The Elephant Man Study Guide

The Elephant Man by Bernard Pomerance

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Introduction

The Elephant Man was first produced in London at the Hampstead Theatre. It soon moved to New York and opened Off-Broadway at the Theatre of St. Peter's Church, and then to Broadway and the Booth Theatre. Pomerance's play earned good reviews and a number of awards, including a Tony Award, the New York Drama Critics award, the Drama Desk Award, and the Obie Award.

The play is based on the story of Joseph Merrick; in large part, it draws from the book by Frederick Treves, which chronicles Merrick's life story. Critics applauded Pomerance's efforts to depict the conflict that results when Treves saves Merrick from the freak shows only to exploit Merrick himself.

The play was so successful that it was turned into an even more successful Hollywood film in 1980. The film earned several British Academy Awards, including Best Actor (for John Hurt as Merrick) and Best Film.

It also received a number of Academy Award nominations in America, including Best Actor, Best Art Direction, Best Costume Design, Best Director (David Lynch), Best Film Editing, Best Picture, and Best Original Score. The film also starred Anthony Hopkins, John Gielgud, and Anne Bancroft.

Author Biography

Bernard Pomerance was born in Brooklyn in 1940. He is a very private man and there is very little information about his parents, his childhood, his early education, or his personal life.

Pomerance was a student at the University of Chicago, but then moved to London when he was in his early thirties. After moving to England, he began working with small, innovative theatre groups. With director Roland Rees, he founded the Foco Novo theatre group, which produced Pomerance's early plays.

Pomerance's reputation as a playwright is based on one play, *The Elephant Man*, first performed in 1979 and then made into a successful Hollywood film in 1980. The play initially opened in London at the Hampstead Theatre before moving to New York and eventually opening on Broadway.

After writing two more plays, *Quantrill in Lawrence* (1980) and *Melons* (1985), he finally published his first novel, *We Need to Dream All This Again, in 1987.*

Plot Summary

Scene I

The opening scene takes place in London Hospital: Dr. Treves, the new lecturer in anatomy, presents his credentials to the hospital administrator, Carr Gomm. A salary is settled upon, and Gomm makes a mysterious reference to the salary serving as an excellent consolation prize.

Scene II

In a store, Ross is collecting money for a viewing of John Merrick, who is described as a freak of nature. Treves enters and says he will not pay if it is all a trick; but after seeing Merrick, Treves pays Ross. They agree that Treves will pay Ross a fee to take Merrick for a day to study his condition.

Scene III

While conducting a lecture, Treves shows slides of Merrick while describing the exact nature of the deformities. Merrick is also present and demonstrates his infirmities when asked. A voice from the audience tells Treves that he cannot permit Merrick to return to the freak show.

Scene IV

In Brussels, the pinheads are being prepared to sing by the Man. Ross and Merrick enter, and Merrick tells the pinheads that he has earned a lot of money, which Ross is holding. Merrick also says he is happy. The Man enters again and tells the pin-heads to sing.

At that moment a policeman enters and orders the show stopped. Ross comes back and tells Merrick that he has become a liability. After stealing his money, Ross turns Merrick over to the conductor, who agrees to drop Merrick at Liverpool Station in return for a little money. The scene ends with Merrick saying he has been robbed.

Scene V

Merrick arrives in London, and a policeman and the conductor have to hide Merrick to protect him from the mob. Merrick tries to speak, but his words are difficult to understand; the policeman and conductor think he is an imbecile. They find Treves's card in Merrick's pocket and send for the doctor.

Scene VI

Treves interviews Nurse Sandwich, whom he hopes will be able to care for Merrick. A number of other nurses have been too revolted by his appearances to care for him. Although he claims to have vast experiences in Africa with terrible diseases, Miss Sandwich is just as frightened and bolts from the room.

Scene VII

The bishop and Gomm talk about Merrick's aptitude for biblical instruction. The bishop feels it is his Christian duty to help Merrick with religious instruction. He is also pleased that Treves is a Christian.

Scene VIII

Treves informs Merrick that he has a home for life and that he will never have to go on exhibition again. Treves badgers Merrick to acknowledge how lucky he is. He repeatedly forces Merrick to thank him and to admit that, while there are rules to follow, those rules will make Merrick happy. It illustrates that Treves sees Merrick as a child and not capable of real thought.

Scene IX

Treves brings in an actress, Mrs. Kendal, to meet Merrick. Treves informs her that Merrick is very lonely that he needs to be more socialized. Mrs. Kendal asks about Merrick's disorder and whether his sexual function has been inhibited. Treves is embarrassed to discuss sexual matters with a woman, but he finally admits that Merrick is normal in that way.

Scene X

Mrs. Kendal comes to visit Merrick and they discuss *Romeo and Juliet*, a play she has acted in several times. They engage in a spirited discussion of Romeo and Merrick is revealed to very much an intellectual capable of deep thought.

Mrs. Kendal is very impressed with his ability to explore beyond the obvious and tells Treves that Merrick must be introduced to some of her friends. She shakes Merrick's hand as she leaves and he is heard sobbing in the background as she exits.

Scene XI

Merrick is working on a model of St. Phillip's Church. He is visited by several important members of society, each leaving a Christmas gift for him. After they leave, Treves and Merrick discuss the model he is building and the illusion of perfection.

Scene XII

Several of Merrick's visitors, including Mrs. Kendal, Gomm, and the bishop, think Merrick is like each of them. All of them fail to see that Merrick has a definite personality of his own.

Scene XIII

Lord John and Treves are talking; the details are not given, but it appears that John may be a swindler of sorts. Merrick overhears and is worried that he may lose his home in the hospital if all the money is gone.

Scene XIV

Merrick complains to Mrs. Kendal that he has never even seen a woman's body unclothed. She begins undressing. Merrick turns to look at her just as Treves enters. As a proper Victorian gentleman, he is shocked that Mrs. Kendal has shown Merrick her body and he orders her to cover herself.

Scene XV

Ross returns and asks Merrick to help him; he has read that Merrick has important visitors and he suggests that Merrick begin charging each of these people to visit. Merrick reminds Ross that he robbed him and refuses to be a part of his plan.

Scene XVI

Treves tells Merrick about a patient he operated on and who came back from the dead. Merrick, who is clearly hurt by Mrs. Kendal's being sent away, begins to question Treves about the women he operates on and how he fells about seeing their naked bodies.

When he asks Treves if Mrs. Kendal might return, Treves replies that she would not choose to do so. The scene ends with Treves muttering to himself that he does not want her present to see Merrick die.

Scene XVII

Treves dreams that Merrick has come to borrow him from Gomm and takes him back for examination. Gomm, who is disguised as Ross, describes Treves as a dreamer.

Scene XVIII

The dream continues: Merrick is lecturing and describing Treves as self-satisfied and incapable of truly giving of himself. He also describes Treves as sexually repressed and focused more on controlling his emotions than on being able to empathize with those around him. This scene mirrors the earlier one where Treves presents Merrick at a lecture.

Scene XIX

Treves informs Gomm that Merrick is dying. Treves notes the irony that as Merrick has finally managed to achieve a more normal life, his body is failing him. The bishop steps away from Merrick, where the two have been praying, and tells Treves that he finds the depth of Merrick's religious belief moving.

Treves appears to be in despair over the meaninglessness of his life and grieving for something lost. As Treves collapses into weeping, Merrick places the final piece in the model of St. Phillip's that he has constructed.

Scene XX

Snork brings Merrick his lunch. After he eats, Merrick falls asleep sitting up only that way will keep the weight of his head from killing him. In a dream, the pinheads enter, singing, and lay him down. Merrick dies and Snork enters to find the body.

Scene XXI

Gomm reads a letter he will send to the newspaper announcing the death of Merrick in his sleep. The letter contains a brief summary of how the hospital attempted to make Merrick's life easier. The remaining funds, previous donated to care for Merrick, will be donated to the hospital's general fund. The play ends with the reading of the letter.

Scenes 1, 2 and 3

Scenes 1, 2 and 3 Summary

This play dramatizes events in the life of John Merrick, whose historically documented illness, experiences and death are presented here in a series of short, metaphorically rich dialogues. The play's principal theme, relating to the illusory nature of life and perception, is dramatized in several ways; but chiefly in the portrayal of the hideously deformed Merrick by an obviously wholly functional actor.

These first three scenes introduce the play's central characters, Treves and Merrick, and offer visual definitions of Merrick's physical appearance.

Scene 1 - *He Will Have 100 Guinea Fees before He's Forty* Treves arrives at the London Hospital to start work as a lecturer in anatomy. He's greeted by his supervisor, Gomm, who speaks enthusiastically about the possibilities for advancement. He refers to the likelihood that Treves will be earning fees of a hundred guineas per patient before he's forty; and also says that as long as Treves increases the hospital's status and reputation, everyone will be happy. He concludes by saying such a position is "an excellent consolation prize". As Gomm goes, Treves reflects that he has no need of such a prize, having already achieved a great deal of professional and personal success, although the idea of such high fees clearly holds appeal for him.

Scene 2 - *Art is as Nothing to Nature* Outside a traveling freak show, Ross shouts for the (invisible) crowd of passers-by to pay to see Merrick, whose physical pain arising from his deformities is surpassed only by his spiritual anguish. As he shouts that Merrick is forced to exhibit himself as "The Elephant Man" solely in order to survive. Treves appears, listens to Ross's sales pitch, and asks whether Merrick is genuine or faked with makeup and mirrors. Ross insists that Treves pay to find out. Treves indicates that, if Merrick is genuine, he would want to examine him; and Ross says again he'd have to pay, implying that he (Ross) looks on Merrick as a business investment. Treves pays, and Ross uses abusive language to call Merrick out of the tent.

Scene 3 - *Who Has Seen the Like of This?* Slide photographs of the real Merrick flash as Treves, in dry academic detail, describes Merrick's extensive deformities. These he deliberately contrasts with a description of Merrick's left arm and hand, which he describes as being perfectly and beautifully formed. Meanwhile, the actor portraying Merrick contorts his body into an approximate recreation of the real Merrick. At the conclusion of Treves' speech, an offstage voice comments that Merrick should not be permitted to exhibit himself, suggesting it's immoral. When Treves asks what should be done instead, the Voice indicates that he has a suggestion.

Scenes 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

The first thing to note about the play is the titles given each scene, which function on varying levels: as a simple indication of the scene's content, an ironic commentary on that content or as an illumination of the scene's deeper meaning. The title of Scene 1, for example, functions on the second and third levels, as an indication of the true meaning of the scene and, more particularly, as an illumination of Treves' character. Specifically, the way Treves focuses on his potential income, rather than on any potential scientific or academic recognition, clearly defines his driving perspective. This definition is reinforced by the juxtaposition of Treves' excitement with the introduction in Scene 2 of the similarly focused Ross, whose take on the financial aspect of his relationship with Merrick foreshadows and magnifies Treves' similarly exploitive attitude. The play returns frequently to issues relating to money, a key component of both the play's themes and its plot.

The play's principal theme, pertaining to the relationship between reality and illusion, is introduced, albeit obliquely, in Scene 2. Treves' questioning of Ross is based upon his curiosity whether Merrick's deformities are created by illusion. Form many similar circus "freaks" of the time were. Scene 3 develops this idea in two ways. Firstly it shows through the slides how real Merrick actually was. Secondly, and perhaps even more importantly, the appearance of a non-deformed actor playing Merrick makes the intriguing and undeniably theatrical comment that Merrick's physical appearance wasn't necessarily indicative of his true nature, in the same way as the actor's physical appearance isn't indicative of the physical nature of the character he's playing. In other words, what's seen isn't always the whole picture. It is often an illusion, a central thematic premise dramatized several times and in several ways throughout the play. One way is through the emphasis placed on Merrick's healthy, beautifully formed left arm. This aspect of his physical being represents and foreshadows the healthy, beautiful aspects of his spiritual and emotional being that exists, in spite of his physical deformity, which by the end of the play can be seen as an illusion. The beauty of his mind and soul, defined throughout the play by his relationships with the Bishop, Mrs. Kendal, and even at times with Treves, is the reality.

The title of Scene 3 is simply descriptive of Merrick's extreme, almost unbelievable physical condition. At the same time, the titles of Scenes 2 and 3, as well as their content, foreshadow Scenes 17 and 18, which take titles and contents alike and transform them into pointed and revelatory commentary on Treves' attitudes towards Merrick. The final lines of Scene 1, meanwhile, raise one of the play's many unanswered questions - a consolation prize for what?

Scenes 4 and 5

Scenes 4 and 5 Summary

These scenes portray incidents around Ross's attempt to exhibit Merrick outside England.

Scene 4 - *This Indecency May Not Continue* A man running a freak show in Belgium instructs two pinheads (mentally and physically deformed young women whose heads rise to a sharp point) in a routine they're meant to perform. Ross comes in with Merrick, commenting on how it's freer in Europe than in England, and they can both make their fortune. He then goes out to complete his arrangements for exhibiting Merrick with the police. Merrick, in the barely comprehensible speech that results from the deformities of his mouth and face, tells the barely aware pinheads how he was chased out of London, and how he came to Belgium to make money. He adds that he hopes to do a show with them someday, a show funded by the forty eight pounds he's saved after being exhibited by Ross.

The man exhibiting the pinheads returns and tells them to start their act for the (invisible) crowds of watchers. The pinheads mix up their words, making the man lose his temper and dismiss the watchers. Before he goes, he threatens the pinheads. As they weep, Merrick attempts to comfort them, but without success. Ross is dragged in by two policemen, arguing that he was promised the right to exhibit Merrick. The policemen refuse, attacking Merrick and pushing both him and Ross away. As the policemen and pinheads disappear, Ross tells Merrick he's abandoning him. He says Merrick stinks of failure and that he is picking up that stink. He gives Merrick a small sum of money for something to eat, gives a train conductor enough money to get Merrick back to England, and disappears with the rest of Merrick's forty eight pounds.

Scene 5 - *Police Side with Imbecile against the Crowd* As Merrick is being manhandled onto a train and then onto a boat, he repeats the word "robbed" over and over again. His deformity prevents him from being understood. The train conductor hands him over to the policeman, saying the crowd outside the train station is so disgusted with Merrick's appearance that they want to rip him apart. The conductor and policeman search him for identification, an indication of where he lives, anything. As they're searching, Merrick repeatedly croaks out the word "Je-sus", which neither the conductor nor the policeman understands. They find one of Treves' business cards and joke about how Merrick must have been used as an illustration on how people who think properly don't risk physical and spiritual deformity. When they go out to call Treves, lights change and Treves appears, commenting with fury on the crowd's anger and becoming shocked when he sees the condition Merrick is in. Merrick begs Treves to help him.

Scenes 4 and 5, Analysis

The title of Scene 4 refers not only to the indecency of showing Merrick publicly as a freak, but also the indecency of Ross exploiting him so mercilessly. Ross's actions also dramatize and embody the play's secondary theme relating to money, its capacity to corrupt those who seek it, and its simultaneous capacity to be misused by those who have it. Later in the play (Scene 15), however, Ross finds himself on the receiving end of Merrick's vengeful anger, for his part in robbing him of his income. Meanwhile, the appearance of the pinheads, their fumbling of the song and the way they are abused foreshadow their appearance at the end of the play; when they sing perfectly and behave with grace and gentleness, almost as though they are angels.

The title of Scene 5 is both a summing up of the scene's action and an ironic commentary on the attitude of the police. The action of the play reveals Merrick is anything but an imbecile. Also, Merrick's use of the word 'Jesus', juxtaposed with the arrival of Treves, can be seen as a suggestion on how Treves sees himself in relation to Merrick - as a savior and teacher, in the same way as Christ was a savior and teacher to non-believers. This idea is supported by the way Treves takes the responsibility of instructing Merrick on morality, in the way Christ taught his disciples. This responsibility leads him to being jokingly referred to as Jesus, by Gomm in Scene 7. The irony is that, as the action of the play unfolds, Merrick himself becomes something of a Christ figure. He teaches and inspires everyone with whom he comes in contact, opening them to broader intellectual, emotional, and spiritual perspectives. His suffering and death can, in that context, be seen as a kind of allegory, or retelling of the suffering and death of his fellow outcast, Jesus Christ the Lord.

Scenes 6, 7 and 8

Scenes 6, 7 and 8 Summary

These three scenes define the physical, emotional, moral and spiritual conditions under which Merrick is to live at the hospital.

Scene 6 - *Even on the Niger and Ceylon, not This* Treves interviews an apparently competent and experienced nurse, Miss Sandwich, who insists there's nothing about Merrick that can frighten or upset her. Treves describes Merrick in as much detail as he can, commenting that there's a public belief that he has somehow, by defective thinking or through wrong beliefs, brought his condition on himself. He and Miss Sandwich agree that such thinking is wrong, and then Merrick's lunch arrives. Treves says he'll take it in and asks Miss Sandwich to join him, explaining that Merrick is in his bath attempting to wash away the smell of his decaying flesh.

They go in to see Merrick; but Miss Sandwich, contrary to everything she said, runs out in complete disgust. Merrick comments gladly that Treves managed to save the lunch this time, implying that Treves had performed the same kind of experiment with other nurses who had dropped the lunch tray. Treves leaves the lunch and goes out to confront Miss Sandwich, who claims that he misled her and then leaves, shouting that no-one will ever do the job he proposes.

Scene 7 - *The English Public Will Pay for Him to be like Us* Merrick remains in his bathtub as a Bishop speaks with Treves about Merrick's amazing fortitude, courage and faith. Their conversation reveals that Merrick has extensive knowledge of the Bible, acquired in the workhouse (orphanage) where his parents abandoned him. As the Bishop offers to give Merrick further religious education, Gomm comes in and announces that the article on Merrick he placed in the newspaper has resulted in an outpouring of sympathetic financial donations that will enable him to stay in the hospital indefinitely. As Treves reacts with happiness, Gomm reminds him that permanent patients are generally not allowed at the hospital; but under the circumstances, an exception will be made. He comments that "God knows what [Treves] will do". The Bishop affirms that God does know, and Gomm comments that God had better know. After all, he deformed Merrick in the first place. As the Bishop goes out, Gomm jokingly refers to Treves as Jesus and asks what his plans are. Treves says he intends to make Merrick's life as normal as possible; and Gomm jokes that that means Merrick will end up like them. Treves doesn't take the comment as a joke, asking in all seriousness whether there's any reason Merrick shouldn't be like them.

Scene 8 - *Mercy and Justice Elude our Minds and Actions* As Treves and Gomm tell Merrick that he's to stay in the hospital as long as he likes, Merrick states that he'd like to live with blind people, where nobody can see what he looks like. He adds that he hopes no one in the hospital will look at him. Treves assures him that he will not be put on display. At that moment a hospital porter and an assistant come in, the porter

showing the assistant the curiosity that is Merrick. Gomm promptly fires the porter and sends the assistant out, saying it's important to establish and maintain discipline. Merrick comments that if such discipline were maintained everywhere, there would be whole towns fired for staring at him. Treves reminds Merrick to thank Gomm for clearly defining the rules, Merrick says thank you, and Gomm goes out.

Treves instructs Merrick on how and why he should be happy where he is, saying he'll be happy as long as he lives by the rules and that he's finally found a home. When Merrick asks why rules make people happy, Treves explains that happiness comes from knowing things are being done for your own good, and because rules exist for the good. Following the rules, therefore, brings happiness. When he sees that Merrick at least seems to have accepted this teaching, Treves then tells him he's presenting a paper on him and needs to know some details of his past life.

Merrick tells how, in the workhouse, he was constantly beaten, a thought that leads him to wonder whether the children of the man who got fired will themselves go to the workhouse. Treves reminds him that, in firing the porter, Gomm was showing mercy to Merrick. Merrick asks what, if mercy can be so cruel, is the result of justice? Treves comments that things are the way they are. Merrick responds by echoing the sounds of the beatings he received in the workhouse - boom, boom, boom.

Scenes 6, 7 and 8 Analysis

The idea that both Treves and Merrick are to be viewed as Christ figures develops in several ways in these scenes. Treves' moralistic teachings combine with Gomm's ironic comments to suggest thatTreves is, perhaps subconsciously, setting himself up to be viewed from that perspective. On the other hand, Merrick's comments, in relation to mercy for the porter, reveal that his perspective is much more genuinely Christ-like. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus operated and taught from a place of absolute compassion and mercy. This is the first of several clearly defined instances in which Merrick's actions and experiences create resonance with those of Christ.

The thematically relevant question of money again appears in this scene. It's clear that, in the context of the hospital, Merrick's ongoing existence and happiness depends on there being enough money available to make it all possible. The irony is that, yes, money does in fact make him physically comfortable. Yet spiritual comfort, happiness and growth all come to Merrick through things that money can't necessarily buy, at least in the perspective of the play,such as honesty, trust and genuine friendship.

The title of Scene 6 is a relatively straightforward reiteration of one of Miss Sandwich's comments. The title of Scene 7, however, has several layers of meaning. It refers to the money collected for Merrick's support and maintenance, and to how that money will be used to give him as normal a physical life as possible. On another level, the title is an ironic commentary on how, even in its generosity, the public will never see Merrick as being like them. On yet another level the title foreshadows Scene 12, which dramatizes how people who meet Merrick easily and eagerly see positive aspects of themselves

reflected in him. In other words, they see in his ugliness a mirror image of their own courage, compassion and enlightenment.

The play later develops a second irony in relation to this idea, one connected to the play's core thematic examination of what's real and what's not. In later conversations with Mrs. Kendal and with Treves, mirrors tend to represent sources of illusion. In this context, what people see of themselves "mirrored" in Merrick is an illusion. This in turn means that the acceptance, apparently embodied in the money given by the British public, is also an illusion. This idea of illusion is also developed in the title of Scene 8. It is an ironic commentary on how both Treves and Gomm operate under the illusion that they're being merciful, when, in fact, those virtues elude them, as they're both ultimately out for fame and financial success.

Scenes 9 and 10

Scenes 9 and 10 Summary

These scenes introduce an important figure into Merrick's life and development.

Scene 9 - *Most Important are Women* Treves has a conversation with the witty, charming and popular actress, Mrs. Kendal. He explains that Merrick is desperate to live a normal life and comments that developing relationships with women, who to this point have found him repulsive, is an important key. He suggests that if he meets Mrs. Kendal, a woman trained to hide her true feelings and portray others, it will help immensely (the implication here is that Mrs. Kendal will be able to mask her disgust with friendliness at seeing Merrick). Mrs. Kendal teases him with playful but pointed comments about his preconceptions, tests out various ways of greeting Merrick and settles on one. She then asks what she considers an important question. Without actually using the word, she inquires whether Merrick's penis is as deformed as the rest of him. Deeply uneasy about both the subject matter and Mrs. Kendal's interest in it, Treves babbles in dryly-medical language. From his comments, Mrs. Kendal and the audience understand that Merrick, at least in that area, functions perfectly. When Treves comments on how embarrassed he is, Mrs. Kendal comments that Merrick must be very lonely indeed.

Scene 10 - *When the Illusion Ends He Must Kill Himself* Treves and Mrs. Kendal visit Merrick, busy on a drawing that Treves explains is a sketch for a model of a church that Merrick intends to build. He then leaves Merrick and Mrs. Kendal alone. Merrick pays Mrs. Kendal some awkward compliments, telling her he doesn't really know why he looks the way he does, since his mother is as beautiful as she is. He does, however, explain that she (his mother) was knocked over by an elephant in a circus while she was pregnant with him, which might be a reason. They banter about how they both display themselves for their living, with Mrs. Kendal commenting that what she displays is an illusion and what Merrick displays is himself.

