

NORRLANDSOPERAN

# THE ELEPHANT MAN

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The Terrible Tale of of the Elephant Man and Jack the Ripper, Two Freaks of  
Nature

An Opera in Two Acts

**Music: Carl Unander-Scharin**

**Librettist: Michael Williams**

“For man is not truly one, but truly two.”

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

Commissioned by National Arts Council of Sweden and NorrlandsOperan  
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## LIBRETTIST NOTE

I approached the commission from NorrlandsOperan to write an opera based on the life of Joseph Merrick with some trepidation. Many artists have sought to create art out of his short, yet remarkable life: David Lean's film, Pomerance's play and Petitgirard's opera, to name just a few. What then could I possibly add to the growing number of interpretations of the Elephant Man?

There is something compelling about this story of gross disfigurement. We remain fascinated by disability for at some point in our lives, sooner or later, for a short or a long period, we all will be disabled in some way. Ergo: Those with disabilities are the unwelcome reminders of our own frailty and mortality. But was this enough of a theme to base an opera on?

Self doubt is another word for writer's block and so I did what writers do when faced with this dilemma: I read everything I could on Victorian England and the Elephant Man. My research took an entirely unexpected turn when I came across the following: "During the time of the Whitechapel murders ... locals were sure that Joseph Merrick was sneaking out of the hospital grounds at night and killing local 'unfortunates'". The Elephant Man suspected of being Jack the Ripper? This fanciful idea was quickly rejected but I was intrigued by the reaction of the "locals" who in their fear had made, what must have been to them an obvious assumption, the man who *looks* like a monster must *be* a monster.

I turned my attention to the Whitechapel murders and found the literature never ending and overwhelming. I was on the point of shutting that Pandora's Box when I discovered Charles Van Unseen's *The Fox & the Flies – The Criminal Empire of the Whitechapel Murderer*. Van Unseen, a leading South African historian, builds a convincing argument that Joseph Silver, a Jewish immigrant from Poland, suffering from syphilis, resident in Whitechapel between 1879 and 1888, could well be the person infamously known as Jack the Ripper.

As I read about this particular Joseph I made some startling discoveries. Aside from the name they shared, these two men, Joseph Merrick and Joseph Silver, were in their early twenties, both were abandoned by their mothers, had absent fathers, were forced by poverty to live in London, obsessed with the idea of sex and beautiful women, lived in Whitechapel at the same time, (inexplicably on the same block - Merrick in London Hospital, Silver directly behind the hospital), both desired, above all to be a gentleman and were highly particular about their outward appearance. But the similarity which fascinated me the most was that both of these men suffered from a congenital disorder - one physical, the other mental - that would eventually be the cause of their death.

Writers are often inspired but this was truly an epiphany: an opera about two very different men, one, a monster within and the other, a monster without.

This idea is hardly original. (I refer to Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mister Hyde* which was inspired by the double standard he saw in the life of the professional classes in Victorian England. Stevenson lived in a world where men led an outwardly respectable life yet such men could live as debauched a life as they chose, but so long as they maintained the semblance of respectability they would still prosper within this society.) Yet in every opera I love there is always that moment where reality is replaced by musical possibilities, imaginative and mystical, and I was haunted with the idea of exploring their journey and bringing these two men face to face.

I was fortunate that Knell Englund, Managing Director of NorrlandsOperan, and the composer, Carl Unander-Scharin, were excited by the new idea. And I owe them both my

gratitude for bringing this piece to life. Carl has been the most inventive composer I have ever worked with and his music has mined layers of the text I did not know existed. His interest in the project took us on an unforgettable Jack the Ripper walking tour in London and a poignant visit to the museum in London Hospital dedicated to its famous patient. He shared with me a quote from Dame Madge Kendall's memoirs, containing some passages about her visits to Joseph Merrick, "The extraordinary thing, is that out of his distorted frame came the most musical voice." This led to the creation of The Throat III, a custom built interactive instrument, which was the most sublime solution to how Joseph Merrick might sound when he sang.

I invite you to walk through the streets of old Whitechapel and into the lives of two very different Joes, two men who might give us insight into the brutality and depravity, the humility and gentleness, we are all capable of.

Michael Williams  
23 January 2012

## SYNOPSIS

### Act 1

A young boy, Joseph Merrick, is forced onto the streets of London to sell haberdashery by his stepmother. His physical disfigurement frightens potential customers away. He encounters the Siamese Twins, who remind him that he too, has a place in this world. The young Merrick is forced to enter a workhouse.

Years later, Tom Barker, the owner of a “Freak Show”, welcomes the audience to view his latest exhibit – the now much disfigured Elephant Man, aka Joseph Merrick. Joseph Silver, a pimp, and five prostitutes, Dark Annie, Long Liz, Kate, Polly and Ginger, demand to see his latest “freak”. However, before Barker is able to present the Elephant Man, a Policeman closes down his show. Dr Treves wishes to examine Merrick and gives Barker his card.

Merrick is accosted by pedestrians on his way to London Hospital. The Policeman protects Merrick from the crowd while Dr Treves escorts him into the hospital. Ginger enters with the news that Polly’s body has been found on the streets – she has been murdered.

Dr Treves presents Merrick to his colleagues in London Hospital, while Tom Barker, acting now as a mortician, examines the corpse of Polly. Ginger ponders the death of her friend and her life as a prostitute. Silver persuades her to work exclusively for him. Ginger refuses his offer.

Dr Treves tries to persuade Merrick to speak. He arranges for Merrick to stay in the hospital for as long as he lives.

Merrick receives many visitors, including the actress Maria Lloyd and the Princess of Wales. Tom Barker, acting as Lord Buckley, gives Merrick a special gift – a silver walking stick with a dagger in its handle. He promises Merrick a private encounter with a woman who “don’t care what you look like”.

The body of Dark Annie is discovered. An angry crowd gathers outside the hospital baying for the blood of the Elephant Man, who they believe is behind the second murder.

### Act 2

Tom Barker is performing a scene from *The Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* until the Policeman shuts the play down. Two more women have been murdered by Jack the Ripper. The Policeman recounts the delivery of a woman’s kidney to his office.

Tom Barker bemoans the state of his finances since he lost his prize “freak” and introduces Silver to Merrick, who promises him one of his prostitutes. The citizens of London are afraid of Jack the Ripper and fear for their lives. Silver offers Ginger another wealthy client. She asks him about her sister, Mary, who has gone missing. She imagines the ghosts of her dead friends and leaves with Silver to meet his latest client.

Dr Treves shares with Merrick the contents of a poem and bids him goodnight. Merrick prepares for the arrival of his female companion. While waiting, he falls asleep and dreams about his mother and stepmother. He awakes to see a blindfolded woman approaching him. He tells Ginger about his dream woman. Silver steps out of the shadows and mocks the couple. Ginger pulls off her blindfold only to see her client is “one of Tom Barker’s freaks”. Silver reveals that he killed Mary and the other women, as a revenge for being infected with syphilis. He plans to kill Ginger and leave her body in the room of the Elephant Man. Merrick inadvertently kills Silver with the silver dagger-walking-stick. Tom Barker removes the body but promises to return.

Merrick lies down on the bed, lays his head upon the pillow, knowing that this act will be his last. Before he dies he is visited by a vision of the Siamese Twins.

## CHARACTERS

Katie/Siamese Twin 2/Nurse	Soprano
Ginger	Soprano
Long Liz/Stepmother/Sally's Army 1	Mezzo
Polly/Woman/Joe's Mother/Sally's Army 2/Princess Alexander	Mezzo
Dark Annie/Marie Lloyd/Siamese Twin 1	Alto
Joseph Merrick	Tenor
Joseph Silver	Tenor
Tom Barker/Mortician/Lord Buckley/Actor	Baritone
Dr Treves	Baritone
Policeman/Man/Hospital Orderly	Bass

## ORCHESTRA

Large Version

2222/4231/11/0, Strings: 87553, Synthesizer and Grand Piano.

Touring version:

1111/2111/11/0, Strings: 44321, Synthesizer and Grand Piano.

