jodhpurs! He used to look splendid. Indulging in equitation, he called it" (p. 32). It is basically Dora's encouragement that has ignited Alan's love of horses; the word 'Equus' itself is taught by her. Her grandfather called horse-riding 'equitation', to make it sound grand. She tells Alan how 'Equus' means the horse in Latin, and the word fascinates Alan. It is primarily Dora's infatuation for horses that is passed on to her son. She has seen her own grandfather riding on horses and found it splendid. Her family is accustomed to such magnificent customs, and she likes to brag about it.

However, Frank, a communist and an "old type socialist" (Shaffer, 1962, p. 28), finds it disturbing and asserts, "Upper-class riff-raff! That's all they are, people who go

riding! That's what they *want* – trample on ordinary people!" (p. 42). Since he has been debased by his wife because he lacks refinement; he cultivates feelings of anger and regret for not being of the same social stature as hers. According to him, horse riding pulverizes people who struggle for basic necessities. It is a magnificent practice for Dora, but it is revolting for Frank. His idea of life is very different from Dora's.

In addition, Dora is economically dependent on him after their marriage; she cannot leave him for financial reasons since she no longer earns for herself. Moreover, she has left her career to nurture her son. She spends all her time and energy to guide him on the right path. Yet, Alan commits this terrible atrocity. Consequently, she becomes disturbed by her own anger and frustrations, and directs all her negative emotions toward Alan. When she comes to visit Alan, she creates a terrible scene in the hospital and says the most dreadful things; as Alan stares at her, she slaps on his face. Dysart asks her to leave by saying that Alan is already distressed and ashamed. Then, Dora explodes:

> *And me? What about me? … What do you think I am?* … I'm a parent, of course – so it doesn't count. That's a dirty word in here, isn't it, 'parent'? … I know all right! I've heard it all my life. It's *our* fault. Whatever happens, we did it. Alan's just a little victim. He's really done nothing at all! (Shaffer, 1962, p. 77)

Alan is exposed as a victim of his mother's misguidance. He has not really done the crime on his own. Everyone is blaming Dora for her son's crime. However, no one notices Dora's sacrifice. None cares about the pain, stress and aggravation that she is suffering from. She has been living with a hope that her son will preserve her pride and prestige, but she becomes devastated as Alan commits the crime.

Furthermore, Frank watches skin flicks at night but lies to Dora that he is busy at work. Dora is aware of that; thus, she ventures to transform Alan according to strict morals and religiosity so that he does not become lecherous like his father. Thus, Shaffer does not seemingly judge her or critique her as "a hypocritical zealot; instead, he shows her as loving and well-intentioned but a misguided parent" (Stacy, 1976, p. 329). Therefore, Dora is neither really prudish nor overly religious; she also does not want to quash Alan's natural instincts. She is basically reacting against the hurtful and hypocritical behavior of her husband.

Moreover, Frank works outside and cultivates his skills to earn money for the family, but unlike him, Dora does not have a job. She invests all her skills in house management and child-care. Apart from nurturing Alan and working inside the house, she has nothing more to do. Therefore, even when Alan is an adult, his mother intrudes in his life, and he strives for autonomy. As soon as he demands his own individuality and rebels to tear away from his mother's grasp, Dora feels distressed. Despite having money and an affluent husband, she exhibits dissatisfaction.

Shaffer's detailed and elaborate portrayal of Dora implies that he is not just concerned with his male characters, something which he has been accused of by his critics; he also expresses an awareness about the middle class women in the post-war British society. In this way, he actually deviates from his contemporary generation of mother-blaming writers, in the sense that, he does not directly put all the blame upon the mother. Rather, he shows that these mothers are suffering from troubles that are

unacknowledged not only by their society but also by their families, and that the fathers of their children are one of the prominent reasons behind their trouble.

In this way, Frank plays a substantial role behind Dora's dissatisfaction and frustration. Moreover, as the head of his family and the sole earner for his dependents, he has to spend a considerable amount of time outside home. He cannot influence his child like his mother. Thus, when Alan becomes dysfunctional, he refuses to acknowledge his own culpability. Instead, he blames his wife for the dysfunction of his offspring, because she stays at home and spends more time with them. Therefore, fathers create an incredible amount of pressure on their children's stay-at-home mothers; very much like the society, they too, hold them responsible for their children's misdemeanors.

