

'Equus' an uncontested triumph

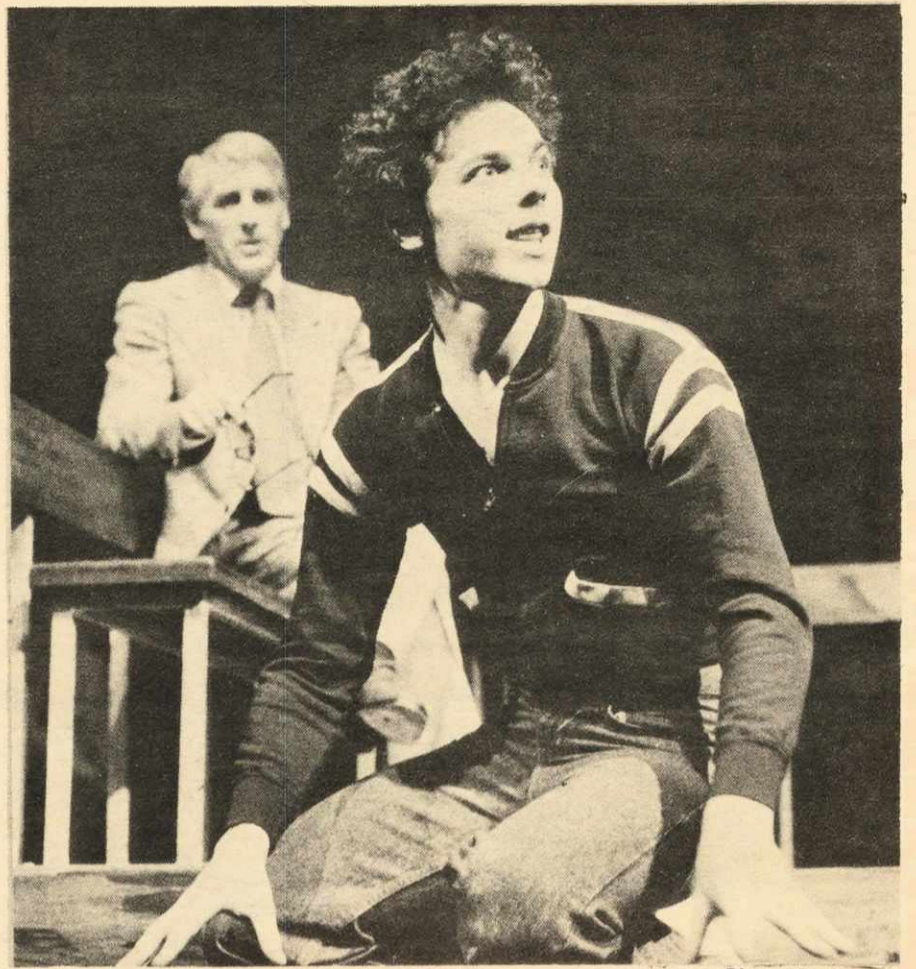
by Judith Pratt

The Neptune production of *Equus* is like a taut sinew that explodes into action after brief preliminary exercises. Casual and reflective, the renowned play, just beginning its initiation into North American

theatres, opens somewhat innocently, only to strip bare the adornments of the soul, revealing a startling and self-exposing cavern that leaves the audience feeling awed and drained.

The playwright Peter Shaffer has taken precautionary measures throughout the play to avoid any semblance of vindicating the curative powers of psychiatry. David Renton as Dr. Martin Dysart introduces the audience to the disturbed boy, Alan Strang, preserving a collected yet perturbed mien, even when confronted with the hostile commercial jingles of the boy. Perhaps too reserved, Renton recites how Strang first entered his life and from there launches into the history of the treatment and the psychiatrist's simultaneous introspective probing. Dysart does not pretend to cure the boy by unveiling the influences which compelled him to commit the heinous crime of blinding six horses, but disrobes the pretentious yet frightened boy of his masks and only then declares that perhaps he can be helped. There is no miracle cure here but an elimination of certain barriers that until then had prevented Dysart from delving deeper into Alan's psyche.

Richard Greenblatt as Alan Strang is extraordinary as he moves from open hostility toward Dysart to a gradual acquiescence to the



Photo/Pederson

Richard Greensplatt and David Renton in Neptune's *Equus*.