**NOTE:** Joseph Merrick's score parts marked with square brackets [ ] are performed with **The Throat III**, a custom-built interactive instrument. This is operated by the singer and supervised by the sound-technician.

*Before the opera begins, while the audience is entering, the shape of a beast-man can be seen behind a curtain on the stage. The beast-man is Joseph Merrick (JOE M) who sings Bars 60 – 74 (First part of Curly Locks) through the Throat III.*

## ACT 1

### Prologue: Workhouse. Whitechapel, London. Circa 1876

*(Out of darkness a light in the doorway breaks upon the stage. A disabled boy, JOSEPH MERRICK, is thrown out into the street. A woman stands in the doorway holding a bag and wooden tray which she throws after the boy).*

**STEPMOTHER** For God's sake! For God's sake!  
The likes of you don't belong here!  
Now get out and earn your keep  
Or it's the workhouse for you! Workhouse!  
I told your father, when I married him  
"Everyone's got to do his fair share!"  
No work – no food! No work – no food!  
Don't come back till  
your pockets got something in 'em,  
Don't come back till  
your pockets got something in 'em!

*(The boy stumbles awkwardly. He collects the bag of haberdashery, and limps forward. A few people hurry past him en route to a travelling fair, ignoring his efforts to sell them his wares).*

**JOE M** Who'll buy my haberdashery?  
Who'll buy my haberdashery?  
Fine needles and thread...  
Haberdashery...

**MAN & WOMAN** Be off with you child!  
We don't want your sort here....

**JOE M** Haberdashery...  
Buy a penny's worth of buttons,  
So I can buy a piece of bread...

**MAN & WOMAN** Go away child! You bring bad luck  
With your wicked face!

**JOE M** Haberdashery! Haberdashery...  
Buy a penny's worth of buttons,  
Fine needles for food...

*(Alone on the street, JOSEPH M takes out a portrait of his mother.)*

**Curly Locks (Joseph Merrick's Aria)**

**JOE M** Curly locks, curly locks,  
Wilt thou be mine?  
Thou shalt not wash dishes, nor yet feed the swine,  
But sit on a cushion, and sew a fine seam,  
And feast upon strawberries, sugar, and cream,  
Strawberries, sugar, and cream.  
Oh, little portrait of my mother,  
That bears her face so white and pure.  
Let her see me from heaven above,  
Bring health and comfort  
To her son. Who once knew her love,  
Her soft and sweetly lips,  
That oft spoke of heavenly cure,  
I see them moving once again,  
Singing:  
Curly locks, curly locks,  
Wilt thou be mine?  
Curly locks, curly locks,  
Wilt thou be mine?  
Oh, little portrait of my mother  
Would that you were the portal  
To the place where she now lives,  
Rejoined, together, happily immortal  
Immortal...  
Oh, little portrait of my mother...

*(More people pass en route to the fair. JOSEPH M holds up his tray of buttons, thread and needles.)*

**JOE M** Who will buy my haberdashery?  
Fine needles and thread...Haberdashe...

**MAN** *(Interrupts)* Get out of the way, boy!

**WOMAN** Get out of the way, boy!

**MAN & WOMAN** That boy should work at the freak-show!

*(The SIAMESE TWINS appear and walk towards JOSEPH M, who notices that he is being watched.)*

**SIAMESE TWINS** There's a boy that we know  
Who wanders to and fro  
He does not sell buttons and thread  
But would buy pity instead  
For the dread he sees on passing faces

*(The twins comes closer. JOSEPH M is drawn to the mysterious figure.)*

**S TWIN 1**            This boy that we know  
Does he have a name?

**S TWIN 2**            I'm sure that he does,  
But would he share it,

**S TWINS**            I don't know...

**JOE M**                Joseph... Joseph Merrick...

**S TWIN 1**            You've been kissed by an angel I see?

**S TWIN 2**            One of God's creatures most certainly...

**JOE M**                *(JOSEPH M doesn't understand.)* I was born like this,  
But it changes, every day it grows...

**S TWIN 1**            *(Very close now to Joe M)* In your eyes I see a beautiful soul...

**S TWINS**            We see you, Joseph Merrick,  
We know you only too well.  
Remember there's a place  
For you in this world.  
And a purpose, too.

*(The "SIAMESE TWINS" hand him a coin and leave, JOE M offers his haberdashery, but they leave without taking anything. JOE M stands in front of his home. From backstage we hear the STEPMOTHER's voice shouting.)*

**STPMOTHER**        I told you we don't want you here!  
I told you there's no room, bugger off!  
I told your father, if you can't make a living  
It's off to the workhouse,  
It's off to the workhouse with you!

*(JOE M turns away and heads to the workhouse. Men in workhouse uniform step forward and receive him into their care. He takes out the miniature portrait.)*

**JOE M**                Oh, little portrait of my mother  
If only you could give counsel  
As to what your son should do...

### **Scene 1A: London**

*Orchestral Intermezzo – time passing. As early afternoon approaches, the smoke of a million coal-fires belching from the chimneys of homes, workhouses and factories mingles with the vapours of an imperfect drainage system, causing a cloud, too dense to rise, to settle over*

*London town. The struggling day gives way to candlelight; the sun's face blocked by a yellow stain.*

**Scene 1B: Freak Show. Music Hall, Whitechapel, London. Circa 1888**

*(Five streetwalkers, POLLY, DARK ANNIE, LONG LIZ, KATE and GINGER enter. They are heavily made up, wear brightly coloured silks, feather hats, petticoats and boots. They are provocative and feral. JOE S, their sharp dressing pimp, leads the women to centre stage.)*

**Goblin Ensemble**

**WOMEN** Can you hear the tramp of Goblin men?<sup>1</sup>

**JOE S** Can you hear the tramp of Goblin men?

**WOMEN** How they spy at us, peeping,  
Come toward us, hobbling

**JOE S** How they spy at us, peeping,  
Come toward us, hobbling

**WOMEN** Puffing and blowing,  
Heaving and panting.  
Full of airs and graces,

**JOE S** Puffing and blowing,  
Heaving and panting.  
Full of airs and graces,

**WOMEN** Dirty Goblin men,  
Fancy Goblin men,  
Dirty Goblin men,  
Fancy Goblin men,

**JOE S** Pulling their wry faces and a penny

**WOMEN** Pulling their wry faces and a penny,

**JOE S** To squeeze and kiss us,  
Lick and undress us,  
Beat and mock us

**WOMEN** To squeeze and kiss us,  
Lick and undress us,  
Beat and mock us

**JOE S** Puffing and blowing,  
Heaving and panting.

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<sup>1</sup> Lyric inspired by Christina Rossetti (1830 – 1894) poem *Goblin Market*

Full of airs and graces,

**WOMEN** Dirty Goblin men,  
Fancy Goblin men,

**JOE S** Dirty Goblin men,  
Fancy Goblin men,  
Dirty Goblin men,  
Fancy Goblin men,  
Fancy Goblin men,  
Naughty Goblin men!

*(End of ensemble. JOE S addresses his ladies as they approach the Freak Show.)*

**JOE S** I heard there's a monster in town, ladies!  
Oi Barker, get on with the show!

**WOMEN** Oi Barker, get on with the show!

*(One by one the women turn to face the stage of a Music Hall which is bathed in the glow of candlelight. Dr TREVES enters. Posters bear the titles: Serpentina – the Snake Charmer, Two Ton Tessie – the World's Fattest Woman, John Chambers the Armless Carpenter, Leonine the Lion Faced Lady, and The Elephant Man<sup>2</sup>. TOM BARKER, a showman extraordinaire, appears. He wears the clothes of a would-be wealthy gentleman, impeccably turned out, somewhat flamboyant, and with the manner of a common barker. He is ambitious, beguiling and wily. Behind him is a closed curtain, hiding the display of "human oddities" – the evening's entertainment.)*

**TOM B** Now then Ladies and Gentlemen, now's your time!  
Step right up, come on in,  
No more standing in line!  
You've come to see the truly remarkable!  
The Greatest show on Earth.  
You've brought your good wife,  
Paid your two shilling's worth,  
For a show you'll remember all your life!  
There's two ton Tessie from Tunbridge Wells –  
*(Forced laughter & Applause)*  
Five hundred pounds of female fun!  
*(Forced laughter & Applause)*  
She's so big she was born on March the tenth, the eleventh,  
And the twelfth! *(Forced laughter & Applause)*  
Then our tattooed man, who's got tattoos everywhere,  
No I'm sorry Ma'am, you won't see *that* part.  
It's a family show I run...!

