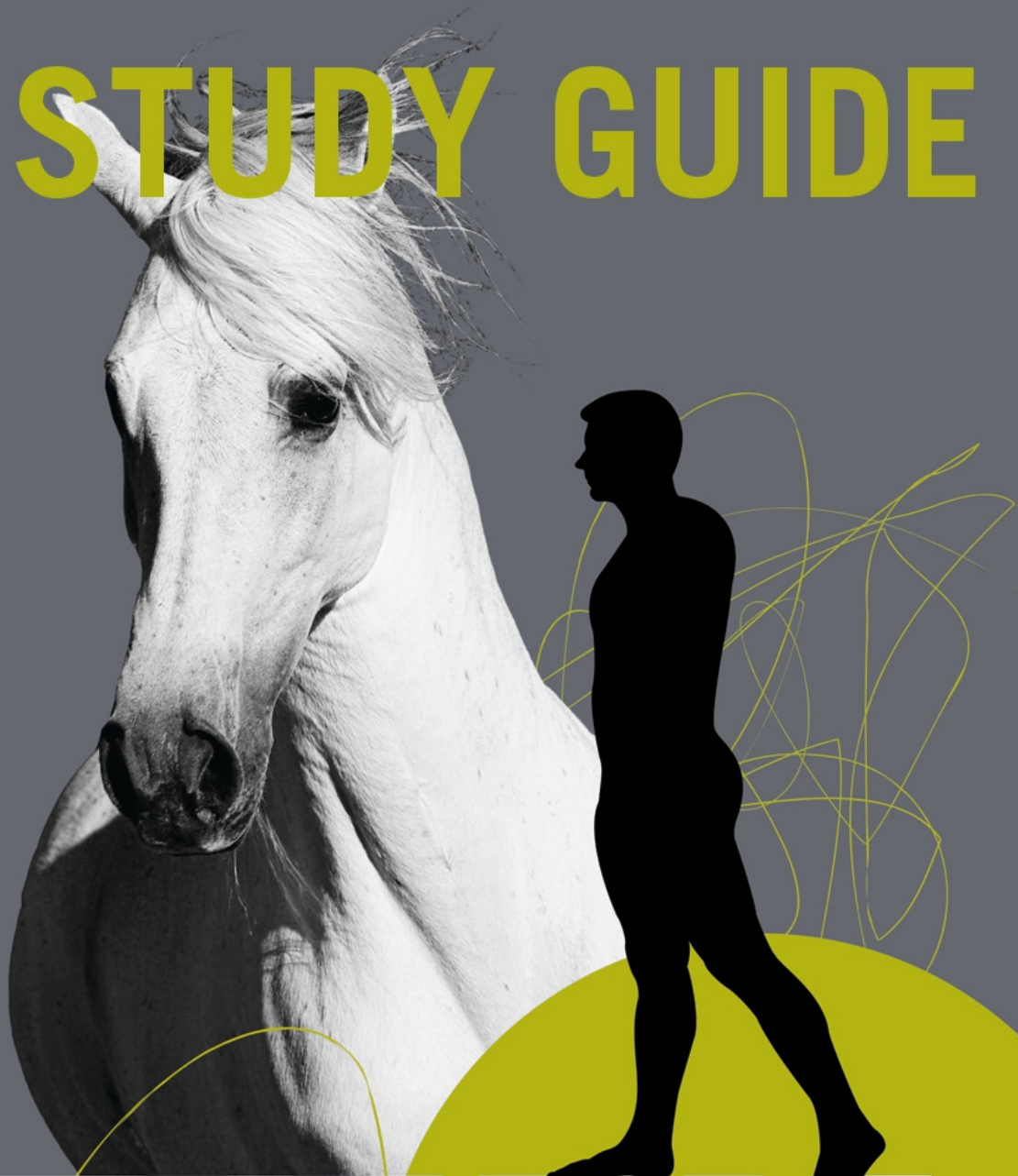


STUDY GUIDE



EQUUS

By / De

PETER SHAFFER

Directed by / Mise en scène de

DOMY REITER-SOFFER

11 September – 2 October, 2011

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This guide was compiled for the Segal Centre for Performing Arts.
It may be used solely for educational purposes.