Middle-class fathers in post-war Britain and their role in the mother-blaming tradition

During the post-war era, as women went back home from their work, fathers like Frank came into prominence with their full-fledged patriarchal authority. Within the middle-class families, housewives' and children's 'helplessness' and 'incapacity', allow men to exercise paternalism; moreover, in order to maintain their control, they assume a deceitful parade of self-importance and all-knowingness (Rowbotham, 1976). In addition, they confront a harsh, competitive world outside, where "only men are strong enough to rule" (Rowbotham, 1976, p. 56). Their wives stay at home, and mostly spend their time nurturing their children. Thus, the father accuses the wife whenever the children misbehave.

Strang is a printer at a press, and constantly reminds Dora and Alan how he works to support his family. With his dominance, he creates an enormous amount of pressure on them. He is highly critical of Alan's abilities, and Dora cannot directly protest against his oppression due to her economic dependence on him. For example, Alan loves to watch television; it is his favourite mode of entertainment, but Frank bars him from watching it because "it's a dangerous drug" (Shaffer, 1962, p. 27). He invents weird ideas and attempts to inculcate them in Alan's mind by saying. "You sit in front of that thing long enough, you'll become stupid for life – like most of the population" (p. 27). He proclaims that television devours people's intelligence and asks Dora to return the set, though television is watched by everyone of Alan's age. Alan is highly moved by this incident. When Dysart meets Alan for the first time, he only sings television commercials. The nurse informs him that Alan always watches them "to the last possible moment" (Shaffer, 1962, p. 84). This shows that his father controls him by taking away the thing he likes. It takes a serious toll on his mental health.

In addition, Dora describes to Dysart another incident of Frank's autocracy. Five years ago, when Alan was about twelve years old, he found a portrait of Jesus in chains, on his way to Cavalry, in "Reeds Art Shop" (Shaffer, 1962, p. 44), and fell absolutely in love with it. He insisted on buying it with his pocket money, and hanging it at the foot of his bed where he could see it as the last thing at night, but his father was furious, as it was an extremely religious portrait. However Dora, being religious, did not mind, but Frank, a self-proclaimed atheist, is highly disapproving of his wife's religious inclinations and considers religion to be the only problem in his house. One day, when Frank and Dora

argue about religion, Frank goes upstairs and tears the portrait from Alan's wall and throws it in the garbage. Alan becomes inconsolable and cries for days though he generally does not cry over any matter; however, he recovers from the grief when a new photograph of a horse is given to him. Consequently, he starts worshipping the horse. This shows that Frank's despotism has its own influence on Alan's crime.

Dora, as she fights with Frank, tries to resist his attempts to impose his ideas on her. When Frank finds that he is losing control and failing to exert dominance on Dora, he re-exerts his control on Alan; this results in deep trauma for Alan. Furthermore, it leads towards the eventual creation of Equus as God. As a result of his parents' conflicting attitudes, Alan invents his own personal religious icon: a blood-stained white horse, wriggling in pain, "with huge accusing eyes" (Gianikaris, 1992, p. 96). Alan has always been searching for an agency that will guide him; he loves his mother and admires her as a knowledgeable person, but she is socially and economically weak. He requires a strong man with whom he can associate himself, whose behavior he can follow; someone who will guide him. Frank fails to be that man in Alan's life.

Freud's ideas are partially reflected in Frank, Dora and Alan's relationship. Alan remains close to his mother; he creates his own idol of worship and imaginary rituals around his mother's teachings. However, his mother cannot guide him about the struggles outside home. Dora romanticizes the notion of religion to Alan, and teaches him that sex is an unclean, biological matter; true love is what touches the soul (Gianikaris, 1992). Nevertheless, in Alan's mind, his incipient sexual sensations have already occurred through horses, when he was just six years old. This occurs out of the realm of his mother's teachings, and Alan wants to explore things beyond his mother's instructions. Alan strokes the horse called Trojan, and rides him; he finds the horse sexually attractive. He recalls the incident of his first ride:

> There was sweat on my legs from his neck… His sides were all warm, and the smell… I looked up into his mouth. It was huge. There was this chain in it… and cream dripped out… it was always the same, after that. Every time I heard one clop by, I had to run and see… I couldn't take my eyes off them. Just to watch their skins. The way their necks twist, and sweat shines in the folds …. (Shaffer, 1962, p.48)

The horse becomes a sex object for Alan. He immensely admires their body structure and feels drawn to their smell and skin. His mother has only taught him the religious aspect of the figure of the Equus; she has asked him to suppress his sexual urges, but she does not properly guide him to exercise his sexual instincts in a healthy manner. Consequently, Alan continues to feel strong sexual impulses towards the horse.