They then debate the nature of love in the play Mrs. Kendal is currently appearing in - *Romeo and Juliet*. Merrick develops his theory that the love Romeo feels for Juliet is, itself, an illusion. If it were true, he wouldn't so easily believe that she's dead (when in fact she's under the effects of a potion that simulates death). He adds that when Romeo saw the illusion was ended, he had no choice but to kill himself. Mrs. Kendal calls his insight extraordinary; and Merrick replies that now he has the time and freedom to develop his thoughts. Treves comes in with the news that Merrick's case has been written up in medical journals. Mrs. Kendal announces her intention to introduce Merrick only to the best people, and asks Merrick for permission to bring some of her society friends. Merrick agrees, Mrs. Kendal shakes his hand, and Treves takes her out, commenting on how successful the visit was and how Merrick had never shaken a woman's hand before. Back in Merrick's room, Merrick is sobbing.

Scenes 9 and 10 Analysis

The character of Mrs. Kendal is extremely important. Through her, Merrick learns much more about genuine humanity and compassion than he learns from Gomm, Treves or anyone else. The irony is that Mrs. Kendal is an actress, as Treves himself suggests. She is someone to whom the portraying of artificial (illusory) emotions is both a job and second nature. It's important to note, however, that nowhere in this scene or anywhere else, does it indicate that when she's with Merrick, she's covering up any kind of repulsion, distaste or fear. Is her reaction a truth or an illusion? It definitely becomes a truth, as the action of Scene 10 suggests. Indeed, throughout the play, she is again taken by surprise by the depths of Merrick's humanity and insight. Her conversation with Merrick about *Romeo and Juliet* is one such surprise, with her genuine admiration for his insight contrasting significantly with Treves' comments that Merrick has been written up in a scientific journal. In short, Mrs. Kendal is discovering and defining Merrick's humanity while Treves is still, in spite of his proclaimed determination to humanize Merrick, treating him as an object to be observed and exploited. Meanwhile, the title of Scene 9 is a reflection of the relative importance Mrs. Kendal plays in Merrick's spiritual growth, in this scene and throughout the play.

The reference to the model of the church is the first stage in illustrating the expansion of Merrick's soul, paralleled with the expansion of his physical dexterity and the simultaneous deepening of the play's theme relating to the nature of illusion. As the church becomes more complete, so too does the illusion surrounding Merrick, deliberately promoted by Treves and unwittingly promoted by Mrs. Kendal as more and more like everyone else. In this context, the title of Scene 10 can be interpreted as more than a reiteration of Merrick's comment on the nature of Romeo's love and his death. It also becomes a foreshadowing of Merrick's death at the end of the play. Shortly after he completes his model of the church, he realizes that the illusion of acceptance that has been built into his life is ended, and as a result dreams himself into death (Scene 20).

Scenes 11 and 12

Scenes 11 and 12 Summary

These two scenes dramatize the growing interest high society takes in Merrick, and the effect that interest has on the lives of both Merrick and Treves.

Scene 11 - *He Does It with Just One Hand* Merrick works on the model of the church as society ladies and gentlemen, including the Princess of Wales, come in, compliment him, and leave expensive gifts. Treves stands nearby, keeping track of each gift as it's presented. The climactic visitor is Mrs. Kendal, who announces that the Prince of Wales has given them all permission to use the Royal Box at the theatre "with its unique perspective". She exclaims with delight how the model is progressing; and Merrick notes (perhaps ironically) how everyone always says it's amazing that he does it with only one hand. Mrs. Kendal comments that Merrick is an artist; but Merrick describes his work as an imitation of an imitation, indicating that the church itself is only a representation of grace "flying up from the mud". Treves compares his comment to that of a similar comment by Plato, that the world is an illusion and the work of an artist is simply an illusion of an illusion. Merrick observes that this means all humans are just copies; and that if God made the copies he should have used both hands.

Scene 12 - *Who Does He Remind You Of?* In succession, the society ladies and gentlemen, Mrs. Kendal, Gomm, and the Bishop each appear and comment on how different characteristics in Merrick make them think he's like them. The Princess of Wales refers to how her husband was so impressed with the way Treves puts up with "the elephant bloke", that he should be able to put up with the Prince. The sequence concludes with an entry from Treves' journal, in which he describes Merrick's physical condition worsening the more he's welcomed into society. Treves takes this as proof Merrick is like him, since both men are experiencing developments in their situation he can't understand - Merrick's deterioration and Treves' social advancement.

Scenes 11 and 12 Analysis

The discussion between Treves, Merrick and Mrs. Kendal about the model of the church and its relationship to Plato's philosophies develops the play's theme relating to the nature of illusion and reality. The suggestion is that the attention paid to Merrick by society (Scene 11), and the way society finds itself reflected in Merrick (Scene 12), are both illusions. As previously discussed in relation to Scene 7, society sees Merrick as a manifestation or reflection of its own noble compassion and open-mindedness. They see what they want to see, they believe what they want to believe, yet it's all illusory.

It's interesting to note that no members of the lower or working classes appear in this sequence of scenes. Only the rich and famous come, or at least are seen to come. The constant bringing of expensive gifts, which only the rich could afford, subtly reinforces

the idea that Treves and Gomm are both interested in money and status. Nobody, in the England of the time, had more money or status than the aristocracy associated with the Prince and Princess of Wales. Treves and Gomm obviously care about society people, and particularly about the Prince of Wales, a man of huge physical presence and equally substantial sensual and emotional appetites. It's not going too far to suggest that in his own, blundering, oversized way, the Prince, too, was a kind of "elephant bloke". This is why his comment that Treves should be able to put up with him can be interpreted as humorous., Treves being named his personal physician is an obvious social advancement, yet the latest downward step in his moral decline.

This is the core of the real parallel between Treves and Merrick. It's not that they're both experiencing life transforming situations neither understands, it's that they're both deteriorating, Merrick physically and Treves morally, as Treves continually and repeatedly exploits Merrick for his, and presumably the hospital's, benefit. Is this perhaps the answer to the question raised at the end of Scene 1, as to what exactly financial and academic and social success are compensation for, a loss of moral integrity?

The titles of both scenes may at first glance seem to be straightforward reflections of the scenes' content. Consideration reveals that the titles are, in fact, quite ironic in their commentaries on the relationship between Merrick, deformity, exploitation, and illusion.

Scenes 13 and 14

Scenes 13 and 14 Summary

These two scenes contrast the power of money with the power of personal connection and relationship, and define Treves as resistant to both.

Scene 13 - *Anxieties of the Swamp* Angry conversation between Treves, Gomm and Lord John, one of the society gentlemen who befriended Merrick, reveals that Lord John used money intended to fund Merrick's care in his own investments, which have failed miserably. He attempts to borrow more money from Treves; but Gomm tells him Treves has to focus on his work for the hospital, rather than on Lord John's financial affairs. Lord John leaves. Gomm warns Treves to be more careful with his friends and their financial dealings, calling Lord John "a one man moral swamp" and essentially ordering Treves to break all ties with him. He goes out as Mrs. Kendal comes in for her regular visit. As she comments on what the newspapers are saying about Lord John, Treves explains that he can't stay with her because he's got business to take care of. He ushers Mrs. Kendal in to see Merrick, reminds himself that "this is a hospital, not a marketplace" and goes out. Mrs. Kendal tries to make small talk; but Merrick, who overheard Treves' conversation with Sir John, seeks reassurance from her that he will still be allowed to stay in his home, even if Treves is in trouble. He also asks for reassurance from her that she will remain his friend. Mrs. Kendal offers no direct answer.

Scene 14 - *Art is Permitted but Nature Forbidden* Later in Mrs. Kendal's visit, Merrick comments on how so many people have mistresses and/or wives, but he has none. He says that it's bad enough that he can't sleep like everyone else, but sleeping alone is worse. When Mrs. Kendal asks what he means, he explains that his head is too heavy for him to lie down - if he did it would fall forward and crush his windpipe, leading to his death. He asks whether Mrs. Kendal is shocked by what he's saying. She replies she's not, adding that for him to realize his desires is not as hopeless as he seems to think - but it is, she adds, unlikely. Merrick confesses that he's never even seen a naked woman, adding that the women he might have glimpsed in his days at various fairs aren't real women.

Mrs. Kendal lists the society women who've made his acquaintance, asking whether he'd like to see one of them. Merrick rejects them all. She asks what Treves and the Bishop would say if they knew he had these thoughts. Merrick says the Bishop's suggestion that he just put the thoughts out of his head was useless, adding that he would never tell Treves because he'd be appalled. Mrs. Kendal takes his trust in her as a compliment, and then asks him to turn around. When she's nude she tells Merrick to look at her, commenting jokingly on how funny her body must seem. When he says it's beautiful she warns him that if he tells anyone what happened she will go away and not come back. She lets her hair fall loosely, saying that now there are no illusions about her. At that moment Treves comes in, reacts with shock to Mrs. Kendal's nudity, tells her

to get dressed immediately, and shouts (it's not clear to whom) that there is great shame in what just happened. Merrick silently adds a piece to his model.

Scenes 13 and 14 Analysis

The thematically relevant contrast between truth and illusion is nowhere in the play defined more clearly than in these two scenes. Neither is the corruptive power of money, and its role in defining Treves' character and motivations, pointed out more vividly. Specifically, Lord John's manipulation of the finances is an illusion, while Mrs. Kendal's baring of her body is a powerful truth.

There is irony in Treves' reaction to both situations, in that his anger at Lord John's mishandling of the money contains no awareness whatsoever that he is guilty of the same kind of manipulation. Here is the key development in terms of the play's second theme relating to money. In the same way as Lord John used the hospital's money for his own gain, Treves has used Merrick's situation for his. He has mishandled Merrick's life in the same way as Lord John misused Merrick's money; and at the end of Scene 14 mishandles it in the worst way he possibly can. At the same time, Treves' reaction to Mrs. Kendal at the moment he discovers her naked with Merrick is ironic. She has befriended and helped Merrick in a way that Treves has not even begun to approach. The text makes a point of not indicating to whom he addresses his final angry cry. There can be little doubt he thinks both Merrick and Mrs. Kendal have behaved shamefully; but is he actually speaking to both of them? Probably. Merrick putting another piece on his model (which, as previously discussed, is a key symbol of illusion) at the height of Treves' anger, suggests that Treves' anger is itself illusory, as is (presumably) the Bishop's dismissive morality. Both are far more shameful, in the thematic eyes of the play, than anything Mrs. Kendal or Merrick have done.

The title of Scene 13 refers to Gomm's suggestion that Lord John lives in a moral swamp, an idea that perhaps has echoes in Treves' life. He, too, realizes from his dreams in Scenes 17 and 18, that he has lived in a moral swamp. The title therefore can be seen as also referring to Treves. The title of Scene 14 is an ironic commentary on the way art, which has previously been defined as illusion, is allowed while truth, in the form (literally) of Mrs. Kendal, is not.

Finally, Merrick's description of how he must sleep, and the reference to the possibility of death if he sleeps the wrong way, foreshadow his actual moment of death at the end of Scene 20.

Scenes 15 and 16

Scenes 15 and 16 Summary

Scene 15 - *Ingratitude* Ross visits Merrick, asking for forgiveness for what he did in the past. He suggests that they work together again, saying that seeing Merrick makes people feel good about themselves. Merrick comments that that makes him sound like a whore. Ross comments that he is, that everyone is, and that the only disgrace is to be a stupid whore. Merrick says he doesn't want to be exhibited ever again. Ross pleads with him, saying it's not fair that Treves receive the benefit of the work he (Ross) did in rescuing Merrick from the workhouse and giving him a life. Merrick reminds Ross that he robbed him, Ross taunts him with the idea of being with a woman, Merrick taunts him about how that doesn't make a man a man, and Ross once again begs to work with him. Merrick refuses one final time. Ross confesses that he, himself, is lost.

Scene 16 - *No Reliable General Anesthetic has Appeared Yet* Merrick attempts to talk with Treves about the Bible, specifically the claim that in heaven God will make the crooked straight. Treves is deep in medical journals and is more interested in finding a reliable general anesthetic. He describes how one patient came out of an unreliable anesthetic, telling of her near death experience which, she says, wasn't very heavenly. It was more like walking in a fog. As they debate the merits and value of faith, they also discuss why Treves sent Mrs. Kendal away. Treves maintains it wasn't proper, leading Merrick to ironically repeat the earlier statement (Scene 8) that rules make one happy because they exist for one's own good. Their argument intensifies as Treves repeatedly asks Merrick whether he's angry. Merrick repeatedly asks what "proper" actually means, while Treves tries to study his book on anesthetics. Treves finally confesses that he may have over-reacted in sending Mrs. Kendal away, but says that she probably won't be back because there are other things involved. As Merrick goes for a walk he asks what other things. Treves doesn't answer. Merrick goes out. Treves comments to himself that she won't be back because he doesn't want her to be around whenMerrick dies.

Scenes 15 and 16 Analysis

The essential point of both these scenes can be summed up in the title of the first. Both Scene 15 and 16 focus on ingratitude, but from different perspectives. Scene 15 is defined by Ross's manipulative claims that Merrick is ungrateful. Scene 16 is defined by Treves' complete unawareness that he is being deeply ungrateful to Mrs. Kendal, and perhaps his unspoken belief that Merrick is also ungrateful. The parallels illuminate the play's core theme of illusion in contrasting ways. Merrick has no illusions whatsoever about Ross, while Treves is operating under the self-righteous and completely illusory belief that whatever he does in relation to Merrick is right. His admission of possibly being wrong in his reaction to Mrs. Kendal is grudging at best. From the beginning of the play he's been too self-admiring and self-conscious to be wrong about anything.

Scene 16 reintroduces the issue of Merrick's death, first hinted at in Scene 14. There is a sense that Merrick is, on some level, eager for the peace and transcendence of death and the simultaneous sense that that death is imminent. Here again the play is ironic. Although wanting to keep Mrs. Kendal away, Treves is aware of her genuine caring and empathy for Merrick. While Treves is being judgmental about her behavior, he is completely unaware of the motivations behind his own.

Scenes 17 and 18

Scenes 17 and 18 Summary

These two scenes portray a pair of Treves' troubled dreams, deliberate echoes and ironic recreations of two earlier scenes.

Scene 17 - *Cruelty is as Nothing to Kindness* Treves dreams that he is being examined by Merrick and exhibited by Gomm, in the same way as Merrick has been examined by Treves and exhibited by Ross. In a deliberate echo of Scene 2 Merrick tries to convince Gomm let him examine Treves without cost, Gomm insists that he's too valuable an investment (an echo of Gomm's implication in Scene 1 that it's important for Treves to increase the hospital's reputation). Gomm also says he's a good man, implying that good men don't deserve to be exploited. Merrick comments that that makes him a perfect subject, and Gomm agrees.

Scene 18 - *We Are Dealing with an Epidemic* Merrick delivers an analysis of Treves' moral condition, similar to Treves' analysis of Merrick's physical condition (Scene 2). Merrick pays particular attention to Treves' head. Merrick says it is of a normal enough size and shape that he can sleep and dream normally, "without the weight of others' dreams accumulating to break his neck." Attention is also paid to Treves' left hand (a reference to the way Treves paid particular attention to Merrick's well formed left hand), which Merrick says covers Treves' genitals in an attitude of control and punishment. He concludes by suggesting that Treves is completely "unable to feel what others feel, [or] reach harmony with them."

The pinheads (Scene 4) appear. In the same manner as the Voice at the end of Scene 2, they comment that what has been revealed to them is profoundly disturbing and is, in fact, an indecency. Merrick comments that Treves' condition is, in fact, becoming an epidemic. Treves begins to wake up, and Merrick puts another piece on his model.

Scenes 17 and 18 Analysis

The title and core action of Scene 17 are a deliberate and pointedly satirical echo of Scene 2, in which Ross and Treves bargained over Merrick in the same way as Merrick and Gomm bargain here over Treves. The action of Scene 18 is an equally deliberate and equally satirical echo of Scene 3. Treves described Merrick's physical deformities in the way Merrick here describes Treves' emotional and spiritual deformities. Merrick's comments about Treves' head are particularly pointed, in that he seems to be referring to how his (Merrick's) dreams don't really seem to have entered Treves' mind or affected him at all. It's also a reference to the weight of Merrick's head which, if held the wrong way, could collapse and kill him. The inference here is that Treves is afraid to allow his brain to be filled with Merrick's dreams; since it might mean having to face the reality of his humanity, as opposed to his being something to exploit and profit from. The

appearance of the pinheads is an ironic comment on similar words of disgust spoken by the disembodied voice at the end of Scene 3, while Merrick's final reference to an epidemic is the play's single overt comment on human society in general. The warning here is that humanity, like Treves??, is becoming too focused on what can be earned or bought rather than who can be befriended and loved.

It must be remembered that these two scenes are dreams. So somewhere in Treves' psyche and experience he is perceiving himself in the terms defined by these dreams, questioning his behavior and attitudes, and perhaps drawing closer to a new understanding of himself and his relationship with Merrick. This sense develops further in the following two scenes, as it becomes clear that Treves' ability to function is being impaired by his doubts.

Scenes 19 and 20

Scenes 19 and 20 Summary

These two scenes parallel Treves' growing awareness of his moral deformity with Merrick's freedom, through death, from his physical deformity.

Scene 19 - *They Cannot Make Out What He Is Saying* Merrick prays with the Bishop as Gomm and Treves discuss Merrick's impending death. Gomm comments on the increased money and reputation Merrick has brought to the hospital. Treves comments bitterly that Merrick's heart is so weak that it might give out even while he's praying. Treves reiterates his previous comment (Scene 12) that as Merrick has become more and more emotionally normal his physical condition has deteriorated. He wonders whether there's a parable of human existence there - "to become more normal is to die." Gomm comments that he can't understand what Treves means, and then as he goes out tells him to stop worrying - he's been knighted and his clients will be kings.

The Bishop comes in, speaking passionately about how moving he finds his prayer sessions with Merrick. Treves comments that Merrick is always happy to do what other people do, saying he's become like a mirror, a reflection of other's attitudes. Treves bitterly adds that people who see themselves in him are flattered. Like Gomm, the Bishop says he doesn't understand what Treves is saying. Treves angrily speaks at incoherent length about the frustration of making people well, so they can go back to their ultimately self-destructive lives of overeating and overdrinking. This applies to upper and lower classes alike. The Bishop says again that he doesn't understand what Treves is getting at, but suggests that he, like Merrick, can find consolation in the church. Treves angrily suggests that what the Bishop finds attractive about Merrick is that he is simply so grateful for being treated like a human being that he will accept anything, do anything, and be anything. Treves breaks down weeping, asking for the Bishop's help. The Bishop consoles him; and at that moment Merrick puts the last piece onto his model and announces "It is done."

Scene 20 - *The Weight of Dreams* Merrick stands looking at his model as an attendant brings him lunch. In the background a funeral procession passes, leading the attendant to comment on how a friend's sister suddenly and unexpectedly died. He tries to think of the right word to describe the situation, can't, and then goes out. Merrick eats a little, polishes his model a little, and then settles himself down into his usual sleeping position - sitting up, his arms on his knees and his head on his arms. The pinheads appear, singing a poetic version of the song they got wrong in Scene 5. The lyrics urge Merrick to enter the empire of darkness, eternity's finest hour, and sleep like everyone else. Together they lay him onto his back. His head falls too far forward. He struggles ... and then dies. The attendant comes back in, having recalled the word he couldn't remember before - "arbitrary". He discovers that Merrick is dead.

Scenes 19 and 20 Analysis

These two scenes contain the play's dramatic and thematic climax, the simultaneous high points of emotional intensity and revelation of deeper meaning. The title to Scene 19 is key to defining both, in that it refers back to earlier moments in which no one could understand what Merrick was saying. At this point in the play, Treves is at the depths of his moral deformity, in the same way as Merrick was earlier at the depth of his physical deformity. Also, in the same way Merrick, at that low point, was incomprehensible, Treves at his low point is equally unable to make himself understood. This is not because he lacks the words, as Merrick did, but because the thoughts, beliefs and feelings he's attempting to express are as deformed as Merrick's earlier words. This deformity develops as a result of Treves being confronted with the truth of what he's done. Through his argument with Gomm he sees how exploitative he's been, while through his conversation with the Bishop he realizes how shallow he's been. He is at a climactic depth of despair, a situation powerfully illuminated by Merrick's placement of the final piece of the model.

The model, as previously discussed, embodies the illusion of acceptance constructed around him. So Merrick's placement of the piece juxtaposed with Treves' breakdown indicates that Treves is now aware that everything he's done for Merrick, and more importantly everything he BELIEVED about what he's done, was an illusion. Herein lies the play's thematic climax.

The final line of Scene 19, "It is done", is possibly a deliberate echo of Christ's final words on the Cross according to the Bible, "It is finished." This interpretation can be seen as a reinforcement of the previously discussed idea that Merrick is a Christ figure. This idea is developed throughout the play, with Merrick portrayed as tormented for being an outsider (so was Christ), as challenging the societal and philosophical status quo (so did Christ), and as bringing enlightenment the way Christ did. The climax of this allegorical development of Merrick's character comes in his physical death, by which he brings spiritual rebirth to others, specifically Treves.

There are several components to this climax. First, in Merrick's echo of Christ's final words there is the clear indication that Merrick somehow knows his death is imminent. The second component is the possibility that Merrick, like Christ, deliberately sacrifices his life so that another might fully live. Given that dreams in this play have already been established as defining important aspects of the dreamer's psyche (Scenes 17 and 18), it's possible to see that that Merrick's dream of the pinheads is a manifestation of a desire and determination to die. Yes, he settles himself down in the proper position. However the dream seems to suggest that his subconscious desire to escape the illusion of life that his physical existence burdened him with led him to lie in the position that would undoubtedly end his life. This desire is manifested in the appearance and action of the pinheads.

All that being said, the title of Scene 20 (which refers back to Scene 18) offers no clear indication of whether Merrick dies accidentally or deliberately. The only illumination

offered by the title is to suggest that the weight of his own dreams, combined with the weight of the dreams placed into him by Treves and Mrs. Kendal, proved too much illusion for him to bear. He chose instead, or chooses, to live another dream - that of heaven; which he clearly believes, or wants to believe, is the truth.

BOOKRAGS

Scene 21

Scene 21 Summary

Final Report to the Investors As Treves listens, Gomm reads a letter to the London Times newspaper, in which he informs both the editor and the Times' readers that what was left of the money raised by the newspaper to pay for Merrick's stay in the hospital (Scene 7) was put into the hospital's general revenue. After Treves points out that he got Merrick's first name wrong, Gomm goes back to the letter, reads his complimentary comments about Merrick, and asks whether Treves can think of anything to add. Treves says Merrick was intelligent, wise and a romantic; but then says that he isn't certain about anything to do with Merrick any more, and goes out. Gomm reads the rest of the letter out loud. It comments that he believes contributing what's left of Merrick's money would be consistent with the wishes of those who originally donated it, and thanks the Times for publishing the letter that triggered all the donations. Treves comes back having thought of something that should be added. Gomm tells him it's too late and, in what appears to be a deliberate echo of Merrick's words after he finishes the model (Scene 19), says "It is done."

Scene 21 Analysis

The title of this scene clearly suggests that all along Merrick and his experiences have been viewed as a purely financial venture investment, rather than an investment in a human being. There's a clear and deliberate echo in the title of Ross's comments in Scene 2, in which he also referred to Merrick as an investment. The irony, of course, is that Gomm (and probably the other "investors") have all along considered themselves to be doing a good, generous, altruistic thing. The exact opposite would appear to be true. They have all, Treves included, been using Merrick to inflate their sense of moral worth, in the same way as Ross used him to inflate his pocketbook.