Please contact **Lucie Lederhendler, Educational Outreach and Group Sales Coordinator**
with any questions or comments at

llederhendler@segalcentre.org or 514.739.2301 ext. 8360
or fill out the attached feedback form and fax it to 514.739.9340

PRODUCTION

Playwright

Peter Shaffer

Director
Set Designer
Costume Designer
Composer
Lighting Designer
Video Artist
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager
Assistant Director

Domy Reiter-Soffer
John C. Dinning
Susana Vera
Christian Thomas
Nicolas Descoteaux
George Allister
Elaine Normandeau
Merissa Tordjman
Rachelle Glait

Cast (in order of appearance)

Martin Dysart

Jean Marchand

Is a therapist and an agnostic who loves ancient Mediterranean civilizations. He has been married to his wife, Margaret, for many years.

Hesther Salomon Susan Glover

Is a magistrate, and a dear friend and confidante of Martin Dysart. When she feels that punishment is not appropriate for defendants that appear before her, she finds alternatives.

Alan Strang

Dan Jeannotte

Is 17-years-old. He works at an electronics store during the week and at a stable on the weekends. He loves horses.

Dora Strang

Ellen David

Is the mother of Alan and the wife of Frank. She is not a strict mother but does not contradict her husband. She is a Christian. She loves her son.

Frank Strang

Daniel Lillford

Is the father of Alan and the husband of Dora. He believes that television and media in general are the bane of society. He is vehemently atheist.

Harry Dalton

Ben Hatcher

Runs the stables where Alan and Jill work.

Jill Mason

Patricia Somerset

Works at the stables and finds a job for Alan there. She develops a crush on him.

Nugget

Pierre-Antoine Tallefer

Is the only horse with a name at the stables.

Horses / Nurses

TBA

A YOUNG MAN RIDING A HORSE

along a beach narrowly misses six-year-old Alan Strang. To calm the frightened child, the young man picks him up and rides with him. Alan is ecstatic until his parents intervene, pull him off the horse and chastise the young man.

Alan's mother, Dora Strang, is a devout Christian. She regularly reads to him out of the Bible, and hangs a graphic picture of the crucifixion of Jesus over his bed. Frank Strang, Alan's father, replaces the picture of Jesus with a portrait of a horse. Frank is very strict, an atheist, and also a socialist.

Alan names the subject of the portrait Equus, and it is the spirit of all horses. Years later, a teenaged Alan finds a job at an electronics store where he meets Jill, who recognizes him as the boy who lingers on the edge of the stable where she works. Jill offers him a weekend job as a stable boy, which he accepts. Every few nights, he sneaks a horse out to perform a spiritual ritual of his own conception.

Jill eventually develops romantic feelings for Alan, and convinces him to come with her on a date to an

adult movie theatre. Frank and Alan are both at the movie, and they confront each other for a few mortifying minutes, until Frank excuses himself. Alan realizes that Frank is just as if not more embarrassed than he. He experiences the epiphany that all men are sexual beings, and allows Jill to take him to the stables for a romantic interlude.

Alan is uncomfortable in front of the horses so they go to a side room and lock the door. This prevents the corporeal horses from seeing, but for Alan they are replaced by Equus himself. After an abrupt sexual experience, Alan becomes hysterical, Jill leaves, and Alan uses a hoof pick to blind all six horses.

He is tried and convicted, but Hesther Salomon, a magistrate, sends him to a psychiatrist instead of sentencing him for life. She appeals to her friend Martin Dysart, who reluctantly accepts the case.

Over many sessions, Dysart uncovers Alan's past. In understanding the cause of Alan's act, he also becomes jealous of his passion, and doubts the quality of his own life, the importance of his work, and the value of normalcy.

SYNOPSIS

THEMES

BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

Religion

Sinning, Atonement, Guilt & Desire

Why does iconography figure so prominently in religious rituals?
What is the relationship between sex and religion?
Is there a difference between romantic and religious love?
Does religious faith increase or diminish a believer's sense of accountability?
How is engaging in socially condemned behaviour different from sinning?

