

How does shaffer convey his ideas and themes in "equus"

Literature



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In " Equus", Peter Shaffer glorifies horses and shows the mighty power of them in many ways. One is the design and layout of the set. The set has a central pole in which Nugget balances on when Alan is riding him. Then the set rotates and it seems as though Alan is riding him around the set. This is the only time in the play that a horse is ridden because Shaffer does not want the pantomime look. This is also the reason why the horses do not look anything like real horses. They have steel and leather masks which go over an actor's head.

This is because Peter Shaffer does not want the horses to look at all pantomimic or real because this is a serious play about very serious matters. The masks are very symbolic and it is very unlikely that you will leave the theatre without remembering the twisted steel and leather figurative masks. Throughout the whole " play", it focuses on horses in the modern world mostly, but there are also references to ancient times and bible stories with horses in them. For example Alan's mother tells us of a story in which horse and rider seemed as one.

And it was only when one rider fell off that they realised they were completely different beings. There is also another ancient Greek link, where Dysart is obsessed by Dionysus and Agamemnon and all other ancient Greek things. There is also the strange dream that Dysart has of Alan where he is dissecting his insides and looking at the patterns they make. This isn't just a coincidental dream but it shows that Alan's mind is being dissected by Dysart, but the more he looks into it, the less he seems motivated to do it and bored of it, which is portrayed by Dysart getting sicker and sweatier every time he dissects another Alan.

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The play posters from both productions, the 1970's and the modern day one also portray the horse's power very well. The 1970's poster shows an abstract horse made with regular shapes but if you take a closer look, it seems to be two horses merged into one. If you cover up the lower eye it seem that the horse is sideways looking to the left, but if you cover the mouth and tilt it ninety degrees to the left, it seems that its body is facing the left but its head is looking at you.

This is very strange because you don't know which way to look at it and whether it was purposely made to look this way or whether it was made by chance. I think that this also shows that there is more than one meaning behind the horses in the play and I think this meaning is of Alan's worship. With the modern poster, it is very different. At first look it seems that there is a young male figure standing with his arms out wide and head tilting up, but when you take a second look, there is a horses head as his body.

So instead of there being two horse figures, there is a horse and a human figure. This is good because in the play, Alan says the horse's head can come out of his body and unite them as one, and here it does just that. Another major idea in Shaffer's production is the idea of worship and passion. Again the masks are very much to do with this idea because they are symbolic and Alan worships the being behind them. Alan Strang has something to worship and is happy with it, but from this he gets pain, and in the play this is known as passion because that is where the roots of the word came from.

Dysart envies Alan for this passion because he has no reason for living as his job is getting dull, his wife and him don't talk, he is infertile so couldn't have

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children to enlighten him and finally he has no worship or anything to swear by. He can also relieve Alan of it because he is the doctor and the passion is the virus or illness that Alan is feeling. Overall Shaffer conveys the themes of worship and the power of horses by means of props and actions. These are all very significant in the play and without them; the play would be less lively and serious.