The idea that Gomm has no real idea of Merrick as a human being is represented by the fact that he gets Merrick's first name wrong. The fact that Treves also has no real idea is represented by his uncertainty about what to say about Merrick the human being, as opposed to Merrick the investment. At this point Treves is still clearly ambivalent and confused about who Merrick was, what he was all about, and what role he (Treves) played in defining him. He can't even understand what he's saying anymore. In this context it's particularly significant that whatever it is that Treves decides to add is never actually known. The point made here is that whatever Treves wants to say isn't relevant. As far as Gomm is concerned, the experience with Merrick was defined entirely in financial terms. In other words, this final scene of the play contains its closing statement of the secondary theme about the power and influence of cold hard cash.

Gomm's final line, "It is done," appears to be an ironic comment on Merrick's previously defined symbolic value as a Christ figure. In Merrick's mouth the words become a powerful evocation of spiritual transcendence, an indication that somewhere, somehow, he accomplished the goal of creating the enlightenment that he was put on the planet to realize. In Gomm's mouth, however, the phrase is reduced to the ironic suggestion that all that was accomplished, all that was intended, was getting the hospital more money. Some would suggest that, in this interpretation, there's a comment on the financial ostentation and manipulation of a large number of churches. This may or may not be the play's intent. It's not clear. What is clear, however, is that in Gomm's final words and in Treves' pathetic inability to articulate what he knew of Merrick, the play is making the ultimate statement of the play's theme about illusion vs. reality. If all one knows is the illusion, either the illusion of the power of money or the illusion of one's empty motives, any true knowledge of reality is impossible.

Characters

The Bishop

The Bishop is concerned about Merrick's religious instruction and offers spiritual guidance. He genuinely believes in doing his Christian duty, but he also appears to forget that Merrick has needs beyond those of religion.

Conductor

The Conductor believes that Merrick is an imbecile. When they arrive in London, he gets help from a policeman to protect Merrick.

Countess

The Countess is one of Merrick's visitors.

Duchess

The Duchess is one of Merrick's many visitors who brings him Christmas gifts.

Carr Gomm

Gomm is the administrator of the London Hospital where Merrick is housed. His care of Merrick always appears to be self-serving. When Merrick dies, Gomm writes the final epitaph for Merrick and decides to donate the money for Merrick's care to the hospital.

Walsham How

See The Bishop

Lord John

Lord John is involved in some shady financial dealings. When a great deal of money is lost, it is implied that John will be leaving town quickly.

Mrs. Kendal

An actress, Mrs. Kendal visits Merrick in order to provide some normal social interaction for him. She is not repulsed by Merrick's appearance. Finding him to be charming and

intelligent, she decides to introduce him to society. She visits him frequently and becomes an important part of his life.

When he tells her that he has never seen a naked woman, she removes her clothes. Treves enters and is so outraged that he throws Mrs. Kendal out of the room and out of Merrick's life.

John Merrick

Merrick suffers from Proteus Syndrome, which has resulted in large, bulbous growths growing from his skull. To explain his nickname, "The Elephant Man," he tells Treves that his mother was beautiful, but she was kicked by an elephant when she was pregnant.

Placed in a workhouse when he was three, he had been part of a freak show for many years. He brings in a lot of money for his "handler," Ross, but then Ross also steals from him. He is incredibly lonely.

After Treves finds Merrick, he is taken to the London Hospital where he is studied and sheltered. While in the hospital, Merrick begins to draw and read, and ultimately he constructs a model of St. Phillip's Church.

Merrick is intelligent and funny, with a normal interest in women. When he tells Mrs. Kendal that he has never seen a normal woman's body, she responds by removing her clothing. When she is banished, Merrick misses her very much.

Pinheads

These are three women freaks with pointy heads. They appear briefly in Brussels as part of a freak show and reappear in Merrick's dream as he dies.

Ross

Ross is the manager of "The Elephant Man," a freak show. He steals from Merrick and sends him back to London. Later, after Ross reads that Merrick has become a celebrity, Ross visits him and suggests that they go back into business again.

Miss Sandwich

Sandwich is the nurse that is so repulsed by Merrick's appearance she runs from the room.

Snork

Snork is a porter who brings Merrick his meals. It is he who finds Merrick's body after he dies.

Fredrick Treves

A surgeon and teacher, Treves brings Merrick to the hospital for study. He also rescues Merrick after Ross abandons him. He appears to genuinely care about Merrick, but he hopes to garner attention from his association with him. Treves is rigid and uncompromising, a Victorian gentleman who is shocked when Mrs. Kendal shows Merrick her body.

In the end, Treves becomes disillusioned in his life and finds no satisfaction in his job or his family. Yet he does seem to understand by the play's conclusion that his life has been changed by Merrick.

Themes

Alienation and Loneliness

On account of his disease, Merrick is completely isolated from normal society: first in the freak show, and later, in his quarters in London Hospital. When Treves meets him, he is treated as a freak and in dire need of friendship.

Although Treves has kind motives, Merrick remains isolated in the hospital; Treves often treats him as a subject to study; and the burgeoning friendship between Kendal and Merrick is ruined when they become too close. When she is banished, Merrick is left even more lonely now he knows what he is missing, and it breaks his heart.

Beauty

In a society that values beauty, Merrick is an outcast: his appearance is so deformed and hideous that people run from him in fear. He serves as an interesting contrast for the beautiful Mrs. Kendal, whose humanity is far greater than her beauty. She is able to look past the deformity and perceive the beauty of Merrick's soul.

Creativity and Imagination

In his artwork, Merrick finds an escape from his problems. Alone in his room at the hospital, he begins to sketch St. Phillip's. There is a beauty in his art that Merrick thinks is missing from his life. Although he is trapped in a body that has betrayed him, Merrick's mind reveals hidden talents.

Fear

When Merrick arrives at Liverpool Station, mobs of people attack him out of fear scared of what they might become and scared of a disease they do not understand.

Treves has his own fears. Like so many other Victorians, Treves fears sexuality and what it represents: loss of control and the embracing of emotion.

Freedom

Because he is so obviously different and he inspires fear in public, Merrick's movements are severely restricted. The hospital is supposed to be a safe place, but Merrick gives up freedom for that safety. When Mrs. Kendal is thrown out, Merrick is powerless: he cannot make choices and is dependent on Treves to invite her back. True freedom for Merrick only comes with death, when he becomes free from his bodily constraints.

Human Condition

Treves perceives Merrick as a reflection of his own humanity and seeks to impose his values and beliefs on him. In the process, he ignores that Merrick is a human being with needs of his own. Each of the people who visit Merrick views him as a reflection of his or her own values.

Mrs. Kendal relates that Merrick is gentle, cheerful, honest, almost feminine just like her. The Bishop thinks Merrick is religious and devout just like the bishop. Gomm thinks Merrick is practical and thankful for his blessings just like Gomm. The Duchess thinks Merrick is discreet just as she is. Even Treves falls victim to this game and thinks Merrick is curious, compassionate, concerned with the world just as Treves is.

Style

Style

Alienation Effect

The alienation effect was proposed by Bertolt Brecht, who thought that keeping the audience at a distance created a desirable effect. Brecht maintained that personal involvement with the plot or characters would inhibit the audience from understanding the political message of the play. Pomerance admired Brecht and modeled the construction of his play on Brechtian ideas about maintaining aesthetic distance.

Melodrama

The Elephant Man is classified as a melodrama, which are plays in which the plot offers a conflict between two characters who personify extremes of good and evil. These works usually end happily and emphasize sensationalism. Other literary forms that employ many of the same techniques are called melodramatic. *The Elephant Man* offers both good and evil in the personifications of Merrick and Ross.

Scene

Traditionally, a scene is a subdivision of an act and consists of continuous action of a time and place. However, Pomerance does not use acts, and so each scene consists of a short interlude that may be separated from previous scenes by distance of time or location.

Setting

The time and place of the play is called the setting. The elements of setting may include geographic location, physical or mental environments, prevailing cultural attitudes, or the historical time in which the action takes place. The primary setting for *The Elephant Man* is Merrick's quarters in the hospital. The action spans an undetermined period of time.

Historical Context

The setting for *The Elephant Man* is late Victorian England; an understanding of this period is important for understanding the relationship that John Merrick had with his doctors and the public.

dustry brought social problems as well. As more people moved from the country to the cities, overcrowding resulted. In 1832, the Parliament passed a number of new laws to improve people's lives: the areas of child labor, welfare, and sanitation were all the subject of new laws.

In 1851 the Crystal Palace exposition displayed England's recent scientific and technological advances. The success of the Crystal Palace led to a smug satisfaction among England's aristocracy that lasted most of that decade.

In 1859, Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* created a dramatic controversy by questioning longstanding assumptions about humanity and man's role in the world. His next book, *The Descent of Man*, introduced the theory of evolution. Religious leaders, who felt that Darwin was attacking a literal interpretation of the Bible, were outraged.

The Utilitarian Movement of the mid-nineteenth century also raised questions about the usefulness of religion. If man's existence was subjected to reason, then religion provided little benefit for humans; people should rely more on technology, economics, and science for survival.

However, religion is based on faith, not reason. In many ways, religion was perceived as a luxury that modern men did not need for survival. In this difficult time, John Merrick' s embrace of religion can be interpreted as an endorsement of its absolute necessity in the world.

The Second Reform Act in 1867 gave voting rights to some members of the working class. Labor became a prominent political and economic issue, with Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (1867) igniting a debate about capitalism.

At the same time, a severe economic depression in the early 1870s led to an alarming rate of emigration, as British people fled their country for a better life elsewhere. By the end of the decade, things had improved; by the 1880s, London had become the center of civilization in the modern world.

As for the royal family, Queen Victoria had her hands full with damage control. Edward, Prince of Wales, indulged in a series of fleeting affairs with actresses and singers. The resulting liaisons created many scandals for the royal family.

Pomerance references this when he has Merrick question Mrs. Kendal about Edward's most recent mistress. His escapades must have provided a welcome relief from the many social problems that plagued Victorian England.

Critical Overview

The Elephant Man initially opened Off-Broadway in January 1979. In one of the first reviews, Jack Kroll contended that the play suffered from Pomerance's "hard and heavy" morality, but "this is a minor fault, and in any case the entire Victorian does seem like an extravagant morality play on the stage of history." Kroll concluded by saying that the "New York theatre is lucky to have *The Elephant Man."*

Edwin Wilson's review in *The Wall Street Journal* lauded the actors and direction, which he felt made up for the play's faults. Among the problems, Wilson asserted

In the last few scenes of the play Pomerance abandons the hard-edged logic of the first part and chases philosophical phantoms, but through most of the evening his astute treatment of this unlikely subject makes *The Elephant Man* one of the best new plays of the season.

A similar sentiment is voiced by Christopher Sharp in his review for *Women's Wear Daily*. Sharp asserted that the play "can compete with any other true artistic effort in the city. It reminds us of what New York theatre can become with a little courage and imagination."

Sharp also noted the strength of the performances, stating that "this is a work that deserves intelligent acting, and it gets it." He concluded by calling the production "a delicious evening of theatre."

Within three months, *The Elephant Man* moved to Broadway with only small changes in the cast. Richard Elder of *The New York Times* noted that the play's second act "has been tightened up" since it moved from Off-Broadway, but that some problems with this act remained.

In part, asserted Elder, this is because "many of the themes that are dramatized at the beginning remain to be expounded at the end." In spite of these problems, Elder viewed Pomerance's play as "an enthralling and luminous play."

Douglas Watt considered many of the same problems in his review for the *Daily News*, but he found that "Pomerance takes us to the very heart of this awesome, true, oft-repeated story."

Like other critics who reviewed *The Elephant Man* on its initial debut Off-Broadway, Clive Barnes maintained that Pomerance's play brought a renewal to a mediocre New York theatre season.

Barnes deemed it a "wonderful, moving play," heaping most of his praise on Pomerance's writing, especially his treatment of themes and characterization.

In concluding his review, Barnes proclaimed that the Broadway production had "taken on a new dimension" and that "to see it is a great experience."

Dennis Cunningham declared that the "first act is the best first act on Broadway this year." Yet he also found that the second act just restates what has been said in the first act. In spite of this "severe flaw," Pomerance's play was "the most extraordinary and moving play on Broadway."

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Metzger is a Ph.D., specializing in literature and drama at The University of New Mexico. In this essay, she explores Merrick's humanity in The Elephant Man.

John Merrick lived his last four years in the hospital, a man ennobled by his suffering never bitter, always forgiving. His was a humanity that transcends that of normal society; yet, it is normal society that Merrick aspired to join.

In Bernard Pomerance' s *The Elephant Man*, the protagonist, Merrick, forces his audience to reconsider its definitions and expectations of what is considered normal. As Martin Gottfried observed in his review of the play,' Treves is trying to 'normalize' Merrick by making him like himself."

Yet Treves focuses only on the deformity, and he is unable to see that underneath the growths and protrusions there exists a real human being with desires and needs similar to his own. In this respect, Merrick is as "normal" as Treves.

The Elephant Man, although set 115 years ago and staged twenty years ago, is especially topical because it questions the rights of patients and their quality of life. In Merrick's efforts to lead a normal life, the audience is able to project their own desires for normalcy. Merrick's struggle, then, is akin to our own.

In her essay, which explores the ethics of medical technology on stage, Angela Belli states that "life in an age of ever-increasing dehumanizing forces" threatens to control twentieth-century man. Belli asserts that man has benefited from the technological advances in science and medicine but that these same advances raise concerns about the patient's physical and mental well being. These advances eventually create the sort of "moral dilemmas" that Belli argues the "public [is] largely ill-prepared" for; she is concerned about the quality of life issues that people must now face as men seek to exert some control over their own destiny.

Belli's focus on the contractual rights of patients to exercise control over their own lives is illustrated by Treves's insistence that Merrick be denied access to Mrs. Kendal. Because Treves does not approve of the merest hint of sexual interest and although nothing improper has occurred Mrs. Kendal is banished.

Yet, Treves's stated intent was always to bring some semblance of normalcy to Merrick's life. What is more normal than sexual interest in an attractive woman?

Merrick's repeated questions about Mrs. Kendal's absence are ignored or rebuffed, as would be the questions of an inquisitive child. Treves ignores the contractual relationship and assumes a parent-child relationship with Merrick. He is reduced to a child-like state and is unable to assert his needs because Treves assumes total control over Merrick's desires.

Treves's goal is to turn Merrick into a proper Victorian gentleman, a reflection of Treves. In this respect, the doctor is seeking to use science which as Belli notes is unable to help Merrick.

Instead, Treves seeks "to prove that although his patient is beyond any medical cure, science can improve his life by transforming him into a reasonable facsimile of an upper-class Englishman of the Victorian Age."

Of course, this is an illusion since normalcy, at least in Treves's eyes, is restricted to a non-sexual, superficially normal life. Merrick is a young man, and young men are interested in the sexuality of women. Yet when Merrick reveals his interest in Mrs. Kendal as a sexual woman, Treves is shocked and disgusted. Normalcy is the eunuch-like existence of a child.

Normalcy is an illusion in other respects. In the artificial world of his hospital room, Merrick eventually comes to understand that the "normal" life that Treves has constructed is only "an approximation of the life he longs for." As Belli points out, "Merrick is confined within an environment where normalcy and freedom are merely a pretence." That he can ever lead a normal life away from the hospital is an illusion that Merrick is forced to face.

Belli contends that when Treves finally recognizes that the social environment he has constructed for Merrick is illusionary, he is forced to question his own ideas about normalcy and the power of science to cure all problems. This leads to a crisis of conscience and a loss of faith.

One of the most interesting facets of Merrick's attempts to achieve normalcy is in how those around him see themselves reflected in his image. As Janet L. Larson observes, Treves's pride in having established Merrick with Mrs. Kendal creates for the audience an expectation that Merrick will achieve normalcy.

Then, when each member of Merrick's new social circle comes forward to relate how he or she finds a mirror image in Merrick, Treves is forced to question what he has accomplished in constructing this artificial social milieu, which is far removed from normal existence. Treves's efforts to normalize Merrick's existence eventually kill him, Larson argues, as "the accumulated weight of others' dreams which Merrick has accepted breaks his neck."

When Merrick's reality is revealed as nothing more than illusion, there is nothing left to do except die. Of course Treves suffers as well. In creating for Merrick what Larson calls a "civilizing fiction of companionship," Treves's "shallow expectations" are completely destroyed, and he must finally question his own values. Merrick's relationships carefully constructed within a contrived social circle are all illusionary.

Only during their last visit together does Mrs. Kendal appear to recognize that Merrick needs and wants more. Her efforts to help make the illusion real end in her banishment.

Treves's attempts to create an illusionary normalcy have been the topic of other critics. In their article comparing *The Elephant Man*, the play, and *The Elephant Man,* the movie, William E. Holladay and Stephen Watt argue that Treves encourages Merrick's normalcy, while restricting it at the same time.

Holladay and Watt note that "Treves endorses Merrick's reading of romantic literature and his conversation with women ... [while] Treves rehearses the importance of rules in the 'home,' denying Merrick any opportunity to express sexual feelings."

Treves's behavior, "of alternately encouraging and then deflating Merrick's desire for knowledge of the opposite sex," is, as Holladay and Watt state, cruel. Treves establishes boundaries that limit Merrick's sexuality; in this case, sexuality becomes an intellectual pursuit rather than a physical one. Treves provides Merrick with the illusion of sexual fulfillment.

The illusion is initiated by Kendal, who uses her acting ability to create normal discourse with Merrick. As Treves explains, she has been brought to meet Merrick because she is an actress, and thus, will not run in fright when she sees him.

This, too, is an illusion, as Vera Jiji points out in her article on *The Elephant Man*. Although Mrs. Kendal tells Merrick that her stage life is an illusion and that her meeting with him is reality, in fact,

the audience has watched the actress create the self with which she greets Merrick. She has carefully practiced several greetings, and so, her initial response is not spontaneous, but carefully rehearsed. However, neither Mrs. Kendal nor Treves appears to recognize that there is nothing normal about this staged meeting. The meeting between Mrs. Kendal and Merrick is as artificial as the environment in which they meet.

Jiji notes that it is not until Kendal removes her clothes that she ceases to act. In the act of undressing, she finally reveals that she is Merrick's friend. In dropping her clothing, she drops the act, ceasing to be an actor and achieving a new level of humanity.

When the illusion between Merrick and Mrs. Kendal becomes reality, Treves bursts into the room to remind everyone that Merrick's reality is limited. He can maintain an illusion of normalcy, but it too will be limited. One reason the audience is so dismayed at Treves's actions is because the audience can see what Treves cannot that Merrick cannot be bound by such artificial restraints. His death, soon after, seems inevitable.

In an age where people all too ready to seek out a plastic surgeon for a quick tummy tuck, face lift, or liposuction, Merrick's ability to project his inner humanity forces the audience to look beyond the obvious and the superficial.

His existence also creates obvious questions about quality-of-life issues that plague modern life. If doctors are to be able to "pull the plug" on those who seek this assistance because they no longer fit the model of what society defines as normal, then perhaps, there are lessons to be learned for all of us from John Merrick's life and death.

If normalcy is an illusion, as it is for John Merrick, then it is an illusion that much of mankind embraces. The need to feel normal, to appear normal, is all too common. That mirrors maintain such a prominent place in so many homes should indicate that the need to reassure us of our normalcy is a trait that much of mankind shares. John Merrick was no different.

Source: Sheri E. Metzger, *for Drama for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Holladay and Watt examine the popularity of both the stage and the film versions of The Elephant Man.

Man stands amaz 'd to see his deformity in any other creature but himself. [John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi;

John Webster is not entirely correct: men in particular have stood "amaz'd" at their own deformity, as the production in 1979 of Bernard Pomerance's drama *The Elephant Man* exemplifies. Based on the life of John Merrick, a famous Victorian sideshow performer hideously disfigured by neurofibromatosis, the play garnered Tony Awards, Obies, the Drama Desk Award, and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award as the best play of the year; but its success in New York, and in London the previous year, can hardly be attributed to the reputation of its little-known author or to the drawing power of the actors in the principal parts. Moreover, some critics, an ungenerous minority, maintained that the play's merit did not originate in Pomerance's superior or even competent craft. John Simon, for example, found the structure imbalanced and accused Pomerance of suspending dramatic action in the later scenes to create a vehicle for anti-imperialist polemic. Pomerance indeed may be less skilled than Bertolt Brecht or Edward Bond at designing engaging drama that at the same time furthers an enterprise of social education, although he is quite obviously influenced by Brechtian theory. But even if Pomerance were Brecht, this metamorphosis would in no way account for the contemporary celebrity of John Merrick: American audiences have seldom given box-office support to materialist drama like Bond's, Brecht's, or John Arden' s. Why then were most reviewers and large audiences captivated by the play?

David Lynch's 1980 film *The Elephant Man* (in which Pomerance had no hand) increased viewers' knowledge of Merrick and, like the play, enjoyed both critical acclaim and considerable popular success. Although more filmgoers lined up to see *The Empire Strikes Back, The Blues Brothers*, and *Smokey and the Bandit, Part Two*, audiences were moved by this skillful black-and-white melodrama re-creating the gritty environment of late Victorian factories and back-alley peepshows. Lynch effectively represents industrialized London by deftly adapting the cinematic style of his earlier cult success *Eraserhead* (1977), a style punctuated by montages of urban mechanization, the constant hum of manufacturing noise, and motifs of burning gas jets and clouds of steam.

By the early 1980s, largely because of Pomerance and Lynch, Merrick's story was widely known; but the play and film are only two examples of the flood of publications about Merrick that appeared in the 1970s and 1980s: Ashley Montagu's *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity* (1971), Fred Shannon's *The Life and Agony of the Elephant Man* (1979), a published version of the Lynch filmscript, Michael Howell and Peter Ford's *The True History of the Elephant Man* (1980), Christine Sparks's *The Elephant Man: A Novel* (1980), and so on. How does one explain this cultural rediscovery of the "Elephant Man" nearly one hundred years after his death in 1890?

What characteristics of John Merrick and his life are most fascinating today? Further, though both Lynch's film and Pomerance's drama share some textual features, they are so different in crucial respects as to form opposing mythologies of Merrick's history. What differing attractions do the two offer, and how are these attractions bound up in theatrical and filmic spectating?

We contend that Pomerance's and Lynch's versions of the history of John Merrick combine to provide an unusually wide variety of pleasures, some spectatorial and libidinal, others more intellectual or contemplative. That is, Merrick's story has been and can be shaped into various forms, each with its own array of audience expectations and satisfactions. We hope to illuminate these by positing three distinct, albeit at times related and overlapping, sources of pleasure in Lynch's and Pomerance's treatments of Merrick's life: the conventions of melodrama, the psychological gratifications of both cinematic spectating and the viewing of sideshow "freaks," and the critique of powerful Victorian institutions and colonial biases an element more pronounced in the play than in the film.

The significant differences between the two versions account for Pomerance's more substantial condemnation of Victorian society. One such difference concerns Lynch's restricted focus on Merrick and his physical well-being. Like Victorian melodramatists who thrilled their audiences by situating powerless characters in increasingly desperate predicaments and devising last-minute rescues, Lynch continually places Merrick in danger and then finds ways to save him. In the film Merrick's tranquil existence in his newfound home at London Hospital is constantly threatened by a wide variety of adversaries: his cruel manager, Bytes; an avaricious porter; an angry mob in a train station; an obstreperous member of the London Hospital Governing Committee; and Carr Gomm, governor of the hospital, who initially opposes Merrick's permanent residency. Crueler still, he is flogged by Bytes, imprisoned in a cage near circus animals, and forced to suffer indignities at the hands of the porter's drunken friends. Only near the end of the film when his place in the hospital is finally secured and he attends the theater to see Mrs. Kendal is the audience assured of his safety, just minutes before he falls contentedly into a fatal sleep.

Constructed differently, Pomerance's play follows this pattern of engaging action only as far as the fifth scene (it has twenty-one), in which Treves rescues Merrick from a mob at a train station; thereafter little doubt remains about Merrick's well-being. This structure allows Pomerance considerably greater opportunity for social analysis, which is frequently conveyed through Treves, the doctor who befriends Merrick and who dominates the later scenes by seriously examining his own, ostensibly selfless motives for doing so. In the film, by contrast, the one moment in which Treves betrays any self-doubt serves as only a brief respite from the continual melodramatic excitement. Pomerance dispenses with the excitement much earlier so as to interrogate the discourses that construct sexuality in Victorian England.

Another major difference between the two versions involves Merrick's sexual desire, an issue that Lynch deflects by portraying Merrick as a devoted son and associating him, both narratively and cinematically, with prepubescent boys. Using the mise-en-scene to

build this theme, Lynch decorates both Treves's parlor and Merrick's room with numerous artistic renderings of mothers and children. Invited to tea at Treves's home, Merrick admires portraits of Treves's family and confesses to Mrs. Treves that as a son he has surely disappointed his mother; when Princess Alexandra resolves the hospital's dispute about keeping Merrick, she quotes Queen Victoria's characterization of him as "one of England's most unfortunate sons." Lynch also trains numerous close-ups on young boys, such as the showman's assistant and the children who harass Merrick at the station. He establishes this identification most conspicuously at Merrick's death: unable to sleep lying down because of his enlarged skull, Merrick suffocates when he emulates a sleeping child in a drawing that hangs in his room. Pomerance, conversely, elects to treat Merrick as he was when Treves found him, a young adult with corresponding desires. This portrayal is all the more convincing in the play because of Pomerance's dictum that the actor impersonating Merrick not use makeup to replicate the character's deformity. Through the "normal-looking" actor, spectators more easily recognize Merrick's typicality, his similarity to other young men in their twenties. This interconnection between the typical and the particular in the play, a relation central to historical representation, is nonexistent in Lynch's film. With an enlarged skull, fibrous tumors, and the rest, John Hurt as Merrick bears little resemblance to any "typical" young man. This is not to say that Lynch's film lacks a sexual (or political) dimension entirely; viewers of *Eraserhead* and, more recently, *Blue Velvet* are familiar with the oedipal themes in Lynch's work. Nevertheless, in *The Elephant Man* Lynch creates an engaging preoedipal fairy tale and for the most part eschews analysis of Merrick's libido.

In Lynch's screenplay, then, Merrick is a gentle monster caught between a safe harbor and several dangers; in Pomerance's play, he is similarly victimized but then again so is his rescuer, Treves, who is ensnared in the values of Victorian England's privileged class. Pomerance effaces the boundary between safety and exploitation, adding layers of social realism to various mythologies about Merrick. These differences between the film and play reveal both the many aspects of Merrick's life that intrigue audiences and the systerns of viewing within which spectators' responses are formed. For these reasons, after summarizing the melodramatic conventions that constitute Pomerance's and Lynch's dramas, we delineate the spectatorial mechanisms at work in viewing the Elephant Man (along with the pleasures underlying these mechanisms) and consider Pomerance' s comparatively richer explanation of the social origins of Merrick' s victimization.

[I]

Like much commercial cinema today, melodrama was the most popular form of theatrical entertainment in Merrick's time. More than a source of pleasure, melodrama offered audiences steeped in its conventions a ready vehicle for interpreting Merrick's experiences. His deformities, much like Quasimodo's in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, made him an outcast, and the true story of his fortunes and misfortunes his mistreatment as a show freak and his "rescue" by the eminent young surgeon Frederick Treves must have read like something one might see at Drury Lane or, more likely, at the Adelphi, famous in London for its melodrama. Quite literally "read," for in addition to the many newspaper accounts of his life, there were a number of reminiscences, since

few who had known Merrick could resist writing about him after his death. Strikingly similar in their melodramatic proclivities, these commentators reveal the extent to which their theatrical viewing informed their memories of actual events. Such interpretations of "facts," as Raymond Williams points out, result from living in a "dramatized society," one in which habitual spectating leads to perceiving the events of daily life as mediated by dramatic conventions: "The specific conventions of a particular dramatization ... are not abstract. They are profoundly worked out and reworked in our actual living relationships. They are our ways of seeing and knowing, which every day we put into practice...." Treves's own memoir of Merrick, a typical example of the way history can be not merely dramatized but melodramatized, serves as the source for most modern representations of Merrick, including Ashley Montagu's book, Pomerance's play, and Lynch's film. What the doctor describes, both playwright and director dramatize, at times amplifying Treves's sentiment and extending the reductive polarizations of his melodramatic account.

Like many contemporary filmgoers, nineteenth-century London audiences were not ashamed to weep at the sight of a villain persecuting a virtuous heroine; they were eager both to have their emotions engaged and to indulge in the sensationalism and spectacle that skillful melodramatists like Dion Boucicault could create. While there were many successful types of melodrama, some elements remained fairly constant. Suffering heroines and sadistic villains are a staple of the recipe, and, as Martha Vicinus observes, melodrama "always sides with the powerless," the noble heroine over the powerful but depraved adversary. Such villains seem wholly possessed by their desires and will do anything to satisfy them. As a result, the heroine and the hero face myriad injustices, but no matter how "helpless and unfriended," the heroine remains virtuous throughout the play. Domestic melodrama routinely rewards such paragons: the hero rescues the heroine, and their adversaries receive appropriate retribution as a larger moral order triumphs over a malign society. The appeal of such an order is obvious, as Vicinus explains: "Much of the emotional effectiveness of melodrama comes from making the moral visible" in the stock characters and in the plot.

Treves evidently knew this paradigm well. When his account and the play are juxtaposed with Michael Ho well and Peter Ford's *The True History of the Elephant Man*, his melodramatizing tendencies become apparent. Howell and Ford's somewhat pleonastic title indicates their efforts to distinguish their factual work from several fictions about Merrick, many of them introduced by Treves. They uncover information that Treves either never knew or had forgotten by the time he wrote his memoir in 1923, information that concerns Merrick's life before he entered London Hospital in 1884, a period about which Treves was uncertain since Merrick preferred not to speak of it. Howell and Ford show that Treves exaggerated many events on the side of the emotional or the sensational, turning the true story into the engaging drama that Pomerance and Lynch recreate. For instance, Treves reproaches Merrick's mother for "basely" deserting her son when he was "so small that his earliest clear memories were of the workhouse to which he had been taken." Less melodramatically, Howell and Ford contend that Merrick's mother was quite kind to him until her death, when her son was nearly eleven. Merrick did enter the Leicester workhouse, but at age seventeen and of his own initiative.

An analogous, yet more subtle, "dramatization" of Treves's consciousness produces his account of first seeing Merrick. At this time the doctor did not perceive a future patient or the results of a devastating disease, only a figure of abject misery:

The showman pulled back the curtain and revealed a bent figure crouching on a stool and covered by a brown blanket. In front of it, on a tripod, was a large brick heated by a Bunsen burner. Over this the creature huddled to warm itself. It never moved when the curtain was drawn back.... This figure was the embodiment of loneliness.

The showman speaking as if to a dog called out harshly: "Stand up!" The thing arose slowly and let the blanket that covered its head and back fall to the ground.... At no time had I met with such a degraded or perverted version of a human being as this lone figure displayed. (Montagu)

Here Treves stresses Merrick's degradation and loneliness, later remarking that Merrick was "as secluded from the world as the Man in the Iron Mask," the popular Dumas character seen often on the Victorian stage. Treves's terms for Merrick the "creature," the "thing," and "it" betray the same mixture of pity and revulsion that Hugo's Quasimodo or Verdi's Rigoletto might inspire. Though Treves's feelings are more intense, they parallel those of a Victorian audience watching the numerous other deformed or handicapped characters who, according to Peter Brooks, illustrate melodrama's "repeated use of extreme physical conditions to represent extreme moral and emotional conditions," its portrayal of "invalids of various sorts whose very physical presence evokes the extremism and hyperbole" of the melodramatic world. It is in this world that Treves intellectually placed Merrick at first sight.

The doctor also sensationalizes the closing of Merrick's show in Belgium (on the grounds of indecency) and the subsequent return to England, in part by casting Merrick's showman as a stage villain. Treves was not in Belgium to witness the events he depicts, so his penchant for the theatrical was only minimally constrained by the bare facts: "Merrick was thus no longer of value. He was no longer a source of profitable entertainment. ... He must be got rid of. The elimination of Merrick was a simple matter. He could offer no resistance" (Montagu). Regardless of what actually happened, Treves transforms Merrick into the helpless victim suffering at the hands of the cruel manager. Not surprisingly, given this transformation, Merrick is cast in a role usually reserved for a woman: Merrick as heroine. He is ideal for the part because of his innocence, helplessness, and suffering. The theatricalizing impulse manifests itself again in Treves's narration of Merrick's return to London, which replicates the conventional harrowing journey of the outcast woman: "[Merrick] would be harried by an eager mob as he hobbled along.... He had but a few shillings in his pocket and nothing either to eat or drink on the way. A panic-dazed dog with a label on his collar would have received some sympathy and possibly some kindness. Merrick received none" (Montagu). This characterization mirrors the portrayal of hapless victims on the Victorian stage, as in W. G. Wills's Jane Shore (1875), in which the title character is marched, starving and hounded by onlookers, through the streets of Christmastime London. History becomes melodrama, an exciting dreamworld of black-and-white morality, sensation, and strong emotion.

Pomerance and Lynch continue Treves's melodramatizing practices, though in differing ways and through re-creations of different moments in Treves's memoir. For example, while Lynch elects to omit the workhouse detail, he substitutes lingering shots of the squalor of Merrick's show life. Pomerance, however, further exaggerates Treves's fiction of the helpless child abandoned to life in the workhouse; he has Ross, Merrick's manager in the play, explain, "Found him in a Leicester workhouse. His own ma put him there age of three. Couldn't bear the sight, well you can see why." To complete the image, Pomerance surpasses his source by writing Merrick a moving speech detailing the horrors of the workhouse: "They beat you there like a drum. Boom boom: scrape the floor white. Shine the pan, boom boom. It never ends. The floor is always dirty. The pan is always tarnished. There is nothing you can do...." Perhaps even more today than in the 1890s, the very term *workhouse* signifies abuse, poverty, and despair the bleak urban world into which the unfortunates of Victorian literature are frequently thrust. In George Moore's *Esther Waters* (1894), for example, the homeless title character wanders London streets carrying her infant son and pondering her destitution: "Why should such cruelty happen to her? The Workhouse, the Workhouse, the Workhouse!... What had she done to deserve it? Above all, what had the poor innocent child done to deserve it?" Like Treves before them, Pomerance and Lynch induce their audiences to ask these conventional questions of domestic melodrama and to experience the pathos of such deplorable injustice.

For other incidents that Treves narrates melodramatically his first sight of Merrick and the manager's abandonment of Merrick on the Continent Lynch builds on the emotion of the original. (Pomerance, by contrast, minimizes the emotionalism of Treves's initial encounter with Merrick, both by keeping the audience outside the show tent and by not giving the doctor any extreme response.) Lynch emphasizes the immediate impact Merrick has on Treves by capturing the overwrought surgeon in a memorable close-up just as tears gather in his eyes and finally trickle down his face. Similarly, even though both Lynch and Pomerance retain Dr. Treves's interpretation of the events in Belgium the play and film audiences alike see a profit-hungry huckster robbing his charge Lynch again exceeds the sensationalism of his source. Lynch's scene begins on the grounds of a Belgian carnival. It is a cold and rainy day, with Bytes attracting a small crowd to see his "creature." Merrick, half naked and totally exhausted, answers his "owner's" command the thumping on the stage of the same cane Bytes uses to beat him to step forward from behind a curtain. He falls to the floor and, although Bytes jabs the cane into his back, Merrick cannot summon sufficient energy to stand. A disgusted crowd expresses its revulsion at the spectacle, thus infuriating Bytes. Later, inebriated and convinced that Merrick is being deliberately spiteful, Bytes evicts Merrick from the show wagon, imprisons him in an animal cage, and throws his few possessions out onto the ground. Lynch has represented this kind of cruelty before, tincturing it with sexual ambivalence as Bytes refers affectionately to Merrick as his "treasure" the valued possession whom he brutalizes. It is only through the kindness of other sideshow performers that Merrick is released from his confinement and placed on a ship for England.

Yet when the ship docks in England and Merrick takes a train to London, his troubles are still not over. He has escaped his sadistic proprietor only to be threatened by an

angry mob at the Liverpool Street station. In this scene both Lynch and Pomerance surpass their source in working on their audiences' emotions. Typically the melodramatist supplies a hero to save the helpless heroine just when the situation looks bleakest. When Dr. Treves, in his memoir, depicts Merrick's attempts to get back to London, he places the "heroine" in such straits, but the doctor is modest, even perfunctory, in assigning the hero's role to himself: "I had some difficulty in making a way through the crowd, but there, on the floor in the corner, was Merrick.... He seemed pleased to see me, but he was nearly done. The journey and want of food had reduced him to the last stage of exhaustion" (Montagu). Pomerance does not re-create the train journey; rather, he opens scene 5 with policemen barring a waiting room against an offstage mob pursuing Merrick. Ignoring the real Treves's modesty about his own actions, Pomerance at the end of the scene brings his young surgeon onstage with the stride of a hero rescuing an innocent victim:

TREVES: What is going on here? Look at that mob, have you no sense of decency? I am Frederick Treves. This is my card.

POLICEMAN: This poor wretch here had it. Arrived from Ostend.

TREVES: Good Lord, Merrick? John Merrick? What has happened to you?

MERRICK: Help me!

In Pomerance's scene, the starved Merrick has presumably been hounded by onlookers, though we never actually witness their inhumanity; but in Lynch's film we see an angry crowd pursue Merrick through the station and ultimately trap him in a public restroom. As they draw closer, Merrick stops them with a desperate plea: " / am not an animal! I am *not* an animal! */ am a human being*!" The crowd backs away momentarily as several policemen come to Merrick's defense and, in the next scene, return him to Treves. Thus, both Pomerance and Lynch, in their different ways, build effective drama out of an incident that Treves invests with only minimal emotion.

In both play and film, this rescue scene concludes with a stage picture analogous to the "big curtain" tableaux vivants of Victorian melodrama, and from then on Merrick's fortunes improve. As in any domestic melodrama in which the helpless woman in dire circumstances finds a home, Merrick finds his in Treves's hospital. Yet for Pomerance there remained one further authorial chore: to complete Merrick's characterization as virginal heroine by establishing his sexual innocence. Treves's account suggests this role by describing Merrick as a woman and Pomerance supplies a test of Merrick's purity to perfect the fiction his Victorian predecessor began. Lynch, significantly we think, chooses instead to develop Merrick's innocence as a child, skipping over the thornier issue of his sexuality.

Both play and film accumulate evidence for their divergent representations in their early scenes. As the real Treves had done in a lecture to the Pathological Society of London, Lynch's Treves alludes briefly to Merrick's genitals, commenting on their normalcy. Though Pomerance appropriates material from the same lecture, he handles the issue

very differently, projecting our curiosity about Merrick' s sexuality onto Mrs. Kendal, who receives Treves's permission to ask an indiscreet question: "I could not but help noticing from the photographs that well of the unafflicted parts ah, how shall I put it?" This inquiry anticipates scene 14, which Merrick opens by noting that, since the prince and the Irishman (Charles Stewart Parnell) keep mistresses, he has "concluded" that he should acquire one as well. Admittedly, some sexual desire motivates this proclamation, but so too does his ambition to conform socially: the most powerful men in society have mistresses; Treves compels him to learn the ways of this society; and the conclusion is obvious a Victorian gentleman requires the company of a lady. Never having seen a woman's nude body, Merrick eagerly accepts Mrs. Kendal's offer in this scene to allow him to survey hers. But there is, finally, little evidence of desire in this incident: in a spirit of adventure or kindness, she disrobes so that women for him will no longer be, to borrow Treves's expression, "creatures of his imagination. " His innocent response to her nakedness "It is the most beautiful sight I have ever seen" is supportive of her earlier opinion: Merrick is "gentle, almost feminine."

In both the historical account and the play, Treves uses the same metaphor of femininity in his lecture when he compares Merrick's arms: the badly deformed, almost "shapeless" and "useless " right arm and his hand "like a fin or paddle" contrast with the "anomalous" left arm, a "delicately shaped limb covered with fine skin and provided with a beautiful hand which any woman might have envied." In an elision of Treves's actual lecture, Lynch's character merely remarks, "And his left arm is entirely normal, as you can see." This small deviation from Treves's account suggests Lynch's decision to avoid the feminization of Merrick that both the historical Treves and Pomerance develop. To be sure, Lynch borrows from Treves's memoir and reproduces minor details; the film's motif of burning gas jets, for instance, might be attributed to Treves's recollection of his first view of Merrick, which was illuminated "by the faint blue light of the gas jet" (Montagu 14). But while Lynch passes over the feminine imagery in Treves's account, Pomerance makes good use of it. In the play, Mrs. Kendal sees Merrick as womanlike and supplies him with toilet articles so that he might "make himself" at the mirror "as I make me." In this regard, Pomerance's characters follow their historical models, as Madge Kendal recalls in her autobiography: "Sir Frederick Treves states that his [Merrick's] troubles ennobled him and 'made him as gentle, affectionate, loveable, and amiable as a happy woman.'" Here Merrick's feminine identity is based on prevalent idealizations of Victorian women and girls: the mid-Victorian "cult of domesticity" configured women as "innocent, pure, gentle, and self-sacrificing" and submissive, totally dependent on men (Gorham). All these adjectives describe Merrick, who is gentle, pure, domestic, and dependent on Treves.

True to the melodramatic convention that involves the "violation and spoliation of the space of innocence" (Brooks), scene 14 depicts Treves interrupting the meeting between Merrick and Mrs. Kendal and repeating the words he had uttered when Merrick was surrounded by the hostile mob: "What is going on here? ... Have you no sense of decency?" Kendal's explanation "For a moment, Paradise, Freddie" underscores the analogy between Merrick's room and Eden, the "enclosed garden, the space of innocence, surrounded by walls," invaded, in Brooks's words, by a "villain, the troubler of innocence." This encounter therefore does not undermine Pomerance's depiction of

Merrick's innocence; on the contrary, it communicates Merrick's virtue more resonantly by suddenly transforming Treves from hero into villain. Serving as a foil here to his morally superior patient, Treves is unable to separate, as Merrick can, nudity from sexuality. Mrs. Kendal's act provides a sufficient test of Merrick's character, and his purity remains intact.

As treated in all three versions Treves's, Pomerance's, and Lynch's Merrick's life assumes the familiar narrative shape of a domestic melodrama. An innocent "woman" has been eking out a precarious living under the hungry eye of an unscrupulous landlord, mortgage holder, or employer. Finally the day arrives when, unable to pay her rent or otherwise satisfy a "lawful" indebtedness, she is turned out into the streets, penniless, soon to face starvation. Although suffering untold agonies as a social outcast, she maintains her honor, even when it is tested in the most severe of environments. Eventually, at the brink of destruction, a strong and equally untainted champion discovers her distress. Evil is crushed, virtue is rewarded, and the heroine becomes an inspiration to all who know her. Change the heroine to John Merrick, and we recognize one of the appeals of viewing *The Elephant Man*: the appeal of melodrama. What was in Treves's memoir the product of a powerful cultural construct becomes in Pomerance's play and Lynch's film a successful dramatic strategy.

[II]

Scene 14 in Pomerance's play, in which Treves interrupts and condemns Mrs. Kendal's exhibition of herself to Merrick, is provocative for reasons other than its association of Merrick with melodramatic heroines. For one thing, it is initiated by a reversal of gender roles: a woman looking at photographs of a naked man, a situation that disrupts the established patriarchal system of seeing and being seen. Or, as Mary Ann Doane has put it, the reason "men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses " is that "there is always a certain excessiveness, a difficulty with women who appropriate the gaze, who insist upon looking." Following Laura Mulvey' s theorizing, Doane and E. Ann Kaplan regard Western culture as "deeply committed to myths of demarcated sex differences, called 'masculine' and 'feminine,' which in turn revolve first on a complex gaze apparatus and second on dominance/submission patterns" (Kaplan). In theories of this apparatus, the gaze is most often posited as male and dominant; the object of the gaze female and submissive. Moreover, as Patricia Mellencamp emphasizes, "More than other senses, the eye objectifies and masters." Such theories of spectation can be enormously helpful in assessing modern audiences' fascination with Merrick and his story, because Pomerance and Lynch not only recognize the kinds of gender demarcation Kaplan mentions but also, through Merrick's powerlessness as a sideshow exhibit, reverse such constructions of maleness and femaleness. These and other spectatorial pleasures are the subject of what follows.

Lynch's introductory sequences in *The Elephant Man* intimate his awareness of what Freud posits as one motive for scopophilia: the pleasure to be derived from seeing private, even forbidden things. Few directors, other than Alfred Hitchcock or perhaps Brian DePalma, understand this desire so well as Lynch does. The initial scenes signal the audience's eventual viewing of a horrible reality just beneath the surface of society.

After a thematically rich opening montage, the first London sequence takes place on a crowded circus ground where Treves, who at this point does not know Merrick, wanders toward a sign upon which the camera focuses: "FREAKS." Treves follows a policeman through an opening marked "No Entry, " past several exhibits cased in glass and advertised as "The Fruit of Original Sin," through yet another opening marked "No Entry," and finally along a labyrinthine passageway. Past more exhibits and customers, at the very back of the show tent, reside Bytes and Merrick. These shots mark the trail to Merrick with transgressions of natural and moral law ("Original Sin"): deformed sideshow performers are the products not of disease but of some moral lapse, some "sin." They are housed, consequently, on the periphery of the circus grounds, away from the center of activity. Seeing Merrick is also illegal in the fictional space of the movie; as Treves approaches Merrick's tent, the police close the exhibition (as they did in November 1884). The cinematic metaphor here suggests that what we are about to see, Merrick himself, lies on the margins of, or deep within, late Victorian culture. The prospect is horrible, yet enticing. In this scene, further, Lynch not only thwarts Treves's desire to view Merrick but also delays satisfying the audience's similar curiosity. The film thus promises a very special gaze and then withholds fulfillment of the promise, piquing viewers' interest in the spectacle.

The topography of the opening, with its winding passageways leading to Merrick's secluded tent, is crucial in reinforcing the expectation of a forbidden spectacle, so crucial in fact that Lynch repeats it for Treves's second visit to Merrick. A boy appears at the hospital to inform Treves of Merrick's new location, one hidden from the eyes of the authorities. Treves moves down several alleys, past numerous laborers and steaming machines to a grimy, out-of-the-way room. There Bytes meets him and collects a fee, opens a locked door, and guides Treves down several dark hallways to Merrick. As the showman opens the darkened room, the audience catches a shadowy glimpse of Merrick before the camera cuts to an appalled Treves, whose eyes well up with tears. The sight of Merrick is still withheld when Merrick is brought to the hospital for Treves's lecture to the Pathological Society of London. Lynch places the camera behind a screen, revealing Merrick only in silhouette. The first full view of Merrick comes when he is back at the hospital after Bytes flogs him. The manager has had time, with his show closed by the police and his valuable commodity on loan to Treves, to drink himself into a fury, and when Merrick is returned Bytes inflicts such a severe beating that Treves must be recalled to minister to Merrick. The visual motif of remote quarters and darkened passageways is seldom repeated, and soon after Treves returns Merrick to the hospital, viewers are afforded the long, clear look of him they want. Treves has accomplished what both sides of the present feminist debate on pornography can claim as a victory: he has taken something once relegated to the margins of society and exposed it to the bright light of the central arena.

Lynch's analogous articulation of this source of cinematic pleasure in a later film, *Blue Velvet,* seems to corroborate our reading of the cinematic style of *The Elephant Man*. A disturbing, at times horrific, parody of life in an idealized American small town, *Blue Velvet* presents an underlying oedipal drama with shocking clarity. The screenplay features the interactions of Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle Maclachlan), a college student; Sandy Williams (Laura Dern), a beautiful high school girl; and Dorothy Vallens (Isabella

Rosellini), a nightclub singer whose husband and son have been kidnapped by a local criminal, Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper). Like *The Elephant Man*, the film begins by foreshadowing forbidden sights. In the early scenes Lynch embeds two clues, one visual and one verbal, to the sinister events to follow. The opening montage is composed of idyllic shots of small-town life: blue skies, white picket fences, and red roses; children crossing the streets aided by safety guards; and an elderly man watering his lawn while his wife watches a murder mystery on television. When the man, Jeffrey's father, falls from an apparent stroke, however, the camera follows him to the ground and then moves below, where insects battle ferociously. The long take on this subterranean warfare both undercuts the representation of Lumberton, USA, as an ideal community and suggests what is to come: under the surface, just below our normal field of vision, violence resides. Moments later, as Jeffrey takes a shortcut home through a field, he finds a severed ear, which we later learn Frank removed from Dorothy's husband. Jeffrey goes to the police station and explains his discovery: "Coming home through the field, behind our neighborhood, there behind Vista, I, uh, found an ear." Like the opening montage, Jeffrey's statement intimates a penetration of the familiar vista, taking us both beneath and behind it. Viewers are curious about what they will find, and Lynch does not disappoint them.

In addition to the pleasure derived from seeing the private and forbidden, other pleasures are relevant to viewing Lynch's film, pleasures identified by feminist inquiry into cinematic spectation. One of these relates to what Kaplan regards as the oedipal content of much melodrama; another concerns domestic melodrama's construction of a female spectator. Appropriating Peter Brooks's notion that melodrama is concerned "explicitly" with "Oedipal issues," as intimated by characters' assumptions of the "primary psychic roles of Father, Mother, Child," Kaplan argues, following Doane's lead, that melodrama constructs a female spectator who participates in "what is essentially a masochistic fantasy." This participation, one assumes, is effected by the audience's identification with virtue rather than with rapine, with the suffering heroine, not the villain. And in melodrama this virtue is generally rewarded, thereby reinforcing and valorizing the heroine's masochism.

The gratification of female spectatorship is available to the audiences of both Lynch's film and Pomerance' s play even though each lends itself to a different psychoanalytic reading. The scene of Mrs. KendaF s banishment in the play, for example, reen-acts the oedipal situation, with some interesting variations: Treves, the figure of the law, plays the punishing father, but Mrs. Kendal has the role of transgressing son, with Merrick portraying the virtuous wife-possession. By contrast, the opening montage of the film suggests a somewhat different psychoanalytic interpretation, illuminating the importance of the preoedipal mother-son relationship in Merrick's story. The first shot of the film, a tight close-up of a woman's eyes, evolves into a slow downward shot of her nose and mouth. As the camera pulls away, we see that the woman's face is actually a framed photograph of Merrick's mother. The sequence continues with shots of elephants and of Merrick's mother lying on the ground, screaming an inaudible scream, and writhing in pain. The next shot is of a billowing cloud from which a baby's cry is heard: the "elephant man" is born. In a later sequence, Bytes, in his capacity as barker for Merrick's show, perpetuates the same mythology of Merrick's origin: on an "uncharted

African isle," Merrick's mother was "struck down in the fourth month of her maternal condition by an elephant, a *wild* elephant." Throughout the film, Merrick gazes at his mother's photograph, displays it proudly to both Kendal and Treves's wife, and finally returns to his mother in death. The film closes with her face in the heavens, welcoming her son back to her and promising him eternity: "Nothing ever dies." His submissiveness has finally been rewarded and if we have identified at all with his gentleness, his humanity, and his passivity, the "female" construction of the spectator is completed.

While the notion of a female spectator may explain one pleasure of viewing both film and play, the story of the "elephant man" told by Lynch and Pomerance also reveals the more typical operation of the gaze: the construction of a dominant male spectator observing and thereby controlling a submissive feminine object. Lynch develops the issue of voyeurism with rare clarity in *Blue Velvet*, a development related to this source of pleasure in *The Elephant Man*. Jeffrey, obsessed with discovering the mystery behind the severed ear, gains access to Dorothy's apartment and conceals himself in a closet. From here, he watches Dorothy undress until she discovers him and forces him to strip, in a moment that reverses the dynamics of most cinematic spectation. Before she can accomplish a greater reversal raping him at knife point Frank is heard at the door, and Jeffrey is compelled to return to the closet. Booth, we now learn, is keeping Dorothy for himself so that she can play "Mommy" to his domineering "baby" his terms, not ours a practice that involves not only sexual intercourse but also physical abuse and the fetishistic use of a piece of blue velvet. Integral to this practice is Frank's demand to "see it" Dorothy's genitals and his insistence that during the ritual she not look at him. This sadistic oedipal drama plays itself out with Jeffrey watching and Dorothy excluded from the spectation. While the outrageousness of the scene, combined with Lynch's frequent use of parodic devices, distances the audience somewhat, the male empowerment of the viewer remains a predictable source of cinematic pleasure in *Blue Velvet.*

This more common variety of spectating seems integral to Merrick's story, in all its versions, and involves the viewing of both sideshow freaks and scenes of explicit sexual activity: a kind of pornographic gaze. This gaze replicates one pleasure of the cinema, as *Blue Velvet* demonstrates: the "pleasure of using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight" (Mulvey). In the typical pornographic representation, women, "for all the graphic display of their body parts, are the excluded term" (Elmer). Merrick, as the denuded object of a stranger's gaze, performs a role usually relegated to women. In Victorian London, Lynch and Pomerance imply, the businesses of pornography and the exhibition of "freaks" often merged, for "natural oddities" like Merrick and scenes of sexual intimacy were commonly displayed together. Proprietors of attractions like Merrick also often managed sex shows, as Lynch's Bytes hints to Treves: "I move in the proper circles for this type of thing. In fact, *anything* at all, if you take my meaning." Legal history confirms the relation between these two entertainments. George Hitchcock, an associate of Tom Norman, Merrick's real manager, was tried with John Saunders on several counts of indecency *(The Queen v. Saunders and Another [Hitchcock])*. In May of 1875, Hitchcock and Saunders operated a show tent divided into two peepshows outside the Epsom Downs racecourse. In one booth, Hitchcock presented two "fat ladies"; in the other, a black husband and wife

appeared "naked" to "perform" *(Law Reports)*. What is the relation between the viewing of obese women or of John Merrick and the viewing of sexual performance? For Leslie Fiedler the viewing of "freaks" provokes sexual desire: "All freaks are perceived to one degree or another as erotic.... They induce a temptation to go beyond looking to *knowing* in the full carnal sense the ultimate other." Whether or not we agree with Fiedler's analysis, clearly Lynch does and by extension so does the great body of film theory that locates one pleasure of the cinema in voyeurism and dominance. In Lynch's film, when the porter brings a crowd of onlookers to the hospital to see Merrick, the camera captures and returns to a man who, while he forces two young women to look at and even kiss Merrick, fondles and licks them in perverse sexual arousal.

Because Victorian sideshow and sex-act performers were often taken from one or another of England's colonial possessions, this specular domination is not only physical, in that the objects of the gaze are often naked and certainly defenseless, but also ideological, since they are denigrated as socially or racially inferior another reason for the mythologies of Merrick's birth in Africa. Pomerance understands the colonial aspect of such viewing and like other contemporary dramatists Caryl Churchill, Margaretta D'Arcy and John Arden, and David Hare, for instance probes the racial and sexual dimensions of British imperialism, both Victorian and modern. The emphasis in Pomerance's play follows that of much recent cultural and historical criticism as well. As Abdul R. JanMohamed points out, "the imperialist configures the colonial realm" as "irremediably different," as a "world at the boundaries of civilization" that is therefore "uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable, and ultimately evil." For Sander L. Oilman, Victorian medicine and iconographic convention joined in representing sexuality as perhaps the most "uncontrollable" and "animallike" difference of the colonial black, as "scientific" studies of exaggerated genitalia complemented paintings of "The Hottentot Venus" and of white prostitutes with their complicitous black servants. Pomerance's Treves betrays a common Victorian method of confronting "otherness" in his seemingly innocuous first question to Ross concerning Merrick: "Is he foreign?" The "pinheads" exhibited with Merrick in the play are advertised as imports from the Congo, "the land of darkness," and Nurse Sandwich remarks later that in Ceylon and on the Niger she has treated horrible diseases, "dreadful scourges quite unknown to our more civilized climes." And if deformity and bestial sexual appetite can be ascribed to the colonized, so too can defective cognition, as a policeman in *The Elephant Man* assumes: "People who think right don't look like that then, do they?" Thus, in exhibiting figures like Merrick, the late Victorian peepshow produced a pornographic view based on a double dominance: mastery through gender and the supremacy of imperialism. More so than Lynch's film, Pomerance's drama illuminates both levels of subjection.

Much of Merrick's intrigue, therefore, is explained by feminist theories of cinematic spectatorship, based as they are on a pattern of dominance and submission. It is possible, as Pomerance shows, to go beyond the gender distinctions inherent in such theories and apply this dynamic to the dominance and submission of colonialism. On the one hand, both film and play empower viewers to occupy a superior position and to enter imperiously the forbidden territory they want to see. On the other hand, as the powerless Merrick attains his moral victory which, in Lynch's film, crucially involves going to the theater as a spectator, acquiring the specular power that he had been

denied viewers also identify with him and in so doing may occupy his "feminine" space of masochism. In short, Pomerance's play and Lynch's film embrace several levels of spectating and provide several pleasures. Of special interest is the relation between the pornographic and the melodramatic, both of which foreground women and involve the imposition of sexual or other demands by the powerful on the powerless. Like pornography, the cinema and melodrama empower the viewer even as they commodify the viewed object, marking her submission.

[III]

Of course, Lynch's *The Elephant Man* offers more than the emotional satisfactions of domestic melodrama and the voyeuristic pleasure of the cinema. Through the film's narrative content and cinematic style, Lynch advances sometimes indirect and sometimes more overt criticism of industrial conditions and class inequities in late Victorian England. In the film's first sequence at London Hospital, for instance, Treves is completing an ugly operation on what is presumably a factory worker. The dialogue specifies the cause of the patient's mutilation unsafe industrial practices as Treves bemoans, "We're seeing a lot more of these machine accidents. . . . Abominable things, these machines...." Despite such observations and the shots of sweating laborers and steaming machines, Lynch elects for the most part to focus on personal rather than political issues. Here he differs from Pomerance, to whom we now turn. Again, the differing narrative structures of the film and play account for Pomerance's more substantial critique: while Lynch's audience is emotionally engaged in Merrick's plight, Pomerance's audience is more detached, in part because the issue of Merrick's safety is resolved early in the play. Treves's movement to center stage serves as a catalyst not only for his self-reflection but for the viewers' as well. When Treves begins to express doubts about both modern science and the society that this science serves, he realizes one of the chief ends of the materialist theater: the creation of a moral self-consciousness, what Edward Bond refers to as a "viable knowledge of the self in relation to practical involvement in the world." Although Treves earns this knowledge slowly and painfully, his newly acquired insight may provide the greatest intellectual satisfaction for the play's audience.

Beginning in scene 16 when Treves tries to explain his banishment of Mrs. Kendal, continuing through his soul-searching in the dream sequence of scenes 17 and 18, and concluding with his plaintive "Help me" in scene 19, the dramatic focus of Pomerance's play shifts from Merrick to Treves. Recently, Franco Moretti has compared what he calls a "novelistic event" one that "to achieve meaning" requires the "fundamentally unchallenged stability of everyday life and ordinary administration" with a "tragic event" of personal crisis. The differences between the novelistic and the tragic define Treves's crisis of faith:

The very fissures and chasms which dismantle such stability [the comforting repetitions of everyday life] constitute the most typical instances of the tragic event, whose meaning lies in being a unique turning-point, a sudden illumination after which one's previous existence one's novelistic existence appears irredeemably false.

This "moment of truth" precipitates an unveiling of social structure or of fetishization, a "dereification of everyday life" and a consequent repositioning toward society. Merrick finally causes Treves's crisis of faith, his moment of social truth, in Pomerance's play.

Following Treves's admission that "perhaps [he] was wrong" to expel Mrs. Kendal, his dream exposes his entrapment within Victorian class structure. In the dream Treves plays Merrick and Merrick plays an inquisitive doctor who requests Carr Gomm's permission to examine Gomm's "bloody donkey." Gomm, the governor of London Hospital cast in Ross's role as showman, is reluctant to surrender Treves, a "mainstay of our institution": "He is very valuable. We have invested a great deal in him. He is personal surgeon to the Prince of Wales." Nevertheless, Treves is a negotiable commodity in this scene, since he is also a valuable specimen to "Doctor" Merrick. A "gentleman and a good man," as Gomm promotes him, Treves is "exemplary for study," a characterless representative of his social class devoid of any individuality that might skew results. The dream attempts to redress the impoverishment of thought and experience Treves has suffered as a "mainstay" of the institution.

Treves's evolving understanding also allows him insight into science's co-optation by class and colonial domination. That is, Pomerance is especially concerned about seeing, about what viewing Merrick entails and calls into question. In fact, the play contains critiques of several levels of viewing; the most obvious concern is the authority science and medicine grant for presumably value-free objective viewing. The anatomy theater of the London Hospital in scene 3 authorizes scientific viewing, an authority not shared by the storefront in which Merrick is displayed. Yet when Treves sees Mrs. Kendal expose herself to Merrick, she is condemned as having "no sense of decency." Unfamiliar with social legislation concerning appropriate viewing, Merrick asks about Treves's operation on a patient for a "woman's thing": "Did you see her? Naked? ... Is it okay to see them naked if you cut them up afterwards?" Treves replies that his occupation as a surgeon legitimizes this viewing: "That is science. .. . Science is a different thing. This woman came to me to be. I mean, it is not, well, love, you know." But Merrick does not "know" that his seeing Mrs. Kendal is a "different thing" from Treves's examining his female patients. Similarly, the process Treves has established for allowing Victorian aristocracy to "see" Merrick is institutionally endorsed, whereas Merrick's public exhibitions were closed by London police for indecency.

Hence, one discourse that authorized the public viewing of Merrick was that of Victorian medical science. To further the "interests of science" (Pomerance's expression), Treves displayed Merrick at several medical conventions in the 1880s. One might assume that the viewing audience at such conventions maintained some objective distance, reacting with neither revulsion nor desire but with appropriate detachment. While in *The Birth of the Clinic* Michel Foucault is not discussing Victorian science, the conception of diagnostic viewing he articulates is precisely the one Pomerance's Merrick has so much difficulty comprehending: an objective or "pure Gaze that would be pure Language: a speaking eye." Like other political dramatists Brecht in *Galileo* or Christopher Hampton in *Savages* (1974) Pomerance explodes the myth of a pure gaze, revealing its complicity with other powerful discourses, colonialism, for example. In Savages Hampton's anthropologist Crawshaw identifies the role objective vision plays in such

enterprises as the Brazilian government's extermination of Indians to acquire and develop their land: "[Anthropologists] aren't supposed to make comments on political matters.... They're supposed to forget that the people they're working with are human and treat them as if they were an ancient monument, or graph, or a geological formation. That's what we call science." Like Hampton, Pomerance probes the implications of the "objective" or "diagnostic " gaze, indicating its proximity to the dehumanizing conventions of Victorian colonialism or, in his more recent play *Melons,* to the exploitation of American Indians by big business.

Transforming Merrick's physical grotesque-ness into an analytical metaphor, Treves begins to recognize that above his mostly middle-class patients looms a "deformed" aristocracy, one "bulged out by unlimited resources and the ruthlessness of privilege" and "yoked to the grossest ignorance and constraint." The metaphorical use of Merrick's body continues in Treves's dream when imperial governance is linked to the repression of sexuality. Assuming Treves's place at the podium, Merrick directs our attention to the doctor's displayed body: "The left arm was slighter and fairer, and may be seen in typical position, hand covering the genitals which were treated as a sullen colony in constant need of restriction, governance, punishment. For their own good." The colonial analogy recalls Churchill's aim in writing *Cloud 9,* one of the contemporary theater's cleverest meditations on Victorianism: to show "the idea of colonialism as a parallel to sexual oppression." Similarly, *The Elephant Man* turns sex into an entrapping, self-contradictory discourse: on the one hand, Treves endorses Merrick's reading of romantic literature and his conversation with women; on the other, Treves rehearses the importance of rules in the "home," denying Merrick any opportunity to express sexual feelings. The cruelty of Treves's behavior of alternately encouraging and then deflating Merrick's desire for knowledge of the opposite sex is likened in Treves's dream to the repressive state apparatus of colonial government. (And when colonial subjects escape this needed restriction, as we have mentioned, they end up in sideshows like Merrick's, which need to be closed because they are an affront to decency.)

Immediately after the dream ends, the relation between science and identity emerges in Treves's conversation with Bishop How. Building on the implication of his dream, Treves compares gardening with a science that has "pruned, cropped, pollarded, and somewhat stupefied" the human subject: "Is that all we know how to finally do with whatever? Nature? Is it? Rob it? No, not really, not nature I mean. Ourselves really. Myself really. Robbed, that is. ... I. I. I. I." In his inarticulateness, Treves realizes that the mastery of nature which, along with the mastery of human beings, has always been an aim of both science and civilization exacts a blinding cost on subjectivity. His friendship with Merrick has rekindled Treves's self-consciousness, eroding in the process his belief in science as a phenomenon separable from human society (and in himself as excluded from human participation). His "Help me" echoes Merrick's cry at the train station, and the parallel indicates the depth of Treves's doubts. Affected by the dream and his subsequent questioning of his relationship with Merrick, Treves moves from an incapacity for "self-critical speech," thus an inability to "change," to "despair in fact." The "scientist in an age of science" is now inconsolable, and the daily practice of his vocation offers no relief: "Science, observation, practice, deduction, having led me to these conclusions, can no longer serve as consolation. I apparently see things others

don't." In his confession, Treves evinces a newly formed political vision of the ways in which society has determined his scientific labors: "I have so little time... to keep up with my work. Work being twenty-year-old women who look an abused fifty with worn-outedness; young men with appalling industrial conditions I turn out as soon as possible to return to their labors." He recognizes that inhumane labor conditions form the basis of not only his clinical practice but also his research, which includes a pamphlet on the dangers of wearing corsets. Treves approaches a "totalizing" recognition of his position in London society.

At the instant that Treves, at the climax of his despair, begs Bishop How for help, Merrick pronounces, in Christlike fashion, "It is done." While the "it" refers to Merrick's completion of his model of Saint Phillip's Church, his "Consummatum est" also proclaims Treves's redemption. The salvation, though, is not religious but political, for Treves has already rejected the "mere consolation" of "Christ's church." What is "done" is the opening of Treves's eyes, the maturing of his dialectical awareness of his participation in society a realization that, for Fredric Jameson, defines self-consciousness:

For the Marxist dialectic ... the self-consciousness aimed at is the awareness of the thinker's position in society and in history itself, and of the limits imposed on this awareness by his class position in short of the ideological and situational nature of all thought and of the initial invention of the problems themselves.

Like Treves, the play's spectators have been brought to interrogate the interconnections between Merrick's exploitation and the society in which they live. If they experience only a small part of the insight Treves achieves, then they have participated in and profited from the critical pleasure of the political theater.

[IV]

So, regardless of John Webster's observation, men do stand amazed to see their own deformity. But why? What was it about Merrick that amazed Victorians and continues to attract contemporary audiences? One answer involves the pleasure derived from seeing the secret or the forbidden, from traveling Lynch's dark alleys. Another originates in the voyeuristic pleasures of sideshows and pornography. But if pornography allows the viewer to objectify and dominate the viewed, so too does melodrama. Both foreground issues of power and powerlessness, of possession and dispossession, of sadism and masochism. In addition to experiencing dominance, this "male" prerogative, spectators who identify with Merrick and take pleasure in the poetic justice of his victory are also psychically endorsing his submission, his "female" qualities. In short, in both Lynch's film and Pomerance's play, Merrick provides viewers with opportunities to play both roles, to occupy both positions.

To these private, libidinal satisfactions, Pomerance adds an intellectually gratifying criticism of Victorian society and its claim to moral ascendancy, and he does so in a generic vehicle that encourages his spectators, those "other Victorians, " to contemplate their own cultural superiority. In transforming Victorian culture into a hypocritical,

somewhat barbaric counterpart of today's highly evolved and sophisticated society (Progress with a capital P is really now, was never then), Pomerance also implicates modern audiences in the smugness they despise in his Victorians. Not only have they enjoyed a melodrama and identified with the position of the advanced culture much like the Victorians who felt superior to Britain's colonial peoples they have paid to see a "freak show." Indeed, their participation in the pornography exceeds the Victorians' in that their gaze actually transforms an actor into a freak. Pomerance forces such viewing by insisting that the role of Merrick be played without makeup; when Philip Anglim contorts himself before the spectators' eyes, the metamorphosis is as much theirs as his. Even more so than Treves, and for reasons not nearly so selfless, the audience is setting Merrick up for private viewing.

Source: William E. Holladay and Stephen Watt, "Viewing the Elephant Man," in *PMLA*, October, 1989, Vol. 104, no. 5, pp. 868-81.

Critical Essay #3

In this brief essay, Ricks discusses the recurrent imagery that Pomerance has borrowedfrom Shakespeare 's Romeo and *Juliet, arguing that the playwright uses the material to illustrate the nature of social conformity in the world of The* Elephant Man.

Repeated images the corset, the cathedral model, and the allusion to Romeo and Juliet represent twists on the idea of illusive and restrictive moral standards in Bernard Pomerance's *The Elephant Man*. The corset first stands as a symbol of mere control or restriction, depending on the degree of irony applied to the image. Ross, the freak show proprietor, uses the corset image to describe Merrick: he is the result of "Mother Nature uncorseted." Ross is trying to say that anything produced by an uncorseted (or uncontrolled) Mother Nature would certainly be freakish. But when one realizes that Mother Nature restricted by a man-made fashion garment would probably bear anything but a "natural " child, the irony of the statement comes blaring forth; one would expect that Ross and the rest of "normal" people are anything but natural.

In close relation to this, the corset also stands as a symbol for moral standards imposed by culture, which restrict. Merrick, as the product of an uncorseted Mother Nature, is not inhibited by the social standards the "normal" characters impose on themselves. As Ross infers that the bulk of mankind is the product of a corseted Mother Nature, the inverse is true in their case, and Dr. Frederick Treves, paragon of societal normality, becomes the perfect portrait of mankind's moral maladies. In moral disillusionment, Treves laments the "grotesque ailments" caused by corsets: his "patients do not unstrap themselves of corsets. Some cannot." Treves's bewailment of the English social system advances the idea that a Mother Nature corseted by mankind cannot produce children who act naturally and with honesty about their own feelings. The other reference to the corset is indirect and appears when actress Mrs. Kendal undresses in front of Merrick. This disregard for cultural morals (and they are cultural; African pygmies run naked) is symbolized by nothing less than taking the corset off.

The model of St. Philip's cathedral symbolizes Merrick's knowledge of Treves's constricting moral standards. Each time Merrick discovers another illusive ethic in Treves's system of thought, he adds another piece to the model. At the moment Treves himself becomes uncorseted from these moral illusions still suffering the "most grotesque ailments" and in despair bemoaning the futility of society's standards, Merrick fits the final piece on St. Philip's. This symbol closely ties with the allusion to Romeo and Juliet. Merrick states, "When the illusion ended, [Romeo] had to kill himself." Since the cathedral represents Merrick's knowledge of Treves's faulty standards, when the cathedral is completed, the illusion ends, and Merrick dies. Juliet, played of course by Mrs. Kendal, helps by removing the corset to destroy the illusion of Treves' morals; this ties the images of corset and cathedral and the Shakespeare allusion together. Mrs. Kendal's permanent departure from the play represents Juliet's demise and foreshadows the death of Romeo.

Source: Val Ricks. "Pomerance's *The Elephant Man,*" in the *Explicator*, Vol. 46, no. 4, Summer, 1988, pp. 48^9.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Greiff compares the tragic elements in Dr. Treves to those found in Dr. Dysart in Equus.

Two highly successful contemporary plays are so alike in conception and design that one description seems to serve for both. A doctor and his patient are the major characters in these plays, with their relationship and conflict quickly becoming the dominant dramatic center. The doctors in both works are professionally prominent and, at least to the audience's initial view, comfortable within the norms and boundaries provided them by society. Their patients, however, are freaks. One suffers profound mental disturbance, to the point of violence, while the other is so physically distorted that few people can stand his presence or sight. The patients, in fact, are pariahs, shunned not only by society but by blood-kin as well. Their doctors nevertheless draw very close to them and, with partial or even complete success, attempt a process of normalization and cure. At the end, however, the cure proves to be double-edged, so that we remain unsure whether patient or doctor has been the more profoundly touched. Both doctors contemplate the final results of their skill deeply unsettled about themselves and their actions. They wonder whether their effort to heal a special patient has really been a tampering with something beyond themselves an assault upon uniqueness by simple and successful mediocrity.

The plays in question are Peter Shaffer's *Equus* and Bernard Pomerance's *The Elephant Man*. They can be introduced with the same general outline because they are founded upon an identical confrontation between the normal and the extraordinary. What Martin Dysart and Alan Strang, through their encounter and juxtaposition, achieve for the one play, Frederick Treves and John Merrick achieve for the other. My purpose in pointing this out is not merely to reveal surprising parallels for their own sake. Rather, as I hope to show, the dramatic pattern shared by *Equus* and *The Elephant Man* demonstrates something important beyond specific detail. It offers us, I believe, new perspectives on the very old issue of tragedy and, in particular, on the tragic hero as he remains faithful to the contemporary and to the timeless in human affairs.

On initial encounter, Alan Strang and John Merrick do not seem possible candidates for tragedy because their human condition appears perverse and not noble, diminished and not larger than life. The first is a lower middle-class youth whose obsession with horses has finally led him to psychosis and violence. The second is destitute and, as a matter of historical record, the world's most extreme case of physical deformity. His appearance has caused men to riot and to attack him in disgust. Yet as is clear from such works as *The Oresteia* or *Philoctetes*, madness, even hideousness, are not disqualifications from tragic stature so long as there is elevation at the same time. For Alan and Merrick alike the source of elevation the bow which transcends their wounds is art. Alan, in his madness, spins a private and unique mythology utterly compelling to himself, to his psychiatrist Dysart, and finally to the audience. Merrick builds a replica, or imitation, of St. Phillip's Church which, like Mozart's music in Shaffer's *Amadeus*, represents human effort to rise from the earth and commune with God. In a fascinating

parallel between the two plays, Alan and Merrick emerge as artists by virtue of an identical and paradoxical formulation. For both of them, art and the artist are born in the coalescence of squalor and the sublime or holy, what Yeats has called "The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor" (Yeats, 1959). Thus Alan makes the hot creatures of the stable into his gods and, through their celebration, becomes a poet and mystic. Thus Merrick finds within his own being and life both the beast which gives him his nickname and the God-urge, both the underpinnings of his church and the inspiration to build its arches and spires. Merrick himself states the artistic equation for both plays in the following exchange with his confidante, Mrs. Kendal:

MRS. KENDAL: You are an artist, John Merrick, an artist.

MERRICK: I did not begin to build at first. Not till I saw what St. Phillip's really was. It is not stone and steel and glass; it is an imitation of grace flying up and up from the mud. So I make my imitation of an imitation. But even in that is heaven to me, Mrs. Kendal (Pomerance, 1979).

The close kinship between Alan and Merrick does not require them to be alike in the execution and style of their art. Alan is certainly the more original of the two, with Merrick emerging as a kind of mimetic or Aristotelian craftsman. Also, Alan is by far the more emotionally frenzied creator, Dio-nysian in contrast to Merrick's Apollonian reserve. As a result, Alan's mythic outbursts shock Dysart and the public while, by an opposite process, Merrick builds his church one piece at a time, quietly, all through the second half of his play. Like Dionysus and Apollo, Alan and Merrick are brothers at heart, yet not identical nor even similar on the surface.

Born as artists through the same union of oppo-sites, they are, however, destined to suffer a similar destruction and ordeal. Each is patient to a skilled doctor, also a friend, whose intention is to cure the special figure and as far as possible make him normal. Words like "normal," "average," and "ordinary" saturate both plays, and in the mouths of the two doctors become prophecies for Alan and Merrick. Reflecting the optimism of his age, Frederick Treves reveals the following plan for his patient:

My aim's to lead him to as normal a life as possible. His terror of us all comes from having been held at arm's length from society. I am determined that shall end. For example, he loves to meet people and converse. I am determined he shall. For example, he had never seen the inside of any normal home before. I had him to mine, and what a reward, Mrs. Kendal; his astonishment, his joy at the most ordinary things (Pomerance, 1979).

Martin Dysart's tone is by contrast bitter and pessimistic, but the likeness of the message remains unmistakable:

I'll set him on a nice mini-scooter and send him puttering off into the Normal world where animals are treated *properly*: made extinct, or put into servitude, or tethered all their lives in dim light, just to feed it! I'll give him the good Normal world where we're tethered beside them blinking our nights away in a nonstop drench of cathode-ray over

our shrivelling heads! I'll take away his Field of Ha Ha, and give him Normal places for his ecstasy (Shaffer, 1974).

Equus ends with the implication that Dysart will succeed, and that Alan will return to normalcy and to society. No such hope is possible for Merrick, who dies at the end of his play, in keeping with historical fact. This opposition is misleading, however, because the plays really end alike for their artist-freaks, even on an identical bit of imagery. The final act performed by Alan and Merrick is to fall asleep on stage, implying that a move toward the norm involves artistic paralysis or worse. Surely Alan's unconscious collapse in Dysart' s arms represents his creative death since, all along, his madness has been his poetic source. Now cured, he will never sing of Equus and the other god-beasts again. The three-way equation of normality, sleep, and death becomes even more explicit and literal in Pomerance's play. Here John Merrick dies attempting for the first time to fall asleep in a "normal" position, something his unnaturally heavy head has always made impossible. This death of both the artist and the man has been foretold by Treves in the previous scene when, like Dysart, he begins to doubt his own remedies: "It is just it is the overarc of things, quite inescapable that as he's achieved greater and greater normality, his condition's edged him closer to the grave. So a parable of growing up? To become more normal is to die?" (Pomerance, 1979).

Thus in *Equus* and *The Elephant Man*, alike, two exceptional figures fall into the misfortune of normalcy and are destroyed. Before a conclusion is reached that the plays are, therefore, traditional tragedy, their other pair of characters should be examined. The brother-physicians Dysart and Treves, interesting and significant in their own right, may themselves have some claim to the status of protagonist. One clear truth about both of them is their opposition, in every respect, to their patients. Where Alan and Merrick touch the far extremes of dirt and deity, Treves and Dysart exist together on neutral ground between the two. They never traffic with the beasts, but surely never approach heaven or the gods either.

Also in contrast to the creative patients, these two healers are ironically destroyers. In a nearly exact parallel between the plays, both doctors reveal at least a subconscious awareness of their destructive qualities through dreams. Within Dysart's dream, and Treves's, an identical vision of carving and dismemberment functions as the metaphor of self-revelation. Dysart tells his friend Hesther Salomon that in his dream he appears as "a chief priest in Homeric Greece" officiating at a sacrifice of children. He relates that:

As each child steps forward ... with a surgical skill which amazes even me, I fit in the knife and slice elegantly down to the navel, just like a seamstress following a pattern. I part the flaps, sever the inner tubes, yank them out and throw them hot and steaming on to the floor. The other two [priests] then study the pattern they make, as if they were reading hieroglyphics. It's obvious to me that I'm tops as chief priest. It's this unique talent for carving that has got me where I am (Shaffer, 1974).

Treves's dream is acted out rather than told, but with no variation to the central image. In it he and Merrick repeat an earlier scene, only with their roles reversed. Merrick now assumes the dream-identity of physician conducting an anatomical lecture, with Treves

on display as patient-specimen. Among several revealing (and often amusing) details, Merrick describes "The surgeon's hands [which] were well-developed and strong, capable of the most delicate carvings-up, for others' own good" (Pomerance, 1979).

Any operation or sacrifice performed on victims as dynamic as Alan and Merrick is bound to have its impact upon the performer himself. For Dysart and Treves, together, this proves to be revelation and a profoundly new awareness of life. It is possible to suggest, in fact, that as the doctors lead their patients toward average sleep, they are themselves awakened in the process to permanent and disturbing perception. Such a turnabout seems most appropriate when one recalls that Alan and Merrick are, after all, artists. They may be victimized by sacrificial cure, but not before having the chance to infect their healers with a bit of the visionary disease.

Again alike, Dysart and Treves find that their newly-gained insight is two fold. First, they both reach some understanding of what it means to live beyond the borders of complacent normalcy, as Alan and Merrick have done. At a key point in each play, the doctor takes the place of his patient to experience what Dysart calls "Pain that's unique" to the very special individual (Shaffer, 1974). In *The Elephant Man* this occurs comically for Treves during the dream-scene, mentioned above, where the patient turns physician and the physician, for once, becomes a freak on display. In the very next scene with the comedy ended and Treves now feeling his own private pain the doctor cries out "help me" and weeps, exactly as Merrick did at the start of their relationship (Pomerance, 1979). For Dysart, the taking on of Alan's burden comes during the play's final scene. Purged from the patient's soul and mind, the god-beast now commands the doctor's attention, perhaps permanently:

And now for me it never stops: that voice of Equus out of the cave 'Why Me? ... Why Me? ... Account for Me!' ... All right I surrender! I say it... In an ultimate sense I cannot know what I do in this place yet I do ultimate things. Essentially I cannot know what I do yet I do essential things. Irreversible, terminal things. I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking at heads! (Shaffer, 1974).

The second side of both doctors' awakening is paradoxically opposite to the first. In the very sharing of their patients' experience, Dysart and Treves also come to know their essential separation from these patients. In their close approach to the extraordinary figure and his uniqueness, the brother-physicians sadly discover their own contrasting and enduring mediocrity. For Dysart, a single word and his preoccupation with it serve to measure this new self-awareness. The slang-term for psychiatrist, "shrink," begins to gain literal meaning during the play, not so much to signify Dysart's effect on his patient but to inform him of his own existence in contrast to Alan's: "Without worship you shrink, it's as brutal as that... I shrank my *own* life. No one can do it for you. I settled for being pallid and provincial, out of my own eternal timidity" (Shaffer, 1974). Within *The Elephant Man*, as well, one word figures heavily [in] Treves's developing perception of himself. This time the word is "consolation," and it recurs throughout the play reflecting several of its different meanings (Pomerance, 1979). At the very outset, the hospital administrator Carr Gomm tells Treves that prominence, title, and "100 guinea fees" will prove "an excellent consolation prize" (Pomerance, 1979). Treves does not understand

this at first. Once having encountered Merrick, however, he finds the meaning all too clear and inescapable. The world's familiar honors and achievements are merely what most of mankind accepts in lieu of transcendence, in consolation for being average. When, just before Merrick's death, Treves again thinks about consolation, it is with touching awareness that the idea defines his life, yet remains utterly unsatisfying:

I am an extremely successful Englishman in a successful and respected England which informs me daily by the way it lives that it wants to die. I am in despair in fact. Science, observation, practice, deduction, having led me to these conclusions, can no longer serve as consolation. I apparently see things others don't. I am sure we were not born for mere consolation (Pomerance, 1979).

Peter Shaffer and Bernard Pomerance have thus, together, provided recent drama with a distinct pattern whereby two opposite figures influence one another toward opposite destinies. When the process is complete, an extraordinary person has been lost, while a far more typical person has been led to important insight and self-recognition. If the plays in question are tragedies, then their authors may be providing audiences and readers with something even more noteworthy a dramatic strategy allowing for alternative protagonists or two tragic heroes in place of the traditional one.

Alan and Merrick certainly approximate the classical tragic hero and preserve a design that is thousands of years old. They are separated from society by drastic flaws, yet also by something exceptional within themselves which elevates and confers uniqueness. Both finally suffer a destructive fall, and all who view it are moved to strong emotion and a sense of major loss. By contrast, Dysart and Treves do not conform to this timeless pattern. They are ordinary men who encounter the extraordinary but cannot attain it, and who become tragic precisely in their recognition of this truth.

In the presence of such differences on stage, we as audience discover a choice of heroes to identify with or, more accurately, find a dual identification with both of them. To witness and thus share the fall of Alan and Merrick is, through an age-old ritual, to commune with our essential humanity, utterly removed from time and social process. The two unique individuals, and their stories, provide ways to celebrate the eternal freak of nature that is man the half-beast with a lust for transcendence, the imaginative creature so worthy of wonder, yet so easily destroyed. What Dysart and Treves provide, in contrast, is a mirror not for eternity but for today. From the vantage-point of our study or theater seat, we see in them our immediate image and circumstances, the human condition now burdened by history, society, and personal limitation. The two doctors function as effective tragic figures, I believe, because the consolations and diminishments of their lives are immediately recognized as our own. Like them, most of us who view their drama have a share in the world's prestige and some private version of the 100 guinea fee. Confronted with the utterly extraordinary, again like them, we take accurate stock of our own insignificance, too intellectually truthful and sensitive to do anything less. The honest shock of recognition suffered by Dysart and Treves, in short, purifies the tribe as a whole. The emotions awakened through such an experience differ from our response to the unique hero's fall, yet possess an equally compelling poignancy and depth.

At least one of the playwrights here under study has pursued the dual protagonists, and the encounter of normal man with the extraordinary, into his most recent work. As a result, Salieri and Mozart collide and struggle, during Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*, much the same way the paired characters did in the earlier plays, although with some variations to the basic pattern. Amadeus himself now functions as the artist-creature who, along with Alan and Merrick, moves toward a traditionally tragic destruction and fall. His art is more tangible, and public, than his brothers' largely solitary efforts, yet in essence the same by virtue of being finally God-driven. The squalid along with the sublime resides in Mozart too, only now emerging comically (and somewhat trivially) through the composer's infantile preoccupations with excrement and with beasts. The audience, for example, sees Mozart make his initial entrance pretending to be a cat, and his first spoken line in the play is miaow.

Opposing this figure is Shaffer's Antonio Salieri, like Dysart and Treves all too desperately normal (and successful) by contrast. Salieri is awakened through contact with his inspired creature, as were the physicians, to the nature of transcendence and to its utter absence in himself. Here, however, a difference arises between this play and the first two. Salieri is honest, like the doctors, in taking his own measure against genius yet, unlike them, aroused to rage and malice by the results. Where Dysart and Treves may have revealed destructive traits subconsciously, and despite genuine intentions to cure, Salieri proves to be overtly vicious toward his counterpart. No healer to Mozart in any sense, he vows to destroy the divine creature and thereby to strike a blow against the God who has sold him short.

My purpose in mentioning *Amadeus* here is not to pursue a detailed comparison of three plays, although I am sure this would yield worthwhile results. Rather, I wish to stress a clear pattern for tragic character held in common by this work and the previous two. If the pattern emerged, over the past decade, through the efforts of Shaffer and Pomerance, it surely still persists in a current and highly visible example of drama today. This is as it should be, because the pattern in question represents a unique contribution to recent theater a tragic mask whose countenance is twofold. One of its faces is familiar since, through Dysart, Treves, and Salieri, it exactly captures the look of contemporary man. Its other more distorted face is that of Alan, Merrick, and Mozart. While hardly average or ordinary, this face unlike the first preserves the essential and the eternal human expression.

Source: Louis K. Greiff, "Two for the Price of One: Tragedy and the Dual Hero in *Equus* and *The Elephant Man,*" in *Within the Dramatic Spectrum,* edited by Karelisa V. Hartigan, Lanhani, MD: University Presses of America, 1986, pp. 64 77.

Critical Essay #5

In the following essay, Larson contends that Pomerance's play is a parable, informing the audience of truths they don't expect or even want to hear.

What is an elephant compared to a man?

Brecht, *A Man's a Man*

[T]he more we study Art, the less we care for Nature. What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition.... Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place. Wilde, "The Decay of Lying"

[Scripture says] that God is a hidden God, and that since the corruption of nature, He has left men in a darkness from which they can escape only through Jesus Christ.... *Vere tu es Deus absconditus*. Pascal, *Pensees*

In 1977 Foco Novo, a radical fringe group named after a play by Bernard Pomerance about South American guerrillas, first produced *The Elephant Man* in England; early in 1979, the play opened in mid-Manhattan at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, a worship space built into the Citicorp Center; a few months later, the production was moved to a Victorian theater on Broadway, where it has enjoyed a long run. This brief production history suggests the broad span of reference in this most recent Pomerance play: beginning in radical politics, it ends in metaphysics, and in between, it directs questions of aesthetics and ethics against show business, theatrical illusion, and all kinds of imitative performance from language learning to orthodox religious discipline and the imitation of Christ.

This thematic range makes for some incoherence: a few critics have justly observed that the play contains too many allusions, without development, too many ideas which the theater audience can scarcely take in. Yet the incomplete web the allusions weave entangles many who have seen this play in a mysterious enchantment that invites interpretation. The very multiplicity of themes and evocations is also essential to the power of a drama that expands its own dimensions through a dynamic of parable. Unfolding through multiple reversals, questioning its own premises while challenging the expectations of its hearers, *The Elephant Man* grows larger as we experience it and invites the audience to enlarge its own critical perceptions and sympathies. In its parabolic movement, Pomerance's play extends itself beyond its leftist critique as well as its absurdist anguish to offer a slender opening for transcendent religious hope. These surprising expansions make *The Elephant Man* of considerable interest as dramatic parable to students of the modern theater.

I

In the history of the freak John Merrick, popularly known as the Elephant Man, Pomerance found a subject that invited both leftist and absurdist interpretations, but finally eluded them. Merrick was first of all the archetypal social victim of the Victorian city a misshapen child of the workhouse who eventually sought out the circus as the only means of earning his livelihood. Exploited, banned as "indecent," and at length abandoned by his managers, Merrick was fortuitously rescued by the young surgeon Mr. Frederick Treves, then rising in his profession. Treves brought Merrick to the London Hospital to study the incurable disorder (neurofibromatosis) that had made a "chaotic anatomical wilderness" of his body. But the scientist also sought to cure the creature's sense of humiliation and to make him "a man like others."

Treves's *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences*, published thirty years after the experience, tells an affecting rags-to-riches story of Merrick's last years at the London Hospital (1886-1890). It is well known that his aristocratic circle of late Victorians studied, domesticated, and exalted the Elephant Man, a strange cult figure altogether suiting the needs peculiar to the *fin de siecle*. Like Little Nell in Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (which forty years earlier had given impetus in the nineteenth century to this sort of worship), Merrick was perceived as a figure of saintly suffering "ennobled " by troubles which he never resented, always forgave. Treves's account suggests the tone of this worship: [the Elephant Man] had passed through the fire and had come out unscathed.... He showed himself to be a gentle, affectionate and lovable creature, as amiable as a happy woman, free from any trace of cynicism or resentment, without a grievance and without an unkind word for anyone. I have never heard him complain. I have never heard him deplore his ruined life or resent the treatment he had received at the hands of callous keepers. His journey through life had been indeed along a *via dolorosa*, the road had been uphill all the way, and now, when the night was at its blackest and the way most steep, he had suddenly found himself, as it were, in a friendly inn, bright with light and warm with welcome. His gratitude to those about him was pathetic in its sincerity and eloquent in the childlike simplicity with which it was expressed.

If Treves seems to protest too much, later he allows himself to suggest that the "accidental" death of the Elephant Man by asphyxiation was an act of suicide. This veiled possibility seems to have made it all the more necessary after his death that Merrick become a religious emblem, shoring up his benefactors' belief in themselves as vessels of "the mercy of God," a God whom they did not otherwise honor. Despite his physical and social entrapments, however, Merrick remains an appealing figure. All the accounts, including Ashley Montagu's 1972 book, *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity,* persuasively present him as an afflicted man who transcended his conditions and possessed his soul.

Out of these materials, Pomerance has constructed an imaginative work that is considerably more than historical drama, although *The Elephant Man* could be studied alone for its remarkable display of late Victorian attitudes: the triumphal spirit of nineteenth-century science, with its undercurrent of anxiety about beastly origins; the hubris of Empire, with its high-minded cant about the "inferior races"; a callous social engineering, pursued in the same spirit of the Mechanical Age that produced social

victims like Merrick; the retrenchment of religious orthodoxy, behind invocations to Duty and a hypocritical sexual code; the new idealizing of the sensual Pre-Raphaelite woman; the fatalism of "Hap" in a Godforsaken universe; the poetry of religion replacing religion; the late Romanticist cult of the victimized artist; and the aristocratic voyeurism of the Decadence, with its cultivation of hothouse curiosities and strange behaviors *a rebours.* Oscar Wilde, another elephantine "freak" of the period who suffered from public opinion, had protested in "The Decay of Lying" (1889) his contemporaries' "monstrous worship of facts" and ridiculed the unimaginative writer who "is to be found at the Librairie Nationale, or at the British Museum, shamelessly reading up his subject." Pomerance's reading, on the contrary, is genuine *recherche;* he has drawn upon the Treves/ Montagu biographic materials not just to ground his play in their facts, but to discover useable dramatic tensions within their unintended fictions.

As Leslie Fiedler has suggested, the stories we tell about mutations reflect our needs to fit their differences into some apprehensible design. The Elephant Man's benefactors and Merrick himself responded to his freakish nature by designing stories, drawn upon culture myths, that inadequately accounted for it. Pomerance, sensitive to the allure of such coherences, reflects skeptically in his play on the earlier accounts of Merrick's beautiful spirit and of his captors' beneficence; the play also emphasizes certain clues in these accounts in order to heighten the contradictions in the Elephant Man's struggle for survival in society. But if Pomerance goes beyond historical reports in these ways, he confirms unexpectedly the central intuition they share: he too is fascinated by the mystery of Merrick's being. Mingling skepticism with wonder, Pomerance's version of the story is neither the product of late Victorian myth-making nor a further act of twentieth-century demythologizing, but a dramatic parable that seems to have emerged from the playwright's surprising encounter with his "subject."

The evocation of wonder is remarkable, because a "problem-solving" language and method permeate the play. In a largely cryptic interview with the *New York Times*, Pomerance has called his approach to theater "left-rationalist": "If you point out an error and appeal for the reason," he explains, "then that is a step in the right direction." Often the clipped, wry, ironic language of the play employs the forms of logic to expose errors and appeal for reasons. In this idiom, the wise naif Merrick is the dialectical questioner of social injustice; but since he is deformed by this society, he is also put forward himself as "proof," as the central exhibit in the play's argument against the present social order. Yet at the end of the play, the "benighted" Sir Frederick confesses that scientific "observation, practice, [and] deduction" have led him to "conclusions " that expose the inadequacy of his rationalism for providing either truth or consolation. Without diminishing its political impact (stronger in the London production), the play shows us that a problem-solving logic is insufficient for head or heart.

What, then, does the case of the Elephant Man "prove"? If the playwright's only project were to "point" to Merrick's shaping as "error," the socially deformed man we encounter in the second half of the play would merely have been reduced to an imitation man, and the play would offer nothing more than the cynical conclusions of Brecht' s song in *A Man's a Man:*

You can do with a human being what you will. Take him apart like a car, rebuild him bit by bit As you will see, he has nothing to lose by it.

The miracle of John Merrick is that, although he is rebuilt by the social engineers, he is not utterly "robbed" (Treves's word) of the mystery of his being. In communicating this mystery on stage, *The Elephant Man* surpasses its own critical "left-rationalist " formulations.

Interestingly, this self-questioning is one of the ways Pomerance's play seems not to depart from, but to be indebted to the early work of Brecht, who elaborated an elephant/man joke in *A Man's a Man* and *The Elephant Calf*. Both plays, which Pomerance adapted for the Hampstead Theatre in 1975, contain dozens of lines and songs that might gloss the later play on the Brechtian theme of society's tyranny over the individual soul and the destructive shaping of the Model Citizen. In *The Elephant Calf,* Brecht's critical theater playfully undermines itself with the self-conscious admission that "Art can prove anything." Rushing willy-nilly to demonstrate that the baby elephant on trial really "is a man" and a matricide, one character urges: it is unprecedented, which I am also ready to prove, in fact I will prove anything you like, and will contend even more than that, and never be put off but always insist on what I see the way I see it, and prove it, too, for, I ask you: what is anything without proof?

The Elephant Calf, with its mockery of a trial that is also a play, is a burlesque of theatrical proof; visually, it is theater "seen from the side," so that backstage business is literally exposed. (Brecht's staging device, with a theater curtain at a right angle to the audience dividing the platform into a visible before/behind theater on the stage, is borrowed for an early circus scene in *The Elephant Man.)* Robert Brustein has argued that Brecht's plays reveal the inadequacy of their own frontal attacks on capitalist society by pointing to errors without providing persuasive reasons:

On the surface,... [Brecht's revolt] is directed against the hypocrisy, avarice, and injustice of bourgeois society; in the depths, against the disorder of the universe and the chaos in the human soul. Brecht's social revolt is objective, active, remedial, realistic; his existential revolt is subjective, passive, irremediable, and Romantic. The conflict between these two modes of rebellion issues in the dialectic of Brecht's plays....

A similar dialectic is present in *The Elephant Man*. This play does not make its impact only as a leftist morality play, but goes behind or under or through this "stage" to reach for unsettling questions about "the disorder of the universe and the chaos in the human soul." Stanley Kauffmann, among others, has identified the play's "most suggestive " theme as "the arbitrariness of existence, posed against a hunger for design." Near the end of the play Pomerance does plant proofs for an absurdist interpretation, but, as I shall argue later, the production undermines these too. To become a dramatic parable with a religious dimension, *The Elephant Man* reaches beyond its own absurdist/leftist dialectic.

Before offering an analysis of the play's structure, let me summarize here my general conclusion and set forth some definitions. Like the heuristic modern fictions Frank

Kermode has described in *The Sense of an Ending,* Pomerance's play overturns its own formulas and "disconfirms" audience expectations in order to create the sense that his dramatic fiction, through these repeated reversals, is "finding something out for us, something *real*." This heuristic pattern is also characteristic of parabolic structures. Here Kermode's more recent writing on parable is less helpful than John Dominic Crossan's theology of story in *The Dark Interval* and *In Parables*, which draws upon the work of Levi-Strauss to offer a rather specialized account of parabolic teaching in the Gospels. Crossan defines parable not only as a form of narrative, but also as a story event: it is an "event" not because something happens in the parable's plot, but because something happens *between* this plot and the story the hearers expected to hear. The parables maker's structure of expression, says Crossan, confronts the hearers' different structure of expectation. (As parable begins to reveal the kind of story it is, a hearer's immediate response may be: "'I don't know what you mean by that story but I'm certain I don't like it.'") Parable, then, requires an audience, is inherently dramatic, and turns on a surprise which draws in the hearers as critical participants. Through their critical participation, they are transformed or they reject the parable, and effectively exclude themselves from the Kingdom.

Crossan describes parable's structure as beginning with conventional expectations in a setting familiar to the listeners, with accepted values intact. Then an unexpected force (an "advent") enters into the story to overturn its terms of value (such as rich/ poor), at that moment reversing the hearers' conventional expectations: their prejudices, common sense, cherished ethics, world view in a word, their "myths." Reversal challenges the hearers to new action, but the story's ending does not synthesize all its dissonances into an explicit lesson that tells them precisely what to do, as a moral example story would. In the context of Crossan's theology of story, he argues that in the New Testament parables and in parabolic moments of human lives, the Kingdom of God arrives in sovereign freedom to "shatter the deep structure of our accepted world" and open up a "new world" and unforeseen relationships. Crossan acknowledges that people cannot live without "myths," but "To be human and to remain open to transcendental experience demands a willingness to be 'parabled.

Underlying *The Elephant Man* is this definition of what it means to be human; to become nonhuman is to live completely enclosed by myths, such as the late Victorian myth of the "Elephant Man." While Pomerance's play cannot be claimed as a Christian parable (even with Merrick as its Christ figure), its dramatic power derives from its internal dynamics of parable (Crossan's dialectic of advent/reversal/ action), as well as from its parabolic impact on the theater audience, whose conventional responses of judgment and sympathy are challenged by the play. On stage, Merrick himself is parabolic, overturning the other characters' expectations of him and of themselves; in turn, they are parabolic for him. (As Crossan says, "It takes two to parable.") In Merrick's transforming relationships with Sir Frederick Treves, the actress Mrs. Kendal, and the churchman Bishop Walsham How, established barriers of thought, language, and feeling are shattered at least briefly and unforeseen human possibilities emerge for simple kindness, more thoughtful understanding, and sensitivity to suffering as well as to beauty in unexpected places. In the growing compassion of some characters, and in Merrick's rare epiphanies of harmony and loveliness, a barely intimated hope for

community is renewed out of the social "swamp," and the mystery of being is momentarily revealed. Through all these transformations, Pomerance's drama becomes parabolic for itself, questioning its own leftist and absurdist formulations which exclude divine presence. Because of these several parabolic dimensions, *The Elephant Man* at length emerges neither as a leftist morality play nor as an absurd drama, but as a kind of modern mystery play through which we glimpse the possibility of a transcendent realm of being. To understand how Pomerance' s parabolic structures work to make this happen, we must turn to the text as interpreted in the New York production directed by Jack Hofsiss.

II

The Elephant Man opens with a ridiculously complacent Freddie Treves presenting himself to the audience as a newly arrived surgeon at the London Hospital who relishes his "excessive blessings":

A happy childhood in Dorset.

A scientist in an age of science.

In an English age, an Englishman.

These concords are brutally disrupted as the scene shifts across Whitechapel Road. Before a garish carnival booth, a rotund manager hawks his traveling mutation show as "... Mother Nature uncorseted and in malignant rage!" But the main attraction is the Elephant Man's suffering from exposure to his fellow men. Ross cries out:

Tuppence only, step in and see: This side of the grave, John Merrick has no hope nor expectation of relief. In every sense his situation is desperate. His physical agony is exceeded only by his mental anguish, a despised creature without consolation. Tuppence only, step in and see! To live with his physical hideousness, incapacitating deformities and unremitting pain is trial enough, but to be exposed to the cruelly lacerating expressions of horror and disgust by all who behold him is even more difficult to bear. Tuppence only, step in and see! For in order to survive, Merrick forces himself to suffer these humiliations, I repeat, humiliations, in order to survive, thus he exposes himself to crowds who pay to gape and yawp at this freak of nature, the Elephant Man.

(Ironically, Pomerance has lifted this barker's spiel almost verbatim from the humanitarian sentiments of Ashley Montagu in his *Study in Human Dignity*.) The voyeuristic appeals of Ross are rapidly succeeded by the subtler cruelty of the brash young lecturer in anatomy, who rents the Elephant Man for the day. Back at the hospital with his anatomical exhibit, Treves lectures while pointing with his cane to projected photographs of the real Merrick (and the past-tense words he uses come directly from the real Sir Frederick's journal):

The most striking feature about him was his enormous head. Its circumference was about that of a man's waist. From the brow there projected a huge bony mass like a loaf, while from the back of his head hung a bag of spongy fungous-looking skin.... The

deformities rendered the face utterly incapable of the expression of any emotion whatsoever.... The right arm was of enormous size and shapeless.... The right hand was large and clumsy a fin or paddle rather than a hand.... The other arm was remarkable by contrast. It was not only normal, but was moreover a delicately shaped limb covered with a fine skin and provided with a beautiful hand which any woman might have envied.... The lower limbs.... were unwieldy, dropsical-looking, and grossly misshapen.

These opening speeches are worth quoting at length, because they suggest how Pomerance is sensitive to the formative or deforming effects of language in ways his predecessors were not when they told the Elephant Man story. The New York production brings out these effects most vividly. During this lecture-demonstration, waiting in a patch of light to Treves's side, is a handsome actor who is Apollonian in physique, loincloth-clad, and cruciform in posture, with arms angled slightly from his body and palms toward the audience. As the lecture proceeds, the actor begins to "present" the Elephant Man character by slowly contorting his straight form until he has become "crooked," as though under the deforming pressure of Treves's anatomical jargon and its implicit normative values.

If this initiating scene portends Merrick's slow crucifixion by many kinds of civilizing languages in the play, it also intimates that he will somehow survive this torture of conditioning. The twisted posture that the actor maintains throughout the play never allows us wholly to forget the shocking photographs, but what the audience actually sees is an elegant theatrical paradox: a human figure imitating an inhuman creature, or in the Platonic terms the play invokes, the essential Form of a god with the mere Appearance of mortal being. Because Pomerance has chosen not to paint and pad his freak literalistically, Merrick ever in a double figure reminds us of the "other" dimension of beauty and wholeness that is nearly absent from the ugly and broken world the play exposes. One cannot choose to see him only as pathetically lamed, twisted, and barely articulate: the actor playing Merrick is also a symbol of transcendence always present on the stage. And it is important to the play's intimation of hope that we look critically *through this symbol* as we watch Merrick's deformation by the other characters, including their appropriation of the Elephant Man as a metaphor for their condition.

Swift melodramatic scenes follow the lecture-demonstration: Merrick, back on the streets, is insulted, deported, beaten, robbed, abandoned. Yet Merrick believes in "happiness," and shows he is susceptible of compassion for other victims and capable of wit in the face of brutality. When he meets up with Treves again, the doctor takes him "home" to the London Hospital to stay. Here Treves teaches the uncouth creature to bathe himself and to repeat such ordering sentences as, "Rules make us happy because they are for our own good." Pomerance's implicit message in this scene is Peter Handke's explicit one in *Kaspar*: "You have a sentence of which you can make a model for yourself . . . which will exorcise every disorder from you." It is just what Merrick needs, one might think, and certainly what his keepers need for this potentially disruptive patient: "You can quiet yourself with sentences. ..," says Kaspar; "you can be nice and quiet." With some difficulty, Merrick learns to imitate his betters, yet this naif/victim knows too much to succumb totally to the imitation of their sentences or their myths. When Treves defends the peremptory firing of a staring hospital attendant as a

"merciful" act for Merrick's good, the freak questions his keeper (in the "left-rationalist" manner): "If your mercy is so cruel, what do you have for justice?" Such early lines seem to promise that Merrick will be the little child who leads the others to transcend their egoistic naivete and civilized barbarism.

From the beginning, John Merrick is a parabolic presence in Treves's life, causing him to revalue his beliefs and at length to abandon them as inhuman and untrue. Other relations too are developing along these lines in the first half of the play. Most important is Merrick's encounter with a woman. Treves has hired the celebrated actress, Madge Kendal, to provide the civilizing fiction of companionship for the Elephant Man, from whom other women less practiced in the arts of illusion have run in horror. Treves's shallow expectations and Mrs. Kendal's are completely overthrown. Despite her initial repugnance, which she controls at first behind a tough professional facade, Merrick's beauty of spirit quickly charms her into authentic response. Their encounters form the most moving scenes in the play. "[SJometimes I think my head is so big," he confides to her, "because it is so full of dreams.... Do you know what happens when dreams cannot get out?" When he shares his strangely wise interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet,* which he has been reading, the actress (as well as the audience) discovers his sensibility to be "extraordinary". Merrick's unaffected humanity forces Mrs. Kendal, who has been a stage Juliet, to abandon her glibly theatrical myth of "romance" for the reality of a courageous friendship, for *agape* if not yet *ems.* Entering the existentially open, potentially dangerous territory of this out-of-bounds relation, Kendal and Merrick have stepped into the uncharted realm of parabolic action. It is taking this step that makes it possible for Pomerance's drama in its first half to move through and past its initial rationalist social analysis. For without love, Merrick asks simply, "why should there be a play?"

When this pair shake hands (in the New York production, when she chooses to take not his well-formed left hand but his right "fin or paddle rather than a hand"), and when they nearly touch again later, the play seems to be reaching for moments of apocalyptic transformation in the marriage of different realms of being. These glimpses of what Kendal calls "Paradise" happen outside the roles prescribed by the London Hospital world, a false Victorian earthly paradise; and the couple's poetic exchanges likewise move beyond the practiced formulas of polite discourse, the routine "I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance" that rings metallically through many social encounters. Yet some kind of society is clearly necessary for John Merrick so that his "dreams" *can* get out, and indeed the others need to know them. "Before I spoke with people," Merrick confesses, "I did not think of all these things because there was no one to bother to think them for. Now things just come out of my mouth which are true." At the close of the play's first half, Treves proudly announces the great "success" of the Kendal-Merrick connection. He does not seem to realize that the human values which Merrick's advent has brought into his world have caused the word "success" to bear a new meaning, even on his lips. With this triumph, the audience's expectations are high for more than Merrick's induction into normality.

As the second half of the production begins, culture myths have begun to reassert their power, and Merrick is dressed for the old success. Artistically gifted, he is building a

model of St. Phillip's Church and explicates its Platonic religious allegory: the cathedral "is not stone and steel and glass; it is an imitation of grace flying up and up from the mud. So I make my imitation of an imitation". Yet it is no longer so clear that "up" is Merrick's direction; the "ANXIETIES OF THE SWAMP" (the title of Scene XIII), of this decaying society, are already sucking him in (as they suck in the colonized victims in such early Brecht plays as *In the Swamp*). As the Hofsiss production conceives the scene (XI), theatrical caricatures of "the best society" now crowd the stage space, diminishing Merrick's presence. The lavish gifts they bear in a Christmas pilgrimage to the London Hospital are useless artifacts meant as theatrical props for the myth of the Elephant Man's humanity, as Kendal observes; the two-dimensional figures are the "best" people whom the excessively-dimensioned Merrick must imitate to become recognized as a man among men. Now in evening dress, Merrick steps respectfully into the background to receive their formulated homage: "I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance"; they are eager to greet the phenomenon they think they have made of him. (As *A Man's a Man* would describe this transformation: "At first, it was a regular elephant, later it was a fake...".)

"Born" into this fake society at Christmas, Merrick seems to have become their domesticated messiah. In this role, he must now accept the others' powerful, contradictory dreams into his bursting head. So one by one the figures come forward to tell just how Merrick seems "almost like me." He mirrors an "Example to us all," says one who feigns to admire models of Self-Help, the preeminent Victorian creed. Mrs. Kendal describes him as "gentle, almost feminine[,]... a serious artist in his way"; Bishop How greets him as a devoutly religious doubter, like himself; Carr Gomm, the militant-ly atheist hospital administrator (a sort of Charles Kingsley for the opposing team), respects John for knowing practically "what side his bread is buttered on" and counting his blessings. To others, Merrick is a "Piccadilly exquisite" or discreet confidant. Treves sees his protege as "curious, compassionate, concerned about the world, well, rather like myself ... ". But like the others, who come forward in a second cycle of confessions, Treves also acknowledges his darker self in Merrick. If Merrick is the dream-Christ who affirms their complacences, he is also a suffering servant whom they need to show them their other dimensions as human beings. In either role, however, he is an exploited symbol, loaded with their meanings rather than encouraged to speak his own.

In these equivocal roles, Merrick becomes implicitly a critic of their lives, and the impact of this criticism is felt most powerfully at this point through the change in Treves, who emerges as Merrick's double. No longer the caricatured scientific scientist, Treves confides to the audience that John Merrick is "visibly worse than 86-87. That, as he rises higher in the consolations of society, he gets visibly more grotesque is proof definitive he is like me." At the center of the play, the successful doctor and popular patient have arrived at exactly the same point. Sir Frederick's transformation has begun with the advent of Merrick into his world. But the doctor's changing sense of what limited value "proof definitive" has, forces him to admit that he can "make no sense of' their shared condition.

From this point onward, the play could be considered anticlimactic. It might be conjectured that Pomerance, having created in Merrick such a remarkable person, does

not then know, any more than his other characters, what to do with him. But it is also possible, and I think more persuasive, to observe at this point in the play that there is a deliberate complication of its issues, even as the stage space becomes more crowded, and that our critical and sympathetic responses to Treves and Merrick become less easy and certain. The beauty which the play does win from its experience of human beastliness emerges only as the drama's contradictions are heightened and important reversals have taken place for the central characters.

Following a Brechtian pattern, Merrick the innocent now becomes even more deeply implicated in the system of exploitation and counterexploi-tation that has "saved" him. When his old manager, Ross, reappears, down at the heel and apparently starving, to ask for help, Merrick rejects the man's crude propositioning with the elegant cruelty he has learned. In this unsettling moment *ofdeja vu*, Merrick echoes Treves's earlier defense of injustice when he says, "I'm sorry, Ross. It's just the way things are." And as "proof" of his new manhood, Merrick backs up against the church model he has made. "By god," says Ross. "Then I am lost."

As witnesses to his moral deformation in society, we find it increasingly difficult wholly to approve Merrick, for we see that he has taken on several new double identities since his comparatively simpler state of natural Elephant-Manhood. He accepts the new artificial self that society imposes, but he judges it; his innocence is provoking and even perverse, while his very goodness has evil effects. Yet despite distortion and confusion, he retains an innate sense of just proportion, and from that center of integrity continues to question divine as well as human justice through the rest of the play.

As these complications are developing in the audience's response to Merrick, Sir Frederick is beginning to attract sympathy. Treves has begun to question the adequacy of his materialist assumptions. Increasingly hard pressed to defend his actions, he falls back upon the Victorian sexual standard as a last resource of moral certainty. The play's climax comes after a great blow to this myth of Treves's and to Merrick's innocent faith in those who have saved him.

One afternoon, Treves discovers the lovely Mrs. Kendal shyly unveiling her torso to Merrick, who has never " seen" a beautiful woman before. In the New York version, her red hair cascaded down a white back, and momentarily she became a sensuous Pre-Raphaelite idealization. The confusion of soul's beauty and body's beauty poses no problem for John Merrick: this "beautiful sight" is simply his supreme moment of Paradise in the play. Treves shatters it. "Do you know what you are?" he shouts at John, bursting in. "Don't you know what is forbidden?" The "Woman" is banished, but worse, Treves never answers Merrick's anguished queries about why his Ideal has never returned to the hospital. Treves even allows Merrick to believe she chooses to absent herself. Although this banishment is meant as kindness, it is cruelty to the doubly betrayed and confused Merrick, and his disillusion forces him back upon the absurdist possibility that his body has always presented. And yet, through the ministrations of Bishop How, he still receives the discipline and sacraments of the Church and stubbornly maintains his childlike faith.

It is not difficult for Pomerance to present Treves's outraged decency as the "error" of an indecent moral confidence, for we know that Treves can invoke no personal religious belief to justify parting these two souls. But when Merrick now begins "chipping away at the edges" of this moralism, Pomerance gives another parabolic turn to our view of its victim." Frederick," Merrick asks soon after the crisis, ".. .do you believe in heaven? Hell? What about Christ? What about God? I believe in heaven. The Bible promises in heaven the crooked shall be made straight." Treves quips dryly, "So did the rack, my boy. So do we all." It is clear that the innocent inquisitor is also becoming Treves's rack when the doctor explodes, "For God's sakes. If you are angry, just say it.... Say it: I am angry. Go on. I am angry. I am angry! I am angry!" "I believe in heaven," return the Model Christian.

Is this "cruelty" or "kindness"? The interchangeability of these words portends a moral nightmare. This chaos in values is brought home in the next scene, a parabolic encounter titled "CRUELTY IS AS NOTHING TO KINDNESS." Stepping forward smartly into Treves's nightmare, a transformed Merrick, equipped with top hat and cane, begins to dissect the moral deformities of "the terrifyingly normal" scientist, hunched dreaming in his chair. The reversal of their roles may be Treves's fantasy, but what we see is a heightened version of Merrick's learned vices for which we already have had proof. Even in its dream mode, this Brechtian lecture-scene jars our sympathy for Merrick, our easy tolerance for the victim's earlier imitative failures of compassion. As with old Ross, Merrick as anatomist of Treves is morally "correct," yet lacks moral imagination. His lecture is patently "analysis" of a "left-rationalist" sort about the cruelties of Treves's patronage, his colonization of other persons and his own sexual desires. Merrick counters neatly the scientist's anatomical language with his own impersonal idiom, and he makes his points sharply; but he lacks the self-criticism for which his speech argues, and more important, he lacks compassion. As Merrick himself has taught us to ask, without love, "why should there be a play?"

As the script directs, scene after scene has ended with Merrick silently placing another piece on the model of St. Phillip's. Even as he has constructed this model of transcendent loveliness, he has been deconstructing Treves and his myths. Treves's confession and breakdown come at last. In a scene near the end of the play, he admits that his society does not "know ... what else to do with" Merrick's or anyone's nature but to "Rob" it; society has made the Elephant Man "a mockery of everything we live by". When the distressed scientist falls into the arms of the Bishop (as Merrick had once collapsed upon Treves) with the half-articulate cry "Help me," John in the background places the last piece on the church and says quietly, "It is done." In this chilling moment, echoing Christ's words on the Cross, the outwardly emotionless Merrick seems not a messiah, but a predatory child-monster, a social victim so brutalized he can excel only in revenge, an aesthete who cares only for his art. At this crux, the model of St. Phillip's seems to represent not the "consolation" of "Christ's church" (as the Bishop would say), but a "cruciform lair" (as Carr Gomm would quip) from which a mildly apocalyptic beast/man who "is not, and yet is" has made his ravaging forays into civilized territory. In light of one category with which the Christian tradition has tried to make sense of the freak of nature, the "monstrous" Merrick has "finished" his circuit through the world to warn *(moneo)* and show forth *(monstro)* God's wrath to a decadent culture.

By this point, the Elephant Man has fulfilled the ominous speculation early in the play that his presence "may be a danger in ways we do not know." The danger is not physical contagion but spiritual scandal in this world, for Merrick is scandalous both in his mutation and in his imitation of the normal. To the guardians of Victorian morals, he represents the shock of their repressed sexuality. As a product of the workhouse, he is a reminder of the savagery on which this society is based and poses the threat of revolutionary upheaval. To the elegant and healthy, he presents the image of ugliness and disease. To the supercivilized, his childlike spontaneity recollects a natural mode of being. Merrick reminds those who accept a common version of the Darwinian hypothesis that their beastly origins are not safely behind them in the prehistoric eons; he mocks the efforts to climb up and up of those who graft onto the hypothesis a progressive social Darwinism. For the scientific investigator, he embodies all that is outside the known scheme of things; for the doctor, he thwarts the ambition to diagnose and cure. And among all the methodically-minded the builders of Empire, the London police, the method actress, the churchman who seems nearly all form, the systematic atheist administrator the advent of Merrick disrupts the rational patterns by which men have organized their social existences, structured desires, and protected themselves from the mystery of their own beings.

Pomerance has described his theater as "some form of social memory," bringing back "points that are too volatile, too dangerous to be lived every day the skeletons in the closet, the guilt." Late in the play, Treves calls Merrick a "parable" (though he means allegory), and indeed Merrick has begun to be a parable in so disturbing his society not by illustrating a moral, but simply by being what he is, a *momenta mori* among systematic people who have excluded the realities of guilt, suffering, and human limits from their most cherished culture myths. But as a parabolic presence Merrick also does more. In Crossan's sense, parable does not stop with the shattering of illusions and complacences of the hearers; parable brings forth as well uncharted possibilities for actions and relationships. Pomerance's play does, I believe, transcend its own disillusionments but very narrowly, against great odds, and not until the absurdist potential of the Elephant Man's plight has been explored to its limits.

Rapidly following upon the completion of the church model and his mission, Merrick's "accidental" death by asphyxiation occurs. His deformity requires him to sleep sitting up, but during a fatal dream he straightens into a normal sleeping position and the weight of his enormous head crushes his windpipe. For a moment, the church model seems to loom on stage menacingly, like the little house in *Tiny Alice*; and seconds after Merrick expires, an attendant blunders into the room with the words already on his lips: "Arbitrary. It's all so ...." If this death scene seems to give absurd drama the final broken word, certainly the play has all along fostered the questioning of cosmic justice and the "chancy" nature of existence. Opening this half of the play, Merrick had boasted that he built the church "with just one hand" (the graceful, artistic one); but this triumph is yet another reminder of the man's incompleteness, of the other hand resembling a beastly vestige from an earlier evolutionary stage. In making him, Merrick slyly asks, God "should have used both hands shouldn't he?" Does his death, then, provide "proof definitive" of the futility of all architecture, social and cosmic?

Neither Merrick's life nor his death is completely "arbitrary" and meaningless. Pomerance has attacked the modern theater for purveying "the most limited, self-seeking adolescent vices" and things that are "just not true." In particular, he rejects "one peculiar ideology that we are all pathetic and that pathos is what we all find in the end." It is on this point that *The Elephant Man*, which recalls *Equus* in some ways, strikingly differs from Peter Shaffer's play. Shaffer's doubting psychiatrist, like Treves, is challenged by the advent of the irrational and anticonventional in the form of his patient; but Dysart's parable is incomplete, and he is left in self-pity and "darkness." This ending was rewarded on Broadway by thundering applause, partly because, I believe, the play told its audience what they wanted to hear: that ordinary life is deadened beyond any hope of salvation by human or divine means, and that pathos is all we find in the end. (This seems to be the message also of Shaffer's recent play, *Amadeus.*) In light of the complaint that Jean-Paul Sartre and Georg Lukacs have lodged against some modernist literature, such a conclusion finally encourages complacency through its fatalistic nihilism. *Equus* also wins its popularity through a predictable and shallow social critique, in my view, rather than generating disruptive forces that really would challenge the status quo. In contrast, *The Elephant Man* evokes the very different response of awed silence in its disturbed audience. Pomerance's play tells us, as parables do, things we do not expect and may not want to hear; it poses challenge after challenge to conventional responses, drawing us in as participants in a dialectical process that forces us back as critics of elements in the play and of ourselves; it invites both our skepticism and our wonder. With its powerful symbol of the freak, the play lives on in the memory as a parable does, having involved us ineluctably in the discovery that there are more things in the world than we have dreamed in our philosophies.

Nor are we allowed to stay in a Kafkaesque world where "We are nihilistic thoughts, suicidal thoughts that come into God's head," a world that is "only a bad mood of God, a bad day of His," where there is (as Kafka added ironically) "plenty of hope, an infinite amount of hope but not for us." This perspective, which Lukacs discusses in his essay "The Ideology of Modernism," directs the anticlimax of *Equus* and is certainly not absent from climactic moments in *The Elephant Man;* but Pomerance does not allow us to remain in the postures of "modern religious atheism," "worshipping the void created by God's absence."

A central theme of *The Elephant Man* that bears upon these difficulties of classifying it is what Merrick calls our "little vocabulary problem." Like the conventional exchanges in the play, our labels are inadequate. The descriptions "arbitrary" and "absurd" are in a number of ways partial and premature, uttered without regard for other dimensions of the play and before all the evidence is in. In the final scenes, Pomerance takes us one step further to remind us of the firm social grounding for a tragedy that is not meaningless, or a cosmic accident. Merrick's death, we recognize, is the culmination of his long, even ritualistic, murder by society. The occurrence of this unattended death in the hospital "home" suggests the carelessness of all society's care for Merrick. Carr Gomm has the play's last spoken words: "It's too late, I'm afraid. It is done. (*Smiles*^' Gomm's cynical version of the crucifixion motto is ironic in a way different from Merrick's earlier unconscious use of it. Gomm's "FINAL REPORT TO THE INVESTORS" implies that Merrick has been disposed of at last, and now the money gathered to support the

Elephant Man can be channeled into the hospital's general funds. If Merrick had first seemed to the disinterested Treves a form of "medical richesse," he remains for some to the end "our capital," as Ross had called Merrick. Yet the capital gains over which the hospital administrator "Smiles" are not quite safely secured: the hospital's star scientist, Sir Frederick Treves, is deeply shaken by events that are not yet "done" in him, and Merrick's influence is not "finished." In this last speaking scene, Pomerance lets us feel the brutal impact of administrative efficiency, while calling into question Gomm's myth of gain, and because Treves is present, reminding us that this myth is broken for good.

Merrick's death is also the instinctive suicide of a deeply disillusioned man a suicide for which the others too are guilty. In one figure the play proposes for this collective responsibility, the accumulated weight of others' dreams which Merrick has accepted breaks his neck. In another, more complicated figure, Merrick, a polished mirror for the others' self-images, eventually discovers that he reflects their nothingness, and therefore (as an early scene title announces) "WHEN THE ILLUSION ENDS HE MUST KILL HIMSELF." As this enthymeme suggests, his death is then a "logical" extension of his earlier theory of Romeo's suicide upon Juliet's death: Merrick had argued, idiosyn-cratically, that in trying no harder to revive Juliet when the mirror he holds up registers no breath from her lips, Romeo proves his "love" for her is only an illusion, and when the illusion ends. . . . With the simple logic of a child and the despair of a man capable of passion, Merrick, bereft of his Juliet and seeing no more evidence of spirit in his world, puts down his head to cut off his own breath. Because there has been love in this play, even this suicidal action has meaning in the context of a society that tries to exclude love from its theater of surfaces and mirrors.

The Elephant Man is a cosmic absurdity, a social victim, and a suicide: but the images for his death do not end here, for Merrick was also by all accounts a Model Christian. Pomerance makes him into a model of Christ as well, yet without allowing the Elephant Man to become enclosed in the mes-siah myth of his Victorian admirers. The way Pomerance handles this powerful image, as well as other Christian symbols, expresses the skeptical faith characteristic of this play, the faith that human life matters because human beings are not cosmical-ly adrift but grounded, and possibly grounded in more than their material conditions. Hope and human value depend upon the transcendence of these conditions, and the consciousness created and delimited by them. If one *can* call this hope a faith in a transcendent realm of being, Pomerance's expression of it is as significantly qualified, and then left open to interpretation, as one would expect in an agnostic parable. What is surprising and what any account of the play has to come to terms with is the fact that while the Christian symbols Pomerance evokes are placed, they are not rejected.

In the New York version, Merrick' s end fulfills the potential of the earlier stage allusion to crucifixion. When his head tilts back too far and his arms claw the air, his final posture barely suggests a quite literal *imitatio Christi*. Prompted by dream sirens from "Beautiful darkness' empire" to "Sleep like others you learn to admires /Be like your mother, be like your sire," Merrick formally imitates the dead maternal figure (the mother whose photograph he keeps under his pillow) and, more important, the equivocal paternal figure of Jesus/Treves (whose names have been linked). Just as this horrible end

releases Merrick from a life of pain, so either "sire" seems both cruel and merciful, while in the background other characters too have been cruel/kind to Merrick. Imitating his equivocal sires, the Elephant Man is a "Both" (to borrow a term from "The Song of the Both," *A Man's a Man,* and his duality complicates our response to his death, just as it was the curse and blessing of his life.

Pomerance's particular way of qualifying Merrick's "crucifixion" is to set it within a suggestive late Victorian context where, we may recall, the artist-as-victim became (as in Wilde's *De Profimdis*) the artist-as-Christ. Coming so soon after the completion of his art project, Merrick's end is made complex by its theatrical aestheticism (and therefore not simply by its arbitrary, broken-off quality). For the English *fin de siecle* writers, as Lionel Johnson and the Rhymers said, life is ritual; for Merrick in his time, death too is ritual and, like his life, imitates art in this play. The form that end takes literally embodies an answer to the question Arthur O'Shaughnessy asked: "What is eternal? What escapes decay? / A certain, faultless, matchless, deathless line, / Curving consummate." Ironically, Merrick achieves immortal form in being made at last "straight" in this final rather morbid performance.

Merrick has journeyed a long way to this late Victorian point: in viewing his equivocal achievement, we might compare his whole career in the play to the development of the English Romantic sensibility. At the beginning, he reminds us of Blake's child weeping in the "charter'd street[s]" of London, soon to be oppressed by the "mind-forg'd manacles" of the Victorian mind police, and closed out of his Garden of Love by the spirit of "Thou shall not." By the end of the play, the Blakean innocent has thoroughly suffered the social, psychological, and metaphysical shocks of nineteenth-century experience. From the decadence of the "moral swamp," he looks for salvation in the manner of Yeats' s Last Romantics. Of course, I am not suggesting that Pomerance is interested in making an allegory of literary history; rather, I am proposing that this is the *kind* of "romantic imagination" Pomerance's Merrick has in the late 1880's. These are Treves's words in his final, nonscientific and tentative diagnosis of the patient's *maladiefin de siecle*. As a Last Romantic, Merrick makes a determined protest with his death against what Wilde called "Nature's lack of design." Or perhaps it would be better to say that Pomerance makes his protest in the design of the play. From the perspective of Brustein on Brecht's dialectical tensions, the objectivity of Pomerance's left-rationalist critique has been called into question by his "romantic" revolt.

The poetry of religion in Pomerance's play marks this revolt as the later uncertain Romanticism which "chose for theme," as Yeats wrote, "Traditional sanctity and loveliness." Although Merrick does not dally with High Church attractions in the manner of Wilde and other later Victorians, in choosing this theme Pomerance does let us see Merrick acting a part. Just before the death scene, at the rear of the stage, Merrick enacts a pantomime of confession with Bishop How (who has become less of a caricature by the end of the production), while conversations go forward upstage about the sincerity of John's faith. Should his faithfulness be taken seriously, or is it only an artistic illusion, "a mass of papier-mache and paint" with which Merrick fools himself and others? Or, to use Treves's medical terms, might it be nothing but a "general anesthetic " protecting Merrick from the brutal surgeries of life, numbing the pain of his doubt that

God is merciful? Treves tells Bishop How, who seeks to confirm his protege in the Church of England, that Merrick "is very excited to do what others do if he thinks it is what others do." In this late scene, the agnostic scientist surprises us, however, by affirming that he refuses to cast doubt on Merrick's faith.

Even as Treves recognizes the imitative character of the Elephant Man's social acts, he also seems to sense that in Merrick's attraction to "Traditional sanctity and loveliness," an act of faith is concealed that transcends theatricality. For hypocritical conformity and mindless repetition are not the only modes of imitation one can associate with this tradition to which Merrick has been drawn. Perhaps in the absence of "proof" that the God so confidently invoked by the Bishop really exists in the world, Merrick is nevertheless in his last moments instinctively attempting to "follow the way by which . . . [others] began," as Pascal wrote of the famous wager, accepting the sacraments, discipline, and consolations of the Church (and now imitating Christ's death) *as if he* believed in their efficacy.

The pity of Merrick' s end is that he seems to have nothing to lose in a wager on faith, and that he can be made straight only in the posture of death. His end also seems to provide Brechtian proof that, whatever other world there may be, in the world we know where people do not live justly and mercifully with one another, a man cannot both be good and survive.

III

The Elephant Man does not end with the death of John Merrick. He is survived by another, equally ironic, symbol of transcendence on the stage: the model of St. Phillip' s Church. Pomerance' s remarks on what this church signifies are suggestive but laconic. In an "Introductory Note" to the Grove Press edition of the play, he writes: "I believe the building of the church model constitutes some kind of central metaphor, and the groping toward conditions where it can be built and the building of it are the action of the play." The "conditions where it can be built," Pomerance says elsewhere, are "the right venue he [Merrick] could survive in."

If one thinks of this play as a dramatic parable, these remarks make fuller sense, particularly for the New York production. *Within* the play, this "church " is the community that Merrick miraculously discovers, built in moments of union with others, a real and present church that helps him to transcend his loneliness and difference. More generally, this survival area is the place that Pomerance has managed to build through the writing of his drama about the Elephant Man, who continues to live in new ways in the popular imagination not as a myth fulfilling desire, a refuge church, but as a parabolic conscience disturbing all our enclaves of false "consolation." The broader community that comes into being in the theater audience is the "church " built through the whole action of *The Elephant Man* as dramatic parable.

The apparent paradox that the building of a "church" should be the central action of this critically conscious play might be put into the larger context that Brustein discusses in *The Theatre of Revolt.* The modern dramatist, he writes, wants to convert this collective

[the theatre audience] into a "chosen people" through the transforming power of his art.... In a world without God, he must shape a congregation, invent a liturgy, create a faith. "To kill God and to build a Church," writes Camus, "are the constant and contradictory purposes of rebellion." These contradictory purposes are the foundation of the theatre of revolt, where each dramatist labors to make a new union out of his secession to make his initial act of revolt the occasion for a new kind of grace.

In his *Times* interview, Pomerance reflects on this mode of church-building. "The most important element in the theater is the audience's imagination," he says, and imagination connects:

The audience is people. What is in them, is in me. It goes back to the function of memory.... I don't mean to tell them something they do not already know. I'm not bringing hot news. My interest in the audience is to remind them of a common thing and, if only temporarily, they do then become a unity, a community.

As his note to *The Elephant Man* text suggests, it is the labor of the play to "[grope] toward conditions where... [the church] can be built," and "the building of it" happens only as the audience is gathered as a community through the collective experience of disturbance and transformation.

It is also this problematical "church-building" that marks the critical contrast between the religious dimensions of *The Elephant Man* and *Equus*. Shaffer yokes violence and the sacred in ritualistic enactments of the individual's epiphany with his dark god. Pomerance's whole mode is different: the ambiance is specifically *liturgical,* and includes audience and actors in a community of worship. His theatrical means are appropriate to this different end: the worshipful moments he includes involve more than one person; ritual objects on the stage are ironic symbols; a cellist at the side plays a soft prelude, an offertory at intermission, and a postlude (an aesthetic/religious touch that was part of the original London production). The Broadway cast have also said that performing *The Elephant Man* resembles the conducting of a religious service, requiring for certain scenes reverent silence in the theater. But this ambiance happens in a play with sharply critical moments as well as witty exchanges that make us laugh. The worship, not self-indulgent and narcissistic like that in *Equus*, maintains a self-critical poise.

Pomerance's drama is not a new parable of the Kingdom, but the audience's silence at the end of the performance recalls what John Dominic Crossan calls the silence in the parables, which do not tell us what to do *next. The Elephant Man* sends its hearers on their uncharted ways. To effect this kind of dismissal from Pomerance's liturgical theater, the last scene (added in production) provides a final occasion for grace and completes the gathering of the playwright's congregation through the whole action of the play.

In the last silent tableau, the members of the cast gather around the church model to pay their respects to a mystery which they do not understand but to which they inescapably belong. In this ritualistic moment, they/we are no longer problem solvers or critical thinkers in a "left-rationlist" theater, but a "church" gathered to ponder the

parable of the Elephant Man, who has ineluctably, perhaps irrevocably, altered our habitual categories of perception, analysis, and emotional response. The ambiance of this ending reminds us that the loveliness Merrick communicated to those he knew has raised the elusive possibility of some "other" kind of existence where love and justice may be no illusion. It is not with a sense of meaningless waste that this modern mystery play leaves its audience, but rather with the dark wonder of Pascal's words in the *Pensees: "Vere tu es Deus absconditus."* The author of this existence, whom Merrick arraigns and admires, hides himself within the play from the Elephant Man and others, but it is not necessary to conclude that he is absent.

Source: Janet L. Larson, "*The Elephant Man* as Dramatic Parable," in *Modern Drama*, September, 1983, Vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 335-56.

Critical Essay #6

Calling The Elephant Man *"easily the best play thus far of the 1978-79 New York theatre season," Hughes offers a brief, favorable review of Pome ranee's play.*

The Elephant Man, by Bernard Pomerance, is easily the best play thus far of the 1978-79 New York theatre season. (No one need remind me that that could be taken as a somewhat left-handed compliment.)

Currently at the new Theatre of St. Peter's Church in the Citicorp Building, but about to transfer to a larger, more "commercial" milieu, it has its flaws but offers the most compelling evening of drama in New York today.

Pomerance has based his play on an actual "freak" of the Victorian era, John Merrick, who suffered from a mysterious and incurable illness that caused his limbs to become twisted and resulted in apparently hideous skin excretions. The title, *The Elephant Man*, was the one applied to him during the period when he worked in a traveling freak show in England.

The playwright, who is an American, though the work was first produced in England, shows Merrick being taken into a London hospital in Whitechapel, where he becomes one of the outstanding curiosities of the British society of the period, the 1880s. In 21 scenes, Pomerance portrays how this deformed man (brilliantly played by Philip Anglim) comes under the wing of Dr. Frederick Treves (Kevin Conway) after he is abandoned by his freak-show manager for being too grotesque even for such audiences. Treves is unable to cure him, but writes about him in a manner that makes him almost fashionable and results in philanthropic grants.

Perhaps the worst thing he does, however and this would seem to be Pomerance's point is to try to change him into someone who is conventionally acceptable, someone who will be "like us." It obviously cannot work, and the playwright becomes a bit too obvious at moments. But *The Elephant Man* deserves the fine reviews it has received and the attention of anyone who calls himself a "serious theatregoer." The production, by Jack Hofsiss, could do with a little work before it transfers, but this is relatively minor. It offers the sort of challenging drama rarely seen in the New York theatre.

Source: Catharine Hughes. "Capsule Comments," *in America,* Vol. 140, no. 7, February 24, 1979, p. 135.

Media Adaptations

The Elephant Man was made into a successful film in 1980. The film starred Anthony Hopkins, John Hurt, Anne Bancroft, John Gielgud, and Wendy Hiller. The director was David Lynch. Pomerance had nothing to do with the film, which was written by Lynch, Eric Bergen, and Christopher DeVore. The video is available from Paramount.

Topics for Further Study

Research the state of medicine in London in the 1880s. What medical options were available for the poor and for those who did not fit into mainstream London society?

Conduct some research into Proteus Syndrome. (Until recently, Merrick was thought to suffer from neurofibromatosis.) Determine what treatments existed in the nineteenth century and compare them with those that exist today.

Investigate freak shows and discuss why you think they have remained popular.

An important theme of this play is humanity versus science. Treves can offer Merrick no cure or treatment, but he keeps him sequestered in a hospital setting. Treves perceives Merrick as a reflection of his own humanity and seeks to impose his values and beliefs on Merrick. Discuss his motives and whether you think he succeeds in redeeming himself by the play's conclusion.

Compare & Contrast

1880s: Queen Victoria has named herself Empress of India, and British Imperialism is at its height. Great Britain and France occupy Egypt and within a few years, Africa will be partitioned and divided among European interests.

1979: Margaret Thatcher is the first woman to become Prime Minister of Great Britain.

Today: Great Britain has ceded control of Hong Kong to China, and Queen Elizabeth is set to celebrate fifty years as British ruler in 2002.

1880s: Impressionist painters create a new movement in art. They hold a major exhibition in Paris in 1874. Within ten years, the form will dominate the art field.

1979: Philip Johnson exhibits a new painting, *Paintsplats* (on a wall). Performance art becomes the newest art form.

Today: An exhibition of Jackson Pollack's art at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art results in long lines as people wait in cold, wet weather to see Pollack's work.

1880s: Louis Pasteur develops a vaccine to prevent rabies. He also develops pasteurization to keep milk from spoiling from bacteria.

1979: Medicare-funded kidney dialysis costs the government $851 million for 46,000 patients and raises questions about whether such patients should continue to receive such a disproportionate amount of medical funding.

Today: Questions about physician-assisted suicide plague the country and leads to fears that doctors will simply dispose of those people who are physically or mentally unable to protect themselves.

1880s: Edison announces the success of his incandescent light bulb. He is sure it will burn for one hundred hours. Meanwhile in the United States, arc-lights are installed as streetlights in San Francisco and Cleveland.

1979: An accident at Three Mile Island results in the evacuation of 144,00 people. Little radiation is released, but the accident fuels fears about nuclear reactors as an energy source.

Today: Energy is assumed to be an unlimited, available resource especially in the United States, where energy conservation lags behind that of other countries.

What Do I Read Next?

The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity (1972), written by Ashley Montagu, is a biography of John Merrick.

Another biography, *The True History of the Elephant Man* by Michael Howell and Peter Ford (1992), attempts to provide a medical diagnosis for Merrick's condition.

Fredrick Dimmer's *Born Different: Amazing Stories of Very Different People* (1988) contains a chapter devoted to John Merrick.

Published in 1992, *Articulating the Elephant Man: Joseph Merrick and His Interpreters* was written by Peter Graham and Fritz H. Oehlschlaeger. The book examines how Merrick's story became a phenomenon that captured the attention of so many people.

Further Reading

Davis, Tracy C. *Actresses As Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture,* Routledge, 1991, 200 p.

A historical and social examination of the issues faced by female actresses.

Howard, Martin. *Victorian Grotesque: An Illustrated Excursion into Medical Curiosities, Freaks, and Abnormalities, Principally of the Victorian Age,* Jupiter Books, 1977,153 p.

As the title promises, this book looks at medicine and human abnormalities.

Judd, Catherine. *Bedside Seductions: Nursing and the Victorian Imagination, 1830-1880,* St. Martin's Press, 1997,211 p.

Explores the role of nurse in Victorian social and literary history. The evolution of nursing provides insights into gender and class issues of this period.

Ritvo, Harriet. *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*, Harvard University Press, 1989, 347 p.

Ritvo provides an unusual approach to discussions of class in Victorian England by focusing on the relationship between animals and humans.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's“For Students” Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on “classic” novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of “classic” novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as “The Narrator” and alphabetized as “Narrator.” If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name “Jean Louise Finch” would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname “Scout Finch.”
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“Night.” Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on “Winesburg, Ohio.” Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. “Margaret Atwood's “The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,” Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. “Richard Wright: “Wearing the Mask,” in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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