I see you ...
I will SAVE you

Messiah Salvation

Think about a time that someone else significantly affected your life by something they said or did. Were you affected for the better or for the worse? What feelings did you have about that person while the change in your life was happening? Did those feelings change afterwards?
Discuss the Messiah as an idea.

Normalcy & Expectations

What is normal behaviour?
Is passion necessarily abnormal?
How have different cultures' conceptions of normalcy changed over time?
Consider pre-Christian western civilizations. How do their religious rituals differ from modern-day Christian rituals?
Are there religious rites that are harmful but legal? Illegal but harmless?

Freedom

Where does the line fall between protection and imprisonment?
What forces, internal or external, limit your personal freedom?
Think about domesticated animals. What do they gain by sacrificing their freedom? What do they lose by having an owner?

The normal is the good ...
smile in a child's eyes
it is also the dead stare in a million adults

THE PSYCHIATRY OF EQUUS

Psychopathology.

Is the branch of Psychology primarily concerned with abnormal personalities. An abnormal personality is characterized by the 4 D's: *deviance; distress; dysfunction; and danger.*

Etiology.

Is the study of origin or causation. This can mean a deductive approach to diagnostics.

Placebo Effect.

A placebo works by engaging the patient's expectations of what a treatment promises to do. A placebo treatment will generally consist of an inert tablet or a false procedure like a surgery. Ailments that are caused by mechanisms of the mind are in this way cured, tricking the same mechanisms into performing a different task than they were performing before. In effect, a placebo encourages sub-conscious self-control.ⁱ

Therapeutic Contract.ⁱⁱ

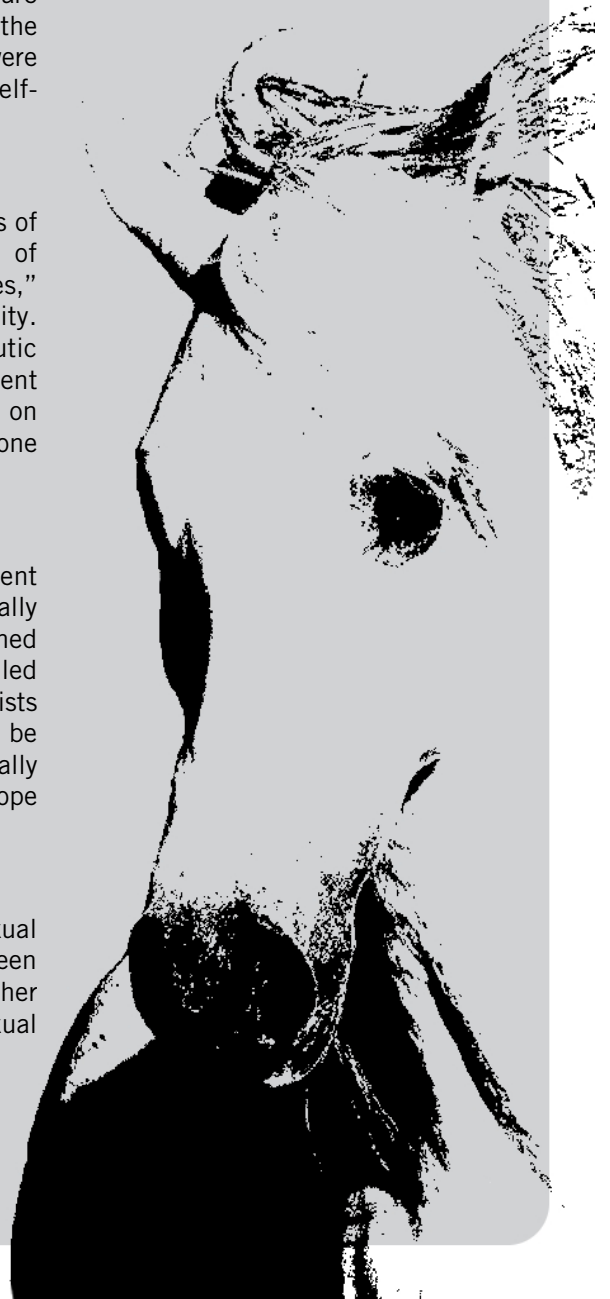
The therapeutic contract is a description of the developmental stages of the relationship between a therapist and a patient. The type of therapeutic contract will depend on the patient's "motivational states," which include denial, helplessness, blame, fear, and responsibility. Once these are established, the therapist can determine the therapeutic contract they will utilize in treatment. For example, if the patient comes in a crisis, the therapist will employ a method centred on problem-solving and case management. If the patient needs someone to talk to, the therapist can employ an active listening technique.