Gin Kee Hing Restaurant

真奇香酒家

Take-out
or Delivery

423-9331

5970 SPRING GARDEN
ROAD

THE SUBMARINE

THE SUBMARINE (5384 Inglis St. 423-7618). Attention Submarine Lovers - this take-out spot offers 20 different varieties (large and small) from ham and cheese to smoked meat on rye to the Continental Special featuring 4 different types of meat and cheese, all garnished with pickles, onions, lettuce and tomatoes, topped with dressing. Black Forest Cake - by the piece or a whole cake for a special occasion - made right on the premises. Cold meat trays available for parties. Hours: Mon.-Wed. 11 a.m. to 1 a.m. Thurs.-Sat. 11 a.m. to 2 a.m. Sun. 4 p.m. to 12 a.m.



!!! TYPING !!!

DICTATE YOUR THESIS OR TERM PAPER ON-TO STANDARD CASSETTE AND LET US DO THE REST.

CALL KAREN McMULLIN FOR DETAILS.



office
overload® 429-2490

Applications for the following positions on Student Union Council are now available.

Treasurer - Honorarium - Approx. \$3,000

Chairman - Honorarium - Approx. \$200

Recording Secretary - Honorarium -
Approx. \$200

Application forms can be picked up in the Council Offices, Room 222, Student Union Building. Applications close March 15, 1977.

doctor's attempts to open the locked doors of his mind. Each interview with Dysart removes a foggy curtain and climaxes in the total revelation of the final nude scene. To maintain the mental agony and beseeched and guilty soul, Greenblatt seems to coil himself into a moving steel band, springing loose in uncontrolled lashes, each one removing an apparently formidable barrier from the doctor's searching probe. The final collapse on the hospital bed is shared by the openly sympathetic audience who feels that, with *Equus* proved mortal, Alan can begin the rehabilitation necessary to readmit him to society.

Yet Dysart's own introspection jars and maligns this apparently necessary rehabilitation. The sympathetic magistrate and friend, Hester Salomon, played by Denise Fergusson, pleads with him to transform this tumultuous confusion into a normal boy. Upon examination of his own well of subconsciousness, revealed in a recurring dream about child sacrifice in ancient Greece, Dysart concludes gradually that the normal state the law requires of Alan is stagnant. The often-remarked stare of Alan's is not one of pleading but is rather accusatory. By destroying Alan's god *Equus*, the doctor is making the cavern more resonant with barrenness, yet it demands to be done. Dysart concludes that he, who professes to be a pagan, believing in a multitude of gods, is farcical and impotent when compared with Alan's worship of *Equus*.

Often sarcastic, often bitingly truthful, Renton proceeds to discover the facets of *Equus* through Alan's hesitant confession. Dysart, who claims at first that "the job is unworthy to fill me", in this gradual detective work concludes that he surely is unworthy to dispose of *Equus*. Echoing self-doubt, self-hate, and scorn for all he professes to stand for, Renton reveals that this horse's head asks questions he has tried to avoid. The passion, the ecstasy, the grovelling, the agony are all avenues of worship forbidden to conventional theorists such as himself and those who demand a standard of normalcy. Greenblatt, with his quivering genuflections is more alive than the somewhat melancholic Renton, who yearns for

"a fantastic surrender to the primitive." It is this conclusion that renders the success of the psychiatrist's in exposing the roots of the crime as slightly tainted. The result is not so much a cure as a robbery.

Renton and Greenblatt both deserved the thunderous applause that marked their curtain call. Renton as Dysart was composed throughout, despite the attacks made by Alan, exposing certain abnormalities in his life. Greenblatt as Alan was superb, registering all the hostility and emotional vibrancy of a disturbed boy trying to protect the sources of his guilt. Mimetically dramatic throughout when recounting of his association with horses and his discovery that for him, *Equus* is parallel to Christ, Greenblatt worships with body and mind, with an acute insight into the encompassing power of devotion. The final purgation through reenactment of the crime is, under John Wood's direction, a catharsis for both Alan and the audience. It is only Dysart who feels that in exorcising Alan's guilt he has taken on an equitable guilt.

Max Helpmann and Joan Gregson, portraying Alan's parents, display an all too common image of paternal repression and maternal over-abundance, leaving a large void in Alan that is filled by his devotion to *Equus*. Their neglect in communicating with their son leads to vivid revulsion and an unwillingness to look behind the arras of the crime. Helpmann and Gregson compliment each other and Greenblatt to lend an aura of stinging approximation to contemporary and therefore realistic situations.

The Neptune Theatre has bravely brought to Halifax a play of the caliber seen only in major cities famous for experimental theatre. To present *Equus*, with its disturbing religious analogies and climactic nude scene, is to confront the sold-out audiences with subject matter largely alien to the Halagonian experience. The heartening fact that the house was sold out almost nightly leads to the conclusion that more of the intensely emotional playwriting similar to Shaffer's would be heralded strongly by Halifax audiences.