In addition, he adopts his father as a disciplining agent. He never directly contradicts his orders. He only expresses his love for horses behind his father's back. He devises his own ceremonies which he dares not observe in front of Frank. His father criticizes and disapproves of Alan's love for horses. Frank becomes Alan's agency for guidance and influence. Nevertheless, the truth behind Frank's character gets disclosed in front of Alan. Frank becomes scared as Alan discovers him at the adult cinema hall, so he lies to cover the actual truth. Alan realizes:

> All those airs he put on! All those nights he said he'd be in late. 'Keep my supper hot, Dora!' 'Your poor father: he works so hard!'… Bugger! Old Bugger! … Filthy old bugger! (Shaffer, 1962, p. 95)

Alan now abhors his father. He is exposed as a liar and a cheat. He orders his wife and his son to act according to his instructions because he works very hard to maintain the family. He declares that due to his pressure at work, he will come home late at night. In fact, he sneaks inside adult cinemas. He has been deceiving everyone all the while, and none can protest his misdeeds because he financially supports his family.

Alan undergoes a strange realization; his father is not a superior being. He has his own secrets and inclinations. Alan reflects:

> … *they all do it! All of them!* . . . They're not just Dads – they're people with pricks! . . . And Dad – he's not just Dad either. He's a man with a prick too … He goes off by himself at night, and does his own secret thing which no one'll know about, just like me! There's no difference – he's just the same as me – just the same! (Shaffer, 1962, p. 96- 97)

Alan instantly cancels Frank as his controlling agency, the super-ego. Just as Alan secretly sneaks off with Nugget the horse at night (Shaffer, 1962), so does his father. Frank becomes a degenerate in his eyes. However, he has considered his father as an authority as incontrovertibly true; now, due to Frank's hypocrisy, his doctrine of life and system of belief become shattered.

Alan remembers the principles and ideologies taught by his parents. He informs Jill that his mother has also been absolutely unfair to his father, and Alan feels sorry for Frank; he registers their mismatch. In addition, his sensations about horses become fused with his mother's teaching of the forbidden, and she replaces the father as his super-ego. Alan immediately develops a hatred regarding his sexual instinct. Gianikaris (1992) observes that as Jill persuades him to explore his sexuality, she becomes a rival of Equus. He becomes frightened as he realizes that he is being watched by Equus and, Equus now will convict him of sacrilege because Equus is implacable and unforgiving. His guilt is inflamed by the idea that the horses have seen everything; he sees their rolling eyes and then grabs a hoof-pick to absolve himself from their accusing stares (Stacy, 1976). Out of his fear, he then blinds six horses.

This is how, Frank's excessive authority on Alan troubles him; his father's hypocrisy has left him traumatized. However, Frank holds Alan's mother responsible for Alan's crime. He can never hold himself liable for his son's crime. He reports to Dysart that Dora indulged him; his mother and Alan "have always been thick as thieves" (Shaffer, 1962, p. 33); she used to whisper "that Bible to him hour after hour, up there in his room" (p. 33). Also, he assumes that Dora fails to see that Alan "is his father's son as well as hers" (p. 34). In addition, the mother and her son supposedly contrive other plots without informing the father. For instance, Dora informs the psychiatrist that Alan has seen "an awful lot of Westerns on the television" (p. 31). Though Frank did not approve of his watching television, Dora let Alan "slip off in the afternoons to a friend next door without his father's knowledge" (p. 31). Dora arranged for Alan what she could, from her limited capacity. Frank forbade Alan from watching television, but he did not manage any other mode of healthy amusement for him. He does not take any responsibility in

relation to his son's development; rather he snatches things that Alan loves (twice – the portrait and the TV), but offers nothing as replacement. Dora intervenes but in secret, in the sense that they cannot talk to Frank about it. This creates a sense of conspiracy between mother and son, which naturally increases their closeness. So Frank's role as a father is equally responsible for Alan's crime; Dora should not be the only parent to blame.