Anti-Psychiatry.

A movement of the 1960s and 70s that was critical of current psychiatry on a moral level. It raised questions of consent, categorically rejecting any involuntary treatment whatsoever. They also questioned diagnoses of mental illness, arguing that in many cases, what is called illness is simply a deviation from normal behaviour. Anti-Psychiatrists RD Laing and David Cooper went on to say that "schizophrenia could be understood as an injury to the inner self inflicted by psychologically invasive 'schizophrenogenic' parents, or as a healthy attempt to cope with a sick society."ⁱⁱⁱ

Freudianism.

This school of psychotherapy outlines early childhood sexual development. According to its founder Sigmund Freud, it is between the ages of 3 and 6 that children become aware of their and other genitalia, and thus aware of themselves and everyone else as a sexual being.



PSYCHIATRY'S HISTORICAL POSITION

Equus was written in 1973, which was a turbulent time for psychiatry. Modern psychiatry came to Europe at the end of the 18th century^{iv}. Before then, mentally ill individuals were dealt with case-by-case and often imprisoned. Asylums have existed since the middle ages, but there was no therapeutic element to them - they were solely custodial, and the insane were confined in the same location as orphans, prostitutes, and vagrants. Mentally ill individuals, before therapy, had many names: "town fool", "distracted person", "idiotic subject".

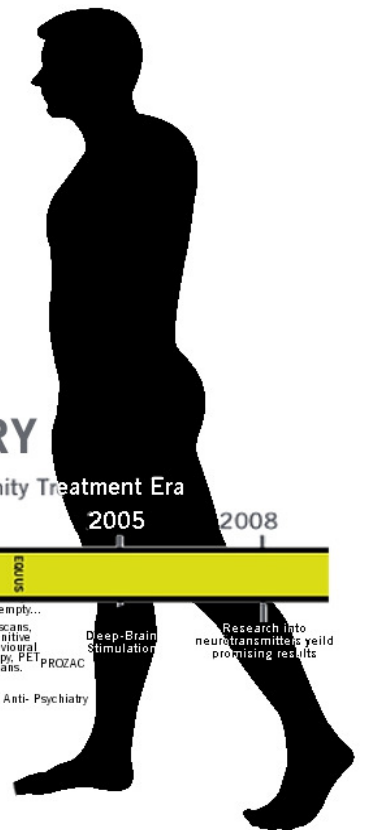
The 18th century Enlightenment focused on the power of the mind and of reason in numerous areas, not the least in curing ailments of the mind, and modern psychiatry was born.

After World War II, medicine began to investigate biochemical cures for mental disorders. Edward Shorter writes, "Somehow, psychiatry's very real shift to science was associated with an imputed loss of caring^v." For many mental disorders, the panacea is concern and attention itself, but that began to seem mutually exclusive to a biochemical treatment.

In the rebellious social climate of the 1960s, a number of thinkers started to question the idea of mental illness itself. It was seen as a method of control by the bourgeoisie, by the patriarchy, or other organized authorities. In 1964, Michel Foucault wrote *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. In it, he questions the subjective European constructions of madness, citing the changes in coping methods and criteria as proof, and argues that diagnoses are often arbitrary attempts to make behaviour more "normal." If normalcy is the opposite of madness, then madness is subject to changes in social values.

