

## **Horsing Around (2008)**

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner on WLRH, Huntsville, AL USA

I got to see "Equus," in the Broadway previews of this dark drama, which opened thirty-five years ago! The revival may be better than the original.

The play is unjustly famous for a nude scene, which is really not essential; this version gets extra coverage because of the UNcoverage of Daniel Radcliffe, whom we last saw as Harry Potter. The lead is (surprise!) Richard Griffiths, whom we also saw in the Harry Potter films, as the nincompoop Uncle Vernon Dursley; here he's a persistent psychiatrist delving into the soul of a stable-boy. The naked truth (oops, sorry!) is that young mister Radcliffe is fine, and does well in that everlastingly challenging task of shedding the pupa role of a child star, for stature as an adult. But Griffiths, as Martin Dysart, tormented by his own demons of doubt and uncertainty, has the central task of the play (and of humankind), to discern responsibility for our actions.

Can you remember (I bare-ly could!) the premise: lad blinds six horses, won't tell why? The rest (as they say) is drama: was it the result of his father, not "weekend absent," but both present and insistent? Was it his mother? No loving, supportive, cherishing force, but a misguided, shrill conscience. Was it the world, his overweening love of horses, and a horse? Was it (and we're getting closer!) the tricks and wiles of an enticingly nubile young woman, whose disrobing doesn't get near the publicity that does Radcliffe's?

Straightening this out is part of the job of the Rokeby Psychiatric Hospital, in 1973, and in 2008. Author Peter Shaffer said that he hesitated to revive this charger because of changes in psychiatric practice through the years, different uses of hypnosis, as well as the use of mysterious "truth serums" ... but that doesn't matter at all: it all comes down to where psychiatry started, unpacking one's past to explain one's present. The result is fine drama, now as then.

Will Radcliffe get a Tony for this? I hope not, or press clippings weigh more than performances. Will Griffiths? Very possibly. Will author Peter Shaffer? Very likely, for a new, fresh, insightful vehicle that's thirty-five years old.

And who's more responsible for our behavior, heredity or environment? Yes.