Frank has been unavailable when Alan needed his emotional support. He dumped all the weight of maintaining order and discipline on the wife's shoulders. By doing so, he has actually evaded his responsibilities. He has never actively participated in his child's nurturance and upbringing. Therefore, he is injudicious and inappropriate, as he blames his wife for his child's misconduct. Furthermore, for post-war British middle-class fathers, their jobs not only occupy them at their work places, but also follow them in all the other aspects of their lives; since the money from their work runs the family, they judge a person's capacity in terms of money and work (Rowbotham, 1976). Therefore, they regard their children as property, and raise them, as a mode of investment. Since the mother is the prime care-giver, if this investment fails, fathers again blame mothers for failing to provide proper care for the children.

Frank considers it a disgrace that Alan, being the son of a printer, has never opened up a book. However, printing has nothing to do with someone's reading habit; moreover, there is no mention in the play that Frank himself reads, or he encourages Alan to read. Frank only feels free to think that while working at the stable, Alan was "perfectly happy raking out manure" (Shaffer, 1962, p. 32); he spent his weekends by just cleaning out stalls, instead of investing the time in further education. However, he informs Dysart that Alan's mother has been a school teacher, but she does not "care if he can hardly write his own name" (p. 33). He is all set to accuse his wife but never takes any responsibility on his own.

Nonetheless, when Frank fails to connect with the other members in his family; he increasingly becomes lonely and friendless. Rowbotham (1976) demonstrates in her study that in the case of the middle class man, work will usually be physically easier than that of the factory workers, but he is subjected to complex psychological pressures because he is always fearful about his own ability to earn more money. At work, the seniority of his position makes intimacy embarrassing; he does not have any friends; at home he feels stressed because he has to meet the increasing demands of his family (Rowbotham, 1976). In this way, the fathers also become frustrated. As a result, Frank secretly watches skin flicks to release his tensions.

Rowbotham (1976) opines that after all the hard work, the father only knows that he has actually achieved nothing in his life. He employs all his time, skills, physical and mental energy to earn money for the family, but, there has actually been no family for him. He has been threatening others to feel and be important in the household. Out of all his efforts and sacrifice, he has developed certain expectations from his wife and children; however, he cannot really force them to like him. When these fathers realize this truth so late during their middle age, it brings devastating outcomes. However, they continue their drastic activities out of a fear of losing their authority. It produces not only

a distorted reality in the family, but also aggression and resentments among other family members.

For example, Frank becomes harsh with Jill, as he fears that his misdeeds will be revealed to his family. Even after he gets caught and becomes all white and sweaty, he keeps "shouting when everyone was asking him to shut up" (Shaffer, 1962, 93). He lies to the children that he has come here to see the manager to discuss business: cinema halls need posters, and he is a printer. Frank tries to be as dignified as possible; when the bus arrives, he asks Alan to board the bus with him, but Alan firmly says that it's proper to see Jill home. Frank knows that he is hated by his family due to his overbearing nature; however, he resorts to his authoritative nature to establish control. This breeds further resentments and anger among the mother and the child.

The post-war middle class British men resorted to families with certain ideologies, but their ideal stereotypes, regarding family and household, failed them. This shows that no one is happy inside a post-war, white, middle class household where the mother is blamed through social expectations. The male despotic authority victimizes the men themselves, and creates an enormous pressure on their wives. Moreover, since the mothers mostly stay inside the house with their children, if the children commit misdeeds, the men hold the women responsible for that.

Conclusion

Women's response to male pressure, within the family, basically results in an unhealthy environment inside the house. The housewives suppress their rage and frustration for a long time to maintain peace inside the house, but they ultimately channel their disappointments towards their children. The husband is economically more powerful, and the wife is dependent on him, she cannot directly object to his authority. The effect of the mothers' resentment devastate their children. The father here only increases these pressures by exerting his dominance on both the mother and the son.

In *Equus*, Dora is dissatisfied with her husband, and she diverts all her attention and dedication to nurture Alan. However, as Alan commits the crime, she becomes extremely shocked and contrite. The society blames her for Alan's misconduct. A thorough study of the play exposes Dora as a victim of post-war social pressures. Her husband increases these pressures on her and is proved to be equally responsible for his son's delinquency. Through this play, women's conditions as housewives in the post-war era can be re-examined, and motherhood can be observed under a different light. In addition, with a re-investigation of Freudian psychoanalysis, relationships between fathers, mothers and children in white, middle class families in post-war Britain can be studied from varied angles.

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