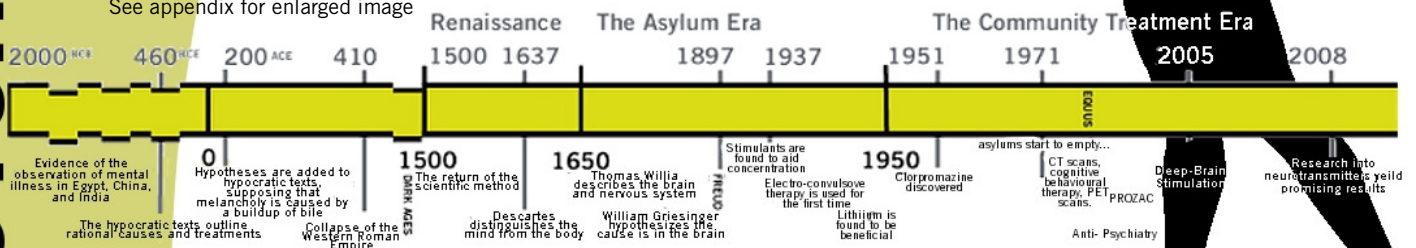
David Cooper first used the term "Anti-Psychiatry" in 1967, but the movement had been active since the early part of the decade. The core belief of the movement was that treatment, categorically, should be voluntary. Thomas Szasz, who is included in this movement but in fact rejected the categorization because of its left-wing associations, advocated against any treatment of behaviour on the sole basis of it being abnormal.

In 1971 a new magazine called *The Radical Therapist* was founded. Its slogan was, "Therapy means change, not adjustment."



SELECTED EVENTS IN PSYCHIATRIC HISTORY

See appendix for enlarged image



Job 39

¹⁹Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?

²⁰Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible.

²¹He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men.

²²He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword.

²³The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield.

²⁴He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet.

²⁵He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

Job 42

¹Then Job answered the LORD, and said,

²I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

³Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

⁴Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

⁵I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.

⁶Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Revelations 19

¹¹And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

¹²His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

¹³And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

¹⁴And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

¹⁵And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

¹⁶And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

(Authorized Version)



AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

1. What effect does the mystery-novel story construction have on the efficacy of the work? Compare the script to the synopsis in this guide. How are your impressions different?
2. What are some reasons that Shaffer would have insisted that all the performers are on stage for the whole show? Recall the themes of the judgemental gaze and freedom.
3. Is the play anti-modern? Discuss Frank and Dora's opposing views on the value of television. What is the relationship between media and religion?
4. Is the play anti-religious? Would Alan have worshipped Equus had that poster not replaced the Christian iconography in his room?
5. Is the play anti-psychiatric? The psychiatrist is more sceptical about his vocation than anyone, but feels a profound sense of duty.
6. Is the play anti-punitive? Hesther is a magistrate and is also the most sympathetic of the characters. In this case, are we supportive of her decision to treat Alan instead of punish him?
7. Discuss judgement in the play. Each character has their own judge, and each is the judge to someone else. Does this dynamic reinforce or subvert their own perceived power?
8. Discuss the elements of tragedy in the play as it relates to inevitability.
9. How did the addition of choreographed dance affect your experience of the performance?
10. Discuss the practical considerations of building a theatre set. Imagine a set for this play that fulfills only its basic requirements. What artistic decisions did Dinning make in this design that added to the content of the piece and to your emotional response? Ask the same questions in reference to Descoteaux's lighting design and Thomas' music.

Peter Shaffer was born in 1926 in Liverpool, Great Britain. He worked odd jobs in England through World War II, eventually moving to New York City with his brother, Anthony. Together, he and Anthony wrote two mystery novels that were published in the US as part of Macmillan's "Cock Robin Mystery" series.

Shaffer wrote his first play in 1954 to great success, which would continue through his career. Many of his plays have shown in Europe and America, and several of them have been adapted for the screen.

Selected Honours

- CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire (1987)
- William Inge Award for Distinguished Achievement in American Theatre (1992)
- Knight Bachelor (2001)

Selected Works

- 1954 The Salt Land
- 1957 Balance of Terror
- 1957 The Prodigal Father
- 1958 Five Finger Exercise
- 1962 The Private Ear
- 1962 The Public Eye
- 1963 The Establishment
- 1963 The Merry Roosters Panto
- 1964 The Royal Hunt of the Sun
- 1967 Black Comedy/White Lies
- 1970 The Battle of Shrivings
- 1973 Equus *
- 1979 Amadeus †
- 1983 Black Mischief
- 1984 Amadeus (film) ‡
- 1985 Yonadab
- 1987 Lettice and Lovage
- 1987 The Savage Parade
- 1990 Whom Do I Have the Honour of Addressing?
- 1992 The Gift of the Gorgon



THE PLAYWRIGHT

* 1975 *Tony Award*

† 1979 *Evening Standard Drama Award, Theatre Critics Award; 1981 Tony Award*

‡ 1985 *Academy Awards, Winner in eight categories*

See Appendix

Peter SHAFFER on EQUUS

Tragedy, for me, is not a conflict between right and wrong, but between two different kinds of right.”

Equus first came to Peter Shaffer as a true story, told second-hand by his friend while they were driving through stable country. A magistrate in rural England had recounted the most disturbing case that ever came before her, in which a boy blinded 26 horses. The boy's parents were, apparently, very strict. The boy worked at a stable. The boy had made love to a girl on the floor of the stable, surrounded by horses. Years later, Shaffer was still haunted by this story and resolved to write it.

He found that the scene in which the sex act and the criminal act occurs was “unwritable.” As Shaffer says, “playwrights sometimes talk to their characters,” and so he spoke with Alan, his main character. Alan admitted that the sex act was never completed. Shaffer realized that the story was really about horse-worship - about religion more than about sexuality. Understanding this motivation of his character, the story unfolded and the psychiatrist became a major figure.

For a work so loaded with sexuality and nudity, Shaffer was explicit in his desire that the only truly erotic moment of the play would be the ride. The sex scene takes place in an almost clinical atmosphere; whereas the religious ritual is animalistic and base.

The moral of the play has been received in a number of different ways. American audiences, according to Shaffer, are much more inclined to see it as comedic anti-psychiatric doctrine, whereas English audiences find it aggressively gory. Shaffer hypothesizes that this is simply explained by the fact that Americans are more likely to see psychiatrists regularly, while the English are more likely to have regular exposure to horses. Others walk out of the theatre with a “do your own thing” message in their minds, which Shaffer disagrees with fervently. Alan's actions are perhaps understandable by the end of the story, but Alan is still desperately unhappy.^{vi}

THE DIRECTOR

DOMY REITER-SOFFER was born in Tel Aviv, Israel, and has since then traveled the world, working as a director, choreographer, designer, dancer, teacher, and artist for stage, television, and film to much critical acclaim. He worked as the Artistic Advisor of the Irish National Ballet from 1975 to 1989, and of the Bat Dor dance company for fifteen years.^{vii} His production of *Egus* for Dance Theatre of Harlem at the Met. New York won him the Best production of the Year Award from New York Daily News.

STUDIES

Psychology University of London (English History); Mia Arbatova- Martha Graham- Anna Sokolov- Audrey de Vos (Dance); Fanny Luvitch at Habimah School of Dramatic Art (Drama); Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, Copenhagen; Bent Isaksen in Copenhagen and Rud Yacov in Israel (Music)

ART EXHIBITIONS

Betzalel Academy of the Arts (Jerusalem); The Danish Royal Academy; Francis Bacon (London); John Paddy Carstairs (London); St. Martins Academy (London)

DIRECTION OF PLAYS & MUSICALS (Selected Work)

Eve – The Irish Theatre
You Ain't Heard Nothing – Gaiety Theatre for Noel Pearson productions
The Fantasticks – Noel Pearson Productions.
Pomes Penyeach – James Joyce Centenary at the Abbey Theatre Dublin
Oscar- based on the life of Oscar Wilde for the Irish National at the Gaiety Theatre Dublin.
Mary Makebelieve – The Abbey Theatre Dublin and the Gate Theatre Dublin
The Glass Menagerie – The Brewery

STAGING & CHOREOGRAPHY OF OPERA (Selected Work)

Don Quixote (Massenet)
Orpheus Ed Euridice (Gluck) - The Wexford Festival



" Domy Reiter-Soffer is particularly noted for his brilliant translations of words into movement, dealing with the very essence of the subject creating sheer theatre. Sheer theatre."
- The New York Times

PAST PRODUCTIONS OF *EQUUS*

Daniel Radcliffe as Alan Strang. In the 2007 production.
Directed by Thea Sharrock,



Image credit Harold Sun. haroldsun.com

Poster for the 1977 film adaptation of *Equus*,
Starring Richard Burton, Peter Firth, and Colin Blakely.
Directed by Sidney Lumet.

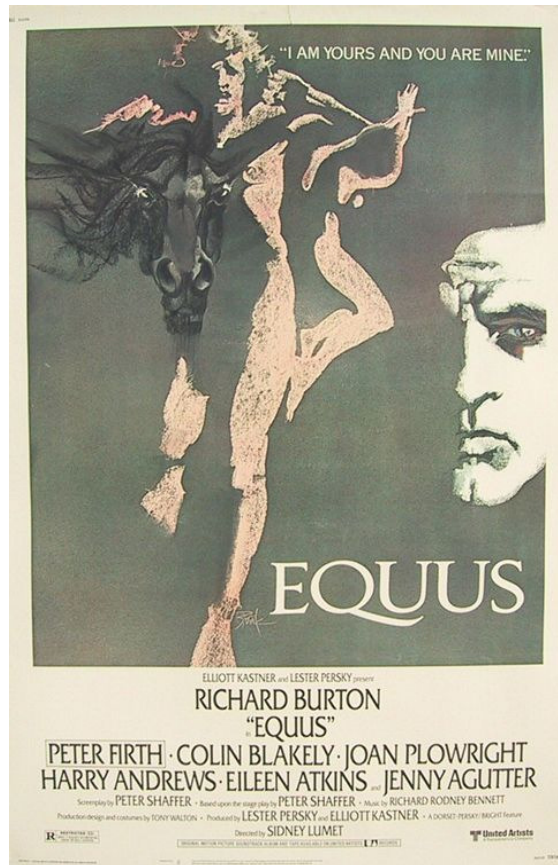


Image credit imdb.com

DOMY REITER-SOFFER'S BALLET EQUUS

Still photograph of the ballet of *Equus*,
by Domy Reiter-Soffer. Music by Joseph.



Image Credit domyrs.com

PETER SHAFFER @ THE SEGAL

Poster for the Segal Centre's production of *Amadeus*
Part of the 2006 – 2007 season.
Directed by Alexandre Marine.

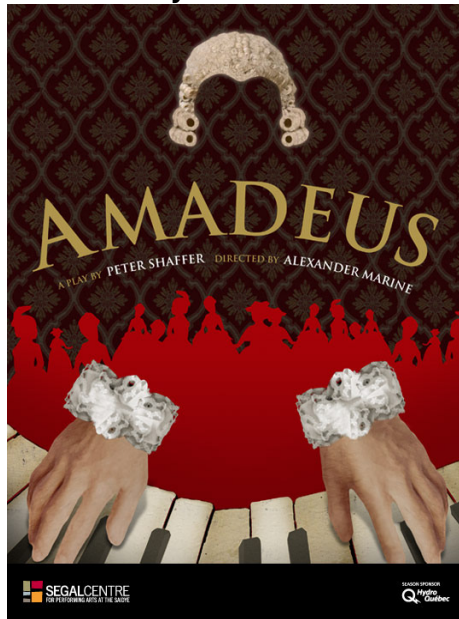
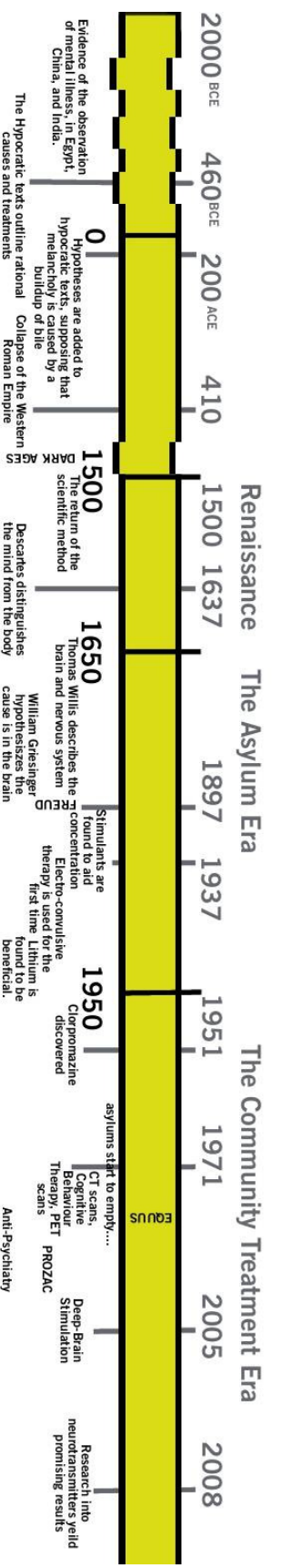


Image credit edmundlam.com

APPENDIX



THEATRE ETIQUETTE

Please take a moment to prepare your students or group for their visit to the Segal Centre. Explain to them what is meant by good theatre etiquette and why a few simple courtesies will enhance the enjoyment of the play for all audience members.

1. *Equus* will be performed in the main theatre of the Segal Centre. Performances at the Segal are for both groups and the general public. It is important that everyone be quiet (no talking or rustling of materials) during the performance, so that others do not lose their immersion in the “world of the play”. Please do not unwrap candy, nor play with zippers or with your programme.
2. Do not put your feet on the back of the seat in front of you and please do not climb over seats.
3. If you plan to make notes on the play for the purpose of writing a review, please do not try to write them during the performance. Seeing you do this can be distracting for the actors. Please wait until intermission or after the performance is finished to write your reflections.
4. Use of phones or cameras is strictly prohibited inside the theatre. Absolutely no photos or video may be taken without the express consent of management.
5. Use of cell phones, iPods, tablets, or other self-illuminating electronics is **strictly prohibited** in the theatre. The light from these devices is visible from stage and in the audience. It is extremely distracting to the artists on stage and inconsiderate to your fellow audience members.
6. Your seat is only guaranteed until the moment the theatre doors close. Late entry is very disruptive; therefore if a patron is tardy we ask that they please follow the instructions of our front-of-house staff.

And...

**ENJOY THE
SHOW!**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

Feedback form for group organizers

It would be a pleasure to hear about your experience of bringing your group to the play.

1. How would you rate your experience of bringing your group to the play?
Extremely positive 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely stressful
2. How much do you feel your group benefitted from the experience?
Very much 1 2 3 4 5 Very Little
3. Would you recommend the experience to other group leaders?
Wholeheartedly 1 2 3 4 5 Never
4. Will you consider bringing a group to the theatre again?
Wholeheartedly 1 2 3 4 5 Never
5. What did you enjoy most about coming to see the play?

6. What aspect of coming to the theatre did you find problematic?

We welcome all additional comments.

Reply to:
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ⁱ Benedetti, Fabrizio et. al. "Neurobiological Mechanisms of the Placebo Effect." *The Journal of Neuroscience* (2005).

ⁱⁱ Lift, Barry. "A typology of Therapeutic Contracts." (2008)

ⁱⁱⁱ Wikipedia contributors, "Anti-psychiatry," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Anti-psychiatry&oldid=435508790> (accessed July 22, 2011).

^{iv} Shorter, Edward. *A History Of Psychiatry: From The Era Of The Asylum To The Age Of Prozac* (Canada: Wiley & sons, 2007), 1-10.

^v Shorter, "History of Psychiatry," 273.

^{vi} Shaffer, Peter. "Peter Shaffer Interview." Mike Wood. (New York: Inge Centre for the Arts, 1992)

^{vii} Reiter-Soffer, Domy. "About Domy Reiter-Soffer." Accessed 19 July 2011. <http://domyrs.com/>

^{viii} *History of Psychiatry Timeline* [Video]. (2009). Retrieved July 22, 2011, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r10Wch110ZQ>



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