**FOUR WOMEN** We don't want to see him show us the Elephant man!

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<sup>2</sup> See Notes 1 on Poster description

**ANNIE & JOE S** We don't want to see YOU, show us the Elephant man!!

**TOM B** Come one, come all and see the Remarkable!  
The greatest show on Earth!  
You've brought your good wife,  
Paid your two shilling's worth,  
For a show you'll remember all your life!  
No children allowed, that's the law Madam,  
Hold tight to your sweetheart's hand...  
Now then, Ladies and Gentlemen...  
You're about to witness  
A freak of nature, forced to expose himself...  
To the horror in your eyes!  
But let not me be the judge,  
I am not responsible for the constitution of the universe.  
I puts before you, only what God has allowed.

**GINGER** And a poor woman had to bear...

**TOM B** I ask you to not despise, to not condemn this man...  
On account of his most unusual appearance.  
Were we to prick Joe he would bleed!  
And that blood would be red as yours and mine!  
So hold tight to your sweetheart's hand!  
No children allowed, it's the law madam!  
Don't blame me if you leave a changed man...  
And remember, he's not here to frighten you,  
But to enlighten you, to enlighten you...  
Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you  
Joseph Merrick, The Elephant Man!  
Can I have a drum roll, please?  
The lights turned low  
Step right up – enjoy the show!

*(The curtain opens revealing a screen. A shadow of JOSEPH MERRICK is projected onto a screen. He shuffles, forward, turns awkwardly but remains hidden from view. Dr TREVES enters, drawn by the enormous shadow on the screen. He steps forward as JOE M stumbles. However, before JOE M is revealed to the public, two policemen enter. POLICEMAN addresses TOM BARKER.)*

**POLICEMAN** All of you can go home.  
This is a disgrace – an immoral display.

**TOM B** I know my rights ... you can't do this!

**POLICEMAN** We're closing you down, Sir,  
It's the law.

**GINGER** There's no law against looking!

**TOM B** But I have a permit...

**JOE S** And I've paid me money!  
And I've paid me money!  
Me money, me money,  
And I've paid me money!

**POLICEMAN** Clear it up! Move away!  
Clear it up! Move it away!  
Have a good day.

*(POLICEMAN tears down posters and exits. Dr TREVES approaches TOM BARKER.)*

**TREVES** I am Doctor Treves.  
I lecture at the London hospital.  
I must examine this... this man further.  
Give him my card.

**TOM B** We don't offer private viewings.

**TREVES** My examination is in the name of science, Sir.  
And once I am through I shall return your property to you, Sir.

*(The women move closer, eager to gain access to the Elephant Man.)*

**WOMEN** I want to see your freak too, Barker!

**JOE S** And I've paid me money!

**WOMEN** Me money, me money,  
And I've paid me money!

*(TREVES moves BARKER away from WOMEN and JOE S.)*

**TREVES** Shall we say tomorrow?

**TOM B** A man's gotta make a living, Sir...

*(TREVES offers him money. TOM BARKER, shakes his head and holds out his hand for more.)*

**TREVES** That's all I am willing to pay, Sir.  
*(BARKER takes the money.)*

*(JOE S waits for the moment he can "make a sale" of one of his girls.)*

**JOE S** Fancy something sweet,  
Before you go home... Doctor?

- WOMEN**                   Come towards us,  
Beat and mock us...  
Can you hear the tramp of Goblin men,  
Come towards us,  
Beat and mock us...  
Full of airs and graces,  
Pulling their wry faces,  
And a silver penny...  
To squeeze us and kiss us,  
To squeeze and kiss us,  
To beat and mock us  
To lick us and undress us  
Dirty Goblin men,  
Fancy Goblin men,
- JOE S**                    Dirty Goblin men,  
Fancy Goblin men,
- TREVES**                *(Offended)* If I had my way I would have these streets  
Washed clean of the likes of you and your business...
- JOE S**                    Fancy Goblin men,  
Naughty Goblin men!
- WOMEN**                *(After Treves)* Oi guv'nor we don't give a damn!
- WOMEN**                And your secret is safe,  
And your secret is safe  
With us, my dearie...
- GINGER**                You goes in like a lion and comes out a lamb!

## **Scene 2: Beast let loose. Streets of Whitechapel**

*(JOE M enters. He wears a sack over head, upon which rests a dark cap<sup>3</sup>. A long black cape covers the rest of his distorted frame. A cane in hand, he walks with some difficulty. Slowly the stage fills with the people of Whitechapel. They watch him advance towards London Hospital. Some are fearful, some spit at him as he passes, others are merely curious.)*

- COMPANY**            There's a beast let loose on London town tonight.  
Rising from the hovels, a brute with no heart or soul.  
Crawls through alleys with murderous intent.  
With a violent mask it hunts its prey hell-bent!

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<sup>3</sup> See Photo gallery

**MEN** With a violent mask it hunts its prey  
A dreadful task to eat us whole,

**COMPANY** Eat us whole!

*(The company converges on JOE M as he slowly makes his way towards the hospital. Four of the women and TOM BARKER dressed as member of the community. TREVES and POLICEMAN in the background – not playing their part, just singing in the ensemble.)*

**GINGER** I don't like the looks of him...

**KATE** What's your business here?

**ANNIE** Why you wear that funny hat?

**LIZ & POLLY** Where you going in such a hurry?

**JOE M** [aas-pe-tal] [aas-pe-tal]

**WOMEN & JOE S** Whatcha say? Whatcha running from?

**JOE M** [treeeeves]

**GINGER** You think the Devil's after you??

**KATE** He's not human!

**ANNIE** Not human at all!

**LIZ & POLLY** He's got something to hide...

**JOE M** [treeeeves] [treeeeves]

**COMPANY** There's a beast loose on London town tonight.  
With a violent mask it hunts its prey hell-bent!

**MEN** With a violent mask it hunts its prey  
A dreadful task to eat us whole,

**COMPANY** Eat us whole!

*(The POLICEMAN pushes back the crowd.)*

**POLICEMAN** What's going on here?  
Back away, back away!

**COMPANY** He steals our children,  
A freak let loose!

**JOE M** [heeelpppp meee!]

**COMPANY** He's not human at all!

**JOE M** [heeelpppp!]

*(JOE M collapses. POLICEMAN calms down JOE M and holds the crowd at bay.)*

**POLICEMAN** That's all right, sir,  
I'm not going to hurt you...

**JOE M** *(Hands POLICEMAN a card)* [treeeeves] [treeeeves]  
[aas-pe-tal] [aas-pe-tal]

**WOMEN/JOE S/  
BARKER** Just look at him!  
Just look at him!

**POLICEMAN** *(Reading the card)* Go call Doctor Treves, at the London Hospital.  
This man is in need of ...

*(TREVES enters from background.)*

**TREVES** Good God... Joseph Merrick...  
What have they done to you?

*(JOE M stumbles, a scream from backstage.)*

**GINGER** *(Shouting)* Officer, come quick!  
A woman's been found,  
She's been cut something awful...

*(All freeze with a horrified look at JOE M. The POLICEMAN urges the crowd out. They sing a quiet threatening reprise of the ensemble while reluctantly giving way. TREVES helps JOE M into the hospital.)*

### **Scene 3: Human Anatomy. London Hospital. Whitechapel**

*(TOM B slips on a mortician's apron and plays the role of pathologist. He picks up a vicious looking knife and examines it with some interest, testing its sharpness on his finger. The corpse of POLLY is wheeled in by the NURSE. TOM B works on the body of the murdered prostitute, while the NURSE assists with the autopsy and takes notes.)*

**TOM BARKER** When Polly was found dead on Buck's Row,  
She was stabbed more than thirty times.  
And her throat had been cut inches long.  
But learned men had no time.  
They were too busy gawking at my friend Joe.  
How had God's handiwork gone so wrong?  
How had God's handiwork gone so wrong...

*(TREVES enters and addresses his fellow doctors of the Pathological Society at London Hospital. A screen is wheeled on by an orderly concealing JOE M.)*

**TREVES** Good afternoon, Gentlemen, settle down now.  
Thank you.  
*(He indicates that the screen should be opened. JOE M, naked, is revealed to the audience.)*  
He is English.  
He is twenty-one.  
His name is Joseph Merrick.  
In the course of my profession, I have come upon  
Lamentable deformities of the face due to injury or disease,  
As well as mutilations and contortions of the body.  
But at no time have I met with such a degraded  
Or perverted version of a human being as this...

*(TOM B moves POLLY's head to one side revealing the wound to her throat. He dictates the mutilations done to POLLY. The NURSE transcribes his notes.)*

**TREVES** Note the enormous and misshaped head,  
**TOM B** An incision in the neck com-

*(As TREVES lectures, the orderly, using a pointing stick, indicates the body parts mentioned.)*

**TREVES** The spongy, fungous-looking skin,  
**TOM B** -menced on the left side, two and a

**TREVES** From the upper jaw, mass of bone,  
**TOM B** half inches below the angle

**TREVES** Upper lip turned inside out, the  
**TOM B** of the jaw, lower part of ab-

**TREVES** right arm...subject of Elephant-  
**TOM B** -domen...is ripped open by deep,

**TREVES** -iasis, pendant masses of  
**TOM B** jagged wound, four similar cuts

**TREVES** cauliflower-like skin, right hand is  
**TOM B** on right side, sharp instrument, pro-

**TREVES** large and clumsy, fingers are like  
**TOM B** -bably knife, used violently

**TREVES** thick tuberous roots...  
**TOM B** with upward pressure...

**JOE M** *(Sings as if in another world) [uurllly ocks... uurllly]*<sup>4</sup>

**TREVES** Yet despite the aforementioned  
**TOM B** Cause of death? Repeated stabbing,  
**JOE M** [ocks,]

**TREVES** anomalies, the patient's ge-  
**TOM B** repeated stabbing, led to mas-  
**JOE M** [Wil oww bee]

**TREVES** -nitals remain entirely  
**TOM B** -sive loss of blood, led to massive  
**JOE M** [-ine...]

**TREVES** unaffected and intact. Unaffected and intact! The  
**TOM B** loss of blood. Repeated stabbing led to death, led to death!  
**JOE M** [...]

**TREVES** man is a complete idiot.  
 An imbecile from birth.  
 A complete idiot... An imbecile from birth...  
 I pray to God he's an idiot!

#### **Scene 4: Let me feed upon my beauty. Streets of Whitechapel**

*(GINGER enters alone. She removes her mourning bonnet and dark cape. The street is empty. The evening trade has not yet begun. She pages through POLLY's diary and contemplates her life. In his London Hospital room, JOE M sleeps sitting up, his head on his knees. At some point he wakes up and moves to hear the singing coming from the street.)*

**GINGER** One day, when I am dead  
 I'd like to go the way Polly did,  
 In a polished elm coffin...  
 Was it Polly who wrote these simple thoughts?  
 Was she once this budding rose of home?  
 Was Polly so blissfully content?  
 Was her future veiled by these golden dreams?  
*"Studied French and dreamt of Paris."*  
*"Went to mass and took communion."*  
*"Bought a lovely summer bonnet today."*  
 Was she once this good girl dreaming?  
 A white brow on which there was no brand.  
*"Some may call me beautiful"*  
*"Some day I will marry"*  
*"Let me feed upon my beauty!"*  
 Her beauty was her curse and tool.

---

<sup>4</sup> Victorian Nursery rhyme:

Curly Locks! Curly Locks!  
 Wilt thou be mine?  
 Thou shalt not wash dishes, nor yet feed the swine;  
 But sit on a cushion, and sew a fine seam,  
 And feast upon strawberries, sugar, and cream

“’Tis all I have so let me use it.  
 Let me feed upon my beauty!  
 To snare men’s souls and give me love.”  
 The love their wives will never have!  
 Poor fools, what do I take from them?  
 How dare they hate us so?  
 What right have they to scorn us?  
 So I sell beauty?  
 But who is hurt by that? Who is hurt by me...  
 Was it me who once had...those simple dreams?  
 Was I once that budding rose of home?  
 Was I so blissfully content?  
 Was my future veiled by these golden dreams?  
 Dreams? My beauty is my curse and tool.  
 “’Tis all I have so let me use it.  
 Let me feed upon my beauty!  
 To snare men’s souls and give me love.”  
 Poor Polly, cut up like a pig...  
 Oh this grey gloomy fog!  
 Death... I’ll not think of it...  
 Why did I read her simple diary?  
 Will no one come?

*(From out of the shadows we hear the “Song of the Shirt”. JOE S emerges out of the shadows onto the stage and sings.)*

**JOE S**                    With fingers weary and worn,  
                                  With eyelids heavy and red,  
                                  A woman sat in unwomanly rags,  
                                  Plying her needle and thread.  
                                  Stitch! Stitch! Stitch! Stitch!  
                                  Stitch! Stitch! Stitch! Stitch!  
                                  In poverty, hunger and dirt,  
                                  And with a voice of so sad a pitch,  
                                  She sang the "Song of the Shirt."<sup>5</sup>

**GINGER**                    I won’t be like them, Joe!  
                                  You promised me,  
                                  I wouldn’t end up in the workhouse!

**JOE S**                    Work! Work! Work! Work!  
                                  Work! Work! Work! Work!  
                                  While the cock is crowing aloof,  
                                  Till the stars shine through the roof.  
                                  Oh, to be a slave,

---

<sup>5</sup> Lyric inspired by Thomas Hood, *Song of the Shirt* (from Punch), 1883

**GINGER** I won't be like them, Joe.  
**JOE S** Along with Jew, nigger and Turk,

**GINGER** You promised me,  
**JOE S** I wouldn't end up in the workhouse!  
**JOE S** Where woman cannot a penny save,  
**JOE S** But this be good Christian work, good Christian work!  
**GINGER** But this be good Christian work, good Christian work!

**JOE S** Is this how you want to live your life?  
*(JOE S dangles a piece of jewellery before GINGER.)*  
 Work till your brain begins to swim.  
 Work! Work! Work! Work!  
 Work! Work! Work! Work!  
 Till the eyes are heavy and dim,  
 And the brain begins to swim!  
 Oh, to be a slave,

**GINGER** Will you stop it, Joe?  
**JOE S** Along with Jew, nigger and Turk!

**GINGER** That hateful song!  
**JOE S** Where woman cannot a penny save,

**GINGER** I cannot stand it!  
 I cannot stand it!

**GINGER** I told you the last time never again!  
**JOE S** Till the eyes are dim, brain begins to swim!

**GINGER** I told you the last time never again!  
**JOE S** Till the eyes are dim, brain begins to swim!

**JOE S** The Atlantic world is waiting... for a girl like you.  
 Fine men in New York City,  
 Gold barons in Johannesburg!  
 Tobacco kings in Buenos Aires...  
 Oh, the things money can buy!  
 I'll take you away from Whitechapel  
 These streets don't deserve a woman  
 As beautiful as you...  
 As beautiful as you...

*(GINGER is at the point of succumbing to JOE S.)*

**JOE S** Let me feed upon your beauty!  
 You snare my soul and give me love.

**GINGER** Let me feed upon my beauty!  
**JOE S** Let me feed upon your beauty!

**GINGER** To snare men's souls and give me love.  
**JOE S** You snare my soul and give me love.

*(...but something snaps in her as she breaks away from his caresses. GINGER leaves. JOE S watches her.)*

### **Scene 5: Persuasion. London Hospital**

*(Light comes up on an exasperated DR TREVES pacing in the small room assigned to his patient. JOE M, awake now, sits on his bed, letting out a cry of frustration.)*

**JOE M** [Aahhhh! Caaa – – nooooooot!]

**TREVES** I will not believe it,  
 Not for one moment!  
 Your response to my examination  
 Has proven to me...  
 That beneath your unfortunate exterior,

**JOE M** [Noooo! Nooooo!]

**TREVES** There lives and breathes a man.

**JOE M** [Noooooot a maaaaann!]

**TREVES** Your eyes follow me as I do my work.  
 They are not the eyes of an imbecile!

**JOE M** [Leeaaavevee meeee, pleeeesse]

**TREVES** But if I am to help you, Joseph,  
 You have to speak!  
*(TREVES sits on the bed and faces JOE M.)*  
 Do you understand, Joseph?  
 Do you understand, Joseph?  
*(He makes to touch him, but JOE M flinches from TREVES and moves away.)*  
 Nod your head if you do.  
*(JOE M nods his head. TREVES picks up portrait.)*  
 Good. That is very good, Joseph.  
 Who is this?  
*(JOE M tries to take the portrait.)*  
 Your sister?  
 A lady friend?  
 Tell me who she is...,  
 Tell me, Joe... Tell me, Joe...

**JOE M** [My muuuuum....]

**TREVES** I don't understand... I don't understand...

**JOE M** *(Joe M stirs and with great effort and emotion attempts to speak.)*  
[My ...Mother!]

**TREVES** Good, Joe, that is very good!

*(TREVES sits, exhausted by his efforts, and looks at JOE M who in turn shakes with the emotion of his outburst. The NURSE knocks on the door.)*

**TREVES** Enter please!

*(She enters with a plate of soup. She sees JOE M and screams, dropping the dinner.)*

**JOE M** [Aahhhh! Aahhhh! Aahhhh!]

**TREVES** Nurse, control yourself!  
He will not hurt you!  
Nurse, control yourself.  
He will not hurt you!  
Now clean up the room!  
I must speak with Mr Gomm.

**JOE M** [So sorry...]

*(TREVES leaves while the NURSE cleans up. JOE M watches her. He tries to speak, but the nurse is too terrified to communicate with him.)*

**JOE M** [My name is Joseph...  
...did not mean to frighten you...  
...My name is Joseph...  
Do not be afraid...  
Look... look...]  
*(Joe M holds out the portrait of his mother towards the nurse. She is both terrified and fascinated.)*  
[This is my mother...  
I was not born this way...  
She loved me...]  
*(Nurse backs away.)*  
[Do not go... please stay...]  
*(Nurse flees. JOE M studies the portrait.)*  
[The girl has your cheeks mama,  
Pink and rosy...]

*(Dr TREVES enters, satisfied and happy.)*

**TREVES** So it has been decided, Joseph,  
The board of the hospital has been very generous.  
You can count on this as your home.

**JOE M**                    *(With a blank expression)* [Home?  
For how long?]

**TREVES**                    For as long as you like, Joseph, for as long as you like, Joseph.

**JOE M**                    [A proper home...  
Can you cure me?]

**TREVES**                    No, I'm afraid that will not be possible...

**JOE M**                    [What shall I do?]

**TREVES**                    Well, there is much interest in you,  
People would like to meet you.

**JOE M**                    [Why?]

**TREVES**                    They are curious how you survived.

**JOE M**                    [Why?]

**TREVES**                    There is much for you to learn about society.  
Would you like to learn, Joseph?

**JOE M**                    [Oh yes, Doctor.  
Very much so.]

**TREVES**                    Excellent, excellent!  
Very well, then,  
I shall see you again tomorrow, Joe.

*(TREVES shakes his hand and leaves JOE.)*

### **Home (Arioso)**

**JOE M**                    Home,  
This is my home.  
For as long as I like.  
People would like to meet me.  
In my own home...

Learn,  
There is much to learn.  
About society.  
"Oh yes Doctor..."  
"Very much, so..." Very much, so...

"Can you cure me?"...  
"No, I'm afraid that will not be possible..."

But this is my home,  
 For as long as I like  
 “Excellent, excellent!  
 Very well, then!”  
 [Learn.] [Cure.] [Home.]

### **Scene 6: Finale 1 Murder & High Society. London Hospital/Streets of Whitechapel**

*(TOM BARKER enters dressed as “Lord Buckley”. He polishes his monocle, swings his silver cane, and tries out his top hat.)*

**TOM BARKER**      Now let me get one thing straight:  
 I’m not one to grouse about a twist of fate.  
 So my friend and one-time business partner  
 Landed with his bum squarely in the butter.  
 Who wouldn’t be happy for the poor blighter?  
 Why should I care that my freak,  
 My bread and butter, so to speak,  
 Should become the pet of the upper classes?  
 Pet of the upper classes!

*(JOE M is now dressed as a gentleman. His room has become a shrine of photos and gifts from guests. JOE M is busy at work building a model of a Church Steeple. Dr TREVES fusses over his “star-turn” and introduces MARIA LLOYD star of the Music Hall, to JOE M.)*

**TREVES**            *(As if from a prior conversation)* ... for I am determined that  
 He should live a normal life.  
 Most critical, I think, are women...

**MARIA**            Why, Dr Treves, I believe you shall end up  
 Supporting the suffragettes...

**TREVES**            Well, let me explain,  
 Women have always shown the greatest fear  
 Towards him, and of course, he adores them.

**MARIA**            I understand...

**TREVES**            He is quite romantic... at times even amorous...  
 But his appearance...

**MARIA**            *(Imitating TREVES)*...Is horrifying  
*(Aside)* and that’s why you needed  
 An actress for this meeting...*(Back in conversation)*

**TREVES**            He wishes to live in an asylum for the blind.  
 He believes that there he might find a willing wife... *(Laughs a little)*

**MARIA**            *(Aside)* (Who will love him for who he is.)  
 Is that so hard to understand, Doctor?

That a man can be loved for who he is,  
And not what he looks like or for what he stands...  
(*Back in conversation*)

(*They enter.*)

**TREVES**

May I introduce you to Maria Lloyd,  
An actress of quite some renown.

**MARIA**

(*Smiling*) I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr Merrick.  
I have heard so much about you.

**JOE M**

(*He breaks down in tears.*) [You are beautiful...] (*Recovers*)

**MARIA**

(*MARIA LLOYD is deeply touched.*) How charming you are...  
Please accept this gift. (*She hands him a photo.*)

**JOE M**

Thank you.  
You are a famous actress?

**MARIA**

So they say. (*Observing the model*)  
What a fine artist you are, Mr Merrick...

**JOE M**

You display yourself for a living then?  
Like I once did...

**MARIA**

That is not myself, Mr Merrick.  
That is an illusion. This is myself.

**JOE M**

But this is who I am...,  
This is not an illusion.  
This is not an illusion...

(*Dr TREVES enters with "Lord Buckley" played by TOM B.*)

**TREVES**

May I introduce you to Lord Buckley,  
A member of parliament, I presume?

**TOM B**

I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr Merrick.

**JOE M**

The pleasure is mine.

**TOM B**

I brought you a present, (*Hands him the silver cane*)  
The mark of a true gentleman.

(*TOM B slips out of character as he faces JOE M. MARIA LLOYD and Dr. TREVES are either involved in their own conversation or momentarily frozen by the twirl of the silver cane.*)

**TOM B**

(*In JOE M's face*) Which you are not, Sir!  
And no friend either.

*(TOM B smiles at TREVES and MARIA LLOYD, pretending to be Lord Buckley – while snubbing JOE M.)*

And certainly no business partner.

*(TOM B slips out of character again, pulls open the handle and reveals a long blade hidden in the stem of the cane.)*

I puts you on the map, and you leaves me high and dry.

But now that you've got some cash,

I'll bring you what I knows you want.

*(TOM B is now receiving PRINCESS ALEXANDRA and conversing with her in the background, introducing her to MARIA LLOYD while pointing discreetly at JOE M.)*

A woman who don't care what you look like.

That's only interested in that part of you that works...

You'd like, that wouldn't you?

*(Whispers in JOE M's ear:)* You'd like that wouldn't you?

Ginger's her name – and loving's her game

You'll like that wouldn't you?

*(TOM B hands JOE M the silver can and reverts to Lord Buckley persona.)* Well, keep your chin up, Mister Merrick.

You're an example to us all.

**JOE M** *(Admiring the cane)* The mark of a true gentleman...

**TOM B/MARIA** I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance...

**TREVES** *(Dr TREVES is bursting with pride while introducing the PRINCESS.)*  
Joseph, may I introduce you to  
Her Royal Highness Princess Alexandra!

**PRINCESS** I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr Merrick.  
You're an example to us all!

**TOM B/MARIA** I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance...

**PRINCESS** I have brought you a photo of the Royal Family!

**TOM B/MARIA/** I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance...

**PRINCESS** You are a credit to Dr Treves!

**TOM B/MARIA/  
TREVES** I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance...

**PRINCESS** You are both a credit to Modern Science!

**TOM B/MARIA/  
TREVES** I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance...

**JOE M** Your Majesty...

**TOM B/MARIA/  
JOE M/TREVES** I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance...  
I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance...

**TOM B/MARIA/  
JOE M/TREVES/  
PRINCESS** I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance...

*(A loud disturbance from the streets disrupts the scene. The sharp blast from a police whistle can be heard backstage. The body of DARK ANNIE has been discovered. A series of shouts and screams intrude on the scene.)*

**GINGER** He's killed again!  
**JOE S** Another woman of the street! Call the police!  
**KATIE** I seen him go in there.  
**JOE S** The hospital has a monster!  
**GINGER** Bring him out!  
**KATIE** He's the murderer!  
**JOE S** The Elephant Man did it!  
**KATIE** I seen him do it! Murder!  
**ALL** *(simultaneously)* Murder! Murder! Murder!

*(TREVES returns and finds JOE M sitting quietly building his church steeple. The doctor observes him and reflects.)*

**KATIE/GINGER/  
LIZ/JOE S** Murder! Murder!

**JOE M** Frederick?  
What's the commotion outside?

**KATIE/GINGER/  
LIZ/JOE S** Murder! Murder!

**JOE M** I heard angry voices...

**KATIE/GINGER/  
LIZ/JOE S  
TREVES** Murder! Murder!  
It is nothing...

**JOE M** But they point at my window!  
They seem unhappy...  
What do they want?

**TREVES** I couldn't say...  
Are you happy here, Joe?

**JOE M** Oh yes, very happy,  
I have nothing to complain about, very,very

**JOE M** happy!  
**ALL** There's a beast let loose on London town tonight.  
**JOE M** [Happy!]  
**ALL** Rising from the hovels, a brute with no heart or soul.  
  
**JOE M** [Hhhaappppy indeed!]  
**ALL** Crawls through alleys with murderous intent  
  
**JOE M** [Hhhaappppy, hhaappyy, hhaappy, hhhaappyyy...]  
  
**ALL** With a violent mask it hunts its prey hell-bent  
  
**JOE M** [hhpphhpphhpphhpphhpp]  
  
**MALE VOICES** With a violent mask it hunts its prey  
A dreadful task to eat us  
**FEMALE VOICES** ah (*continuous*)  
  
**ALL** Whole, eat us whole!

*End of Act 1.*

# The Elephant Man

An Opera in Two Acts

**Music:** Carl Unander-Scharin

**Libretto:** Michael Williams

## Act 2

## ACT 2

### Overture

#### Scene 1: Dr Jeckyll & Mr Hyde. Lyceum Theatre, West End. 1888

*(Lights up on TOM B acting the role of Jeckyll/Hyde in a play adapted from Louis Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde at the Lyceum theatre. "Dr. Jeckyll"<sup>6</sup> is in his laboratory about to drink a concoction that will transform him into Mr Hyde.)*

**TOM B** *(As Dr Jeckyll)* Here in my hand I hold the key

To man's depravity...  
A chemical which alters the mind,  
Releasing evil nature in mankind.

I, Doctor Jeckyll, shall prove to you,  
That man is not truly one  
But truly two...

In the name of science I offer myself.  
In the name of science I offer myself.

*("Dr Jeckyll" drinks the concoction. The transformation occurs slowly. In full view of the audience we see his metamorphosis into the beast – "Mr Hyde".)*

**TOM B** *(As Mr Hyde with a hoarse and unhuman voice)*

At last I am free to be my true self!  
A creature of the night,  
Answering to my holy calling.  
Preying upon the weak.  
Indulging in my desire.  
Released from the fetters of society....

*(The POLICEMAN unceremoniously steps onto the "live" stage and puts an end to TOM B's performance.)*

**POLICEMAN** Alright, alright, thank you very much!  
*(POLICEMAN shakes his head)*  
That will be enough of this nonsense...

**TOM B** Do you mind, Sir?  
I am in the middle of a performance...

**POLICEMAN** There's been complaints, Sir,

---

<sup>6</sup> Dr Jekyll being a somewhat bland and platitudinous philanthropist, who has a tendency to grope with his right hand in the region of his heart, while Mr Hyde is a crouching, Quilp-like creature, a malignant Quasimodo, who hisses and snorts like a wild beast.

After the death of those two women...  
*(Holds up two fingers)*

**TOM B** But what has that got to do with my show?

**POLICEMAN** *(Reading)* It has come to the attention of the officers of law in the borough of the East End, that the theatrical production now playing at the Lyceum Theatre of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, has been identified as a potential inspiration behind the string of murders, numbering four unfortunate women, in the Whitechapel area. Due to the subject matter of the aforementioned play, it is my unhappy duty to close down the production immediately. Signed, the Mayor of London.

### **The Fried Kidney (Aria)**

**POLICEMAN** *(Shaking his head)* Unpleasant, unpleasant, a most unpleasant business, Mister Barker, unpleasant, a most unpleasant business.  
 He sliced them open, *(Slices with an imaginary knife in the air)*  
 He sliced them open. *(Slices with an imaginary knife in the air)*  
 Not one, *(Holds up one finger)* but two, *(Holds up two fingers)*  
 Not one, *(Holds up one finger)* but two, *(Holds up two fingers)*  
 On the same night you know, Jack the Ripper, he did.  
 Wrapped up in a parcel, you know,  
 He sent us half a kidney, *(Shows a "slice" in the air)* you know,  
 Jack the Ripper, he did. *(shakes his head)*  
 He said he took it from the women.  
 He said he fried it,  
 And ate it,  
 He said he ate it.  
 And it tasted... "very nice". *(He shrugs his shoulders)*  
 Unpleasant, unpleasant, a most unpleasant business,  
 Mister Barker, unpleasant, a most unpleasant business.  
 He sliced them open, *(Slices with an imaginary knife in the air)*  
 He sliced them open. *(Slices with an imaginary knife in the air)*  
 You'll understand, you'll understand  
 Why we had to close your play down.  
 You'll understand, you'll understand  
 So sorry, Mister Barker, so sorry. *(He shrugs his shoulders)*  
 Unpleasant, unpleasant, a most unpleasant business,  
 Unpleasant, Mister Barker, a most unpleasant business.  
 Unpleasant, unpleasant, a most unpleasant business,  
 A most unpleasant business, indeed. Good night.

### **Scene 2: Meeting of Men. London Hospital, Whitechapel.**

*(Frustrated and despondent TOM B takes off his jacket, discards Mr Hyde's wig, packs up his "props", turns to the audience.)*

**TOM B** "A most unpleasant business, indeed!"  
 Now what's a man to do

When every avenue is closed to you  
 When life treats you this unfair  
 You got to grab your fair share!

*(He discards his actor's robes and moves to meet JOE S who enters from one side.)*

You'll have to use all that you've got  
 To get what you want, to get what you want!

*(JOE M comes into view sitting alone on his bed in his usual upright position.)*

I'll make sure that one man meets another man.  
 To see if things could work my way...

*(In the dead of night TOM B enters JOE M's room. JOE M is in his familiar position sleeping upright in his bed.)*

Hey Joey, wakey, wakey!  
 I've come to bring you what was promised...

*(Startled, JOE M wakes. Afraid by the sudden intrusion, he crouches in his bed, staring at TOM B.)*

**JOE M** Mr Barker...?  
 Does Doctor Treves know you're here?

**TOM B** This will be our secret Joey...

**JOE M** Who's there in the shadow?

*(JOE S steps forward and circles JOE M, looking at him with unashamed fascination.)*

**TOM B** The man who provides your heart's desire.  
 Mister Joseph Merrick, meet Mister Joseph Silver.

*(JOE M does not know how to respond to the careful scrutiny of the stranger and repeats somewhat monotonely the polite phrase:.)*

**JOE M** I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance.

**JOE S** *(with a broad smile)* And I yours, Mister Merrick.  
 You are everything they say!

**TOM B** He'll provide your heart's desire!

**JOE M** Forgive me, I am not dressed...  
 I was not expecting guests this late...

**JOE S** There's no need for polite protocol.

**Like any other men, I loathe who I am (trio)**

**JOE S** I take it you're a man, Mister Merrick?  
With a man's natural needs?

*(From his jacket, TOM B pulls out a flask of liquor. He pours three tots into the tea cups set out on a tea tray, and serves JOE M and JOE S).*

**JOE M** Oh yes, very much so.  
Don't be fooled by what you see...

**TOM B** *(Aside – the imposter syndrome)*  
Don't be fooled by what you see.

**JOE S** *(Aside – the imposter syndrome)*  
Like other men...

**JOE M** Don't be fooled by what you see...

**JOE S** I loathe who I am...

**TOM B** He would be like any other man...

**JOE M** Don't be fooled by what you see...

**JOE S/TOM B** *(Back in play with sudden contempt)*  
I take it you're a man with a man's natural needs.

**JOE M** Don't be fooled by what you see...

**JOE S/TOM B** I see you're a man with a man's natural needs...

**JOE M&S/TOM B** *(All three aside – The imposter syndrome)*  
A man with enough reason to love  
A man with enough reason to love  
A man with enough reason to hate  
A man with enough reason to hate

**JOE S** *(Back in play, hateful and disdainful)*  
What evil did you do,

**JOE S/TOM B** What evil did you do,  
To deserve your fate?

**JOE S** Do you count yourself as a punishment by God?

**TOM B** Do you count yourself as a failure by God?

**JOE S/TOM B** Do you wonder why he cursed you?  
Does he wonder why you curse him?

**JOE M** This unwanted guest has taken root in me...

- JOE S** *(struck by these words; aside Imposter Syndrome)*  
...unwanted guest...
- JOE M** This unwanted guest has shaped my destiny...
- JOE S** ...destiny...
- JOE M** And will be the death of me!
- JOE S** ...death... Like other men...
- JOE M** Don't be fooled by what you see...  
**JOE S** I loathe who I am...  
**TOM B** He would be like any other man...
- JOE M** Don't be fooled by what you see...
- JOE S/TOM B** *(Back in play with open contempt)*  
I take it you're a man with a man's natural needs.
- JOE M** Don't be fooled by what you see...
- JOE S/TOM B** I see that you're a man with a man's natural needs...
- JOE M/S/TOM B** *(All three aside – The imposter syndrome)*  
A man with enough reason to love  
A man with enough reason to love  
*(All three back in play – looking suspiciously at one another, realizing their similarity)*  
A man with enough reason to hate  
A man with enough reason to love...  
*(They drink a toast.)*
- JOE S** Now to the female companion you seek.  
What is it that you want with her?
- JOE M** I wish merely to look upon her...
- JOE S** *(Laughs)* That's what they all say, Mr Merrick,  
That's what they all say...
- JOE M** *(Solemn & decisive)* The girl must wear a blindfold...
- JOE S** I can see why you would want that...  
But to find such a girl will be costly....
- JOE M** *(drops a bag of coins on the table)* We must be discreet,

But take what you need...

*(TOM B and JOE S exchange glances, in a flash the bag is emptied of its coins.)*

**TOM B** Treves won't know a thing.  
Shall we say tomorrow night?

**JOE M** But what if the Doctor knows?

**TOM B** Shh not a word, this will be our secret, Joe,  
This will be our secret.

**JOE S** Good night, Mr Merrick, it's been a pleasure  
Doing business with you...

**JOE M** Good night...

*(The two men leave. JOE M walks around the room. He cannot come to rest. He is agitated. He picks up his mother's portrait, hurriedly places it face down. He comes across the mirror – looks at his face.)*

**JOE M** I remember  
A beautiful blonde girl  
Following me round the workhouse.  
Screaming:  
“Why don't you just die freak!”  
“Why don't you just die freak!”  
I was lost among lost children.  
While the unwanted guest  
Grew and grew within me,  
Until Joseph was no longer  
The man he wanted to be...  
“Like other men, I loathe who I am...”  
*(He turns to the Bible on the side of the table, opens it up to read...)*  
The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,  
I shall not want...

*(Angrily, JOE M slams the Bible closed. Lights fade but the music segues into the next scene.)*

### **Scene 3: Fire & Brimstone. Streets of Whitechapel, London.**

*(An air of dread and fear permeates the streets of Whitechapel. The Ripper's recent double murders have shocked the neighbourhood. The POLICEMAN enters and places a sandwich board at centre. LONG LIZ, POLLY and DARK ANNIE enter as Salvation Army Workers. The company crowds around the board to read its contents:)*

#### **POLICE NOTICE.**

**On the morning of Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1888,  
two Women were murdered in or near Whitechapel,  
supposed by some one residing in the immediate**

neighbourhood. Should you know of any person to whom suspicion is attached, you are earnestly requested to communicate at once with the nearest Police Station.  
**Metropolitan Police Office**  
**30<sup>th</sup> September 1888**

<b>TOM B/TREVES</b>	<i>The Lord is my Shepherd...</i>
<b>LIZ/POLLY/ANNIE</b>	<i>The Lord is my Shepherd...</i>
<b>TOM B/TREVES</b>	<i>I shall not want,</i>
<b>LIZ/POLLY/ANNIE</b> <b>TOM B/TREVES</b>	<i>I shall not want, shall not want...</i>
<b>GINGER/KATIE/JOE S/POLICEMAN</b>	<b>God save us from the Beast's delight!</b>
<b>LIZ/POLLY/ANNIE/TOM B/TREVES</b> <b>GINGER/KATIE/JOE S/POLICEMAN</b>	<i>He maketh me lie down in green pastures</i> <b>Let loose on London town tonight!</b>
<b>LIZ/POLLY/ANNIE/TOM B/TREVES</b>	<i>He leads me beside quiet waters...</i>
<b>GINGER/KATIE/JOE S/POLICEMAN</b>	<b>We dread the deathly streets, Fear for our lives!</b>
<b>LIZ/POLLY/ANNIE/TOM B/TREVES</b>	<i>He restoreth my soul...</i>
<b>GINGER/KATIE/JOE S/POLICEMAN</b>	<b>We fear the blood soaked knives!</b>
<b>LIZ/POLLY/ANNIE/TOM B/TREVES</b>	<i>He restoreth my soul...</i>
<b>GINGER/KATIE/JOE S/POLICEMAN</b> <b>LIZ/POLLY/ANNIE/TOM B/TREVES</b>	<b>Our flesh devoured and dishonoured.</b> <i>He restoreth my soul...</i>
<b>GINGER/KATIE/JOE S/POLICEMAN</b>	<b>We fear the blood soaked knives!</b>
<b>LIZ/POLLY/ANNIE/TOM B/TREVES</b>	<i>He restoreth my soul...</i>
<b>GINGER/KATIE/JOE S/POLICEMAN</b>	<b>Our flesh devoured and dishonoured.</b>
<b>LIZ/POLLY/ANNIE/TOM B/TREVES</b>	<i>The Lord is...</i>
<b>GINGER/KATIE/JOE S/POLICEMAN</b>	<b>God save us from the Beast!</b>
<b>LIZ/POLLY/ANNIE/TOM B/TREVES</b>	<i>My shepherd...</i>
<b>GINGER/KATIE/JOE S/POLICEMAN</b>	<b>We dread the deathly streets!</b>
<b>LIZ/POLLY/ANNIE/TOM B/TREVES</b>	<i>The Lord is...</i>

**GINGER/KATIE/JOE S/POLICEMAN**                    **We fear the blood-soaked knives!**

**LIZ/POLLY/ANNIE/TOM B/TREVES**                    *Amen...*

**GINGER/KATIE/JOE S/POLICEMAN**                    **There's a beast  
Loose on London town tonight!**

*The company drift away into the shadows leaving JOE S at centre. He takes out his pen knife, cleans his finger nails, waits for GINGER to arrive.*

**Eight little Whores (Arioso)**

**JOE S**                    *(Whistles)*  
 Eight little whores, with no hope of heaven. *(Whistles)*  
 God may save one, then there'll be seven. *(Whistles)*  
 Seven little whores, begging for a shilling. *(Whistles)*  
 One stays in Buck's Row, then there's a killing. *(Whistles)*  
 Six little whores, glad to be alive, *(Whistles)*  
 One sidles up to Jack, then there are five. *(Whistles)*  
 Four and whore rhyme all right,  
 So do three and me,  
 I'll set the town alight.  
 Then there are two, shivering with fright.  
 Seek a cosy doorway in the middle of the night. *(Whistles)*  
 Jack's knife flashes, and there's but one.  
 And the last one's ripe for fun.

*(GINGER enters. She is distracted, scared.)*

**GINGER**                    What you want, Joe?  
 I told you I wanted to lay low...

**JOE S**                    I got us some new business,

**GINGER**                    After what happened  
**JOE S**                    And a rich blighter,

**GINGER**                    to Katie and Liz...Have you seen Mary,  
**JOE S**                    too, with money to spare... A real gentle-

**GINGER**                    Joe? I think he got my  
**JOE S**                    man, a real gentle-

**GINGER**                    sister!  
**JOE S**                    man!

**GINGER**                    I'm scared for my life, I'm scared for my life!  
**JOE S**                    A rich blighter too, with money to spare!

**GINGER** I'm scared for my life, I'm scared for my life!  
**JOE S** A rich blighter too, with money to spare!

**JOE S** *(Pulls her to him)* Oh, you work for me...

**GINGER** *(Pulls away)* But not for much longer!

**JOE S** He's a real gentleman...

**GINGER** After what happened to Katie and Liz...

*(JOE S takes out the bag of money and dangles it before GINGER).*

**JOE S** And a rich blighter too.

**GINGER** There's a monster out there!  
 Have you seen Mary, Joe?  
 Have you seen my sister, Joe?  
 I think he got my sister!  
 I'm scared for my life...

**JOE S** There was a country maiden,  
 Came to London for a trip,

**GINGER** Some say they've seen dear Polly lying in Buck's Row,  
**JOE S** And her golden hair was hanging down her back...

**GINGER** Her body giving off a ghoulish glow.  
**JOE S** She wandered out in London for a breath of evening air,  
 And her golden hair was hanging down her back...

**GINGER** Poor Katie, Lizzie, Annie – no more, no more shall we meet.  
**JOE S** While rich men, young and old, greeted her there,  
 And her golden hair was hanging down her back.

**GINGER** Last night I dreamed of Mary,  
 Begging me for help...  
 But I was so afraid,  
 I left her to die!

*(GINGER starts crying. JOE S sings to her)*

**JOE M** But oh! Fi! Such a change you know,  
 When she left the village she was shy,  
 But alas alack, she's gone back  
 For she's a naughty little twinkle in her eye!

*JOE M dangles the money bag in front of a weeping GINGER. She follows him, as if in a daze.  
 JOE S whistles carelessly.)*

**Scene 4: London Hospital. Whitechapel.**

*(Lights come up on Dr TREVES seated in JOE M's room at London Hospital. He is paging through a book, while JOE M works on his model Church. JOE M appears agitated and unsettled.)*

**JOE M** Does God punish the wicked, Doctor?

**TREVES** I believe it says so in the Old Testament.

**JOE M** Was my mother so wicked, she should be punished, be punished with me?

**TREVES** Your condition is a medical one, Joseph.  
*(Finding the passage)* Ah here it is,  
The passage I've been looking for.  
I believe this was written, was written for you.

*(TREVES sings Watts' poem to JOE M)*

**Watts' Poem**<sup>7</sup>

**TREVES** *"It's true my form is something odd,  
But blaming me is blaming God.  
Could I create myself anew,  
I would not fail in pleasing you."*

*(He hands the book to JOE M, who reads the remainder of the poem.)*

**JOE M** *"If I could reach from pole to pole,  
Or grasp the ocean with a span.*

**JOE M/TREVES** *I would be measured by the soul  
The mind's the standard of the man."*

**TREVES** You shall be measured by your soul, Joseph.

**JOE M** My mind defines who I am.  
*(JOE M hands TREVES the book, but he gestures that it is a gift.)*  
Thank you, Doctor. I shall treasure this always.

**TREVES** Very well, then. I shall bid you goodnight...

*(He makes to leave, gathers his cape and hat.)*

**JOE M** Good night, Doctor.

**TREVES** Good night, Joseph.

---

<sup>7</sup> Lines from Isaac Watts poem that Joseph Merrick used to end his letters.

**JOE M**                    You are a true friend, Fredrick.  
I hope never to disappoint you.

**TREVES**                I don't believe that is possible.  
Until tomorrow...

*(TREVES leaves. JOE M follows him to the door and sees him out. He grows agitated again and begins to tidy the room. He takes out the gifts he received from his visitors and lays them carefully, one by one, on the table. He strokes the portrait of his mother and places it under his pillow. He sprays himself with cologne, re-combs his hair, organises the room, while constantly checking the time. Finally, he sits at the table and drums his fingers against the chair impatiently. Soon he is asleep and dreaming.)*

### **Joe M's Dream II**

*(His dreams are soaked with the image of himself preserved (alive) in a large bottle of formaldehyde. Out of the shadows of his dream his mother (POLLY) approaches, she is followed by his stepmother (LONG LIZ). She in turn is replaced by the Siamese Twins (KATIE & ANNIE). The women circle JOE M as he dreams. He reaches out for them.)*

**MOTHER (POLLY)** Curly Locks! Curly Locks!  
Curly Locks! Curly Locks!  
Wilt thou be mine?

*(LONG LIZ, as stepmother, enters and replaces the dream of his mother.)*

**STEPMOTHER (LIZ)** I told you we don't want you here!  
I told you there's no room, bugger off!  
I told your father, if you can't make a living  
It's off to the workhouse,  
It's off to the workhouse with you!

*(The two women disappear as GINGER appears, blindfolded, moving slowly forward. It might at first appear that she too is part of his dream. Her hands are stretched out in front of her searching for something. Behind her, in the shadows, unseen by JOE M, JOE S watches GINGER as she moves closer to the sleeping figure of JOE M. She moves closer and closer to the sleeping man. Her hands feel the air. They are inches away from JOE M. At the moment she is about to touch him, he stirs. Frightened she stops moving.)*

**GINGER**                Joe...? Joe...  
Is there anyone there?

*(JOE M is both paralysed and fascinated by the close proximity of the blindfolded woman with the outstretched hands. He watches her hands moving like butterflies in front of his face. GINGER is about to take off her blindfold. Involuntarily JOE M stops her by grasping her hand.)*

**JOE M**                    No! Don't.

*(Startled, GINGER, moves backwards. She collects herself.)*

**GINGER** I thought I heard something,  
Something breathing,  
Like an animal.

**JOE M** I'm sorry I frightened you.  
I was sleeping...

*Adopting her professional attitude.*

**GINGER** No man thinks of sleeping,  
While Ginger's come a-visiting...  
*(JOE M is at loss for words.)*  
So what's your pleasure, guv'nor?  
I haven't got all night...

**JOE M** I just thought we could talk a little...

**GINGER** You paid such good money just to talk?

**JOE M** And to touch... and to touch...  
I want to touch...

**GINGER** That's more like it...

*GINGER begins to undo her top. Horrified, JOE M stops her.*

**JOE M** No, not yet!

**GINGER** You're a strange one, guv'nor  
Why the blindfold?

**JