

Notes to accompany post screening talk about The Elephant Man at Salisbury Arts Centre.

Remark about accidents caused by machines.

Terrible things these machines, you can't mess with them.

Background noise like Eraserhead.

Slow fades between scenes.

Silhouette. Keeps us from seeing him for as long as possible. Builds up anticipation that we are going to see something scary. When we do, it is him who is scared. A monster who is afraid.

Produced by Mel Brookes, hired Lynch because he admired Eraserhead. Left his name off credits as it would give wrong idea. Originally offered to Terrence Malick but he passed.

Horror film: He is one who is scared.

When Treves sees Merrick for the first time, he sheds a single tear. Anthony Hopkins thought of his sick father at that moment to help him to cry.

Themes:

Treatment of outsiders.

Alienation. Inner Turmoil.

Nature. Nurture.

Triumph against adversity. Willing him along. Outer appearance at odds with inner person.

Morbid curiosity with these "freaks of nature" Basis of programming on ch5.

People going to see him to impress others. Madonna with African baby? Are they the ones wearing the mask?

Provokes complex questions about the nature of voyeurism, 'wonderment' and 'scientific' observation.

When people scream at him, he screams back. Who is the freak?

Reciting 23rd psalm. Turning point. Orchestral score. Doom laden.

Photographs of children. "have such noble faces".

Treves: Good in society

Bytes: bad in society. Bytes is modeled after Robert Newton's characterization of Bill Sykes in David Lean's 1948 film of *Oliver Twist*.

Actor Frederick Treves, great nephew of the surgeon, appears in the opening sequences as an Alderman trying to close down the freakshow.

Imagery:

Ducks Eyes: picture of mother?

Model church: It is all constructed.

Industrial age, machinery. Alienation, Was far from a compassionate charitable age.

Ending thunder and lightning dramatics.

Mirrors: We see ourselves in him.

Narrative Style:

B&W photography recreates industrial revolution. Very Dickensian. German Expressionism.

Cross cutting: Abominations of natures / Merrick making model of church.

In this case, Lynch uses John Merrick's quest for his own humanity to show that human relationships are fundamentally deception.

Ending:

Has achieved his two dreams: to sleep on his back and to go to the theatre. He has seen sceptical rather than been it. Treves getting him to stand up for applause at theatre. Echoes his earlier freak show performances. How different is Teves to Bytes? Doing it for himself or John?

Beauty and the Beast: Relieved that the ogre would never get out of the lions den. Who is the ogre?

Last words: its finished.

Takes us to the stars. His next film was sci fi epic Dune.

Links with Lynch's other work:

Dream sequence. Background noise. Dwarves. Lightning like strobe lights. Industrial machinery (alienation of man, outside our control, dehumanisation). Todd Brownings Freaks. Theatre scene at the end. Nursery Rhyme music.

History:

Neuro Fibro Mitosis / Proteus Syndrome: atypical growth of the bones, skin, head and a variety of other symptoms. Merrick mentions that his deformity began developing when at the age of five.

The incidents in Belgium and at the railway station took place *before* Merrick was admitted to Treves's hospital, not afterward, and Merrick traveled to Belgium of his own accord, because freakshows had been made illegal in Britain, unlike the film, in which he is kidnapped. There is also no evidence that Merrick was abused while working at the horrible freakshow. In fact, Merrick had saved up a great deal of money from the wages he had earned while working there. Likewise, Treves did not "rescue" Merrick from a sadistic carnival proprietor; it was Merrick who freely approached the doctor with a written note requesting his care.

Ending up in the Leicester Union workhouse not once but twice, Joseph was unemployable for the better part of his life.

Voluntarily joined freakshow. Made a lot of money for himself. Was visited there by Treves who gave him his business card.. Made his own way over to Belgium after Freakshows were banned here, and was badly treated by a showman who took all his money. The incident towards the end of the film at Liverpool St Station happened when he was returned to England. The authorities found Treves card and called him, and that's the point he took him in.

Mother was also disabled.

Death was recorded as accidental.

Clip:

It opens, like Eraserhead and with a stylised conception/birth sequence; a still photograph of his mother, a stampede of elephants, a woman writhing, her screams dubbed over with the sounds of elephants, a fade a burst of steam and a baby's cries.

Made many models. The one shown in the film still exists and is much more intricate than the one shown.

Makeup based on casts made from Merrick's body after he died. Preserved in London Medical Hospital Museum.

Patrick Bliss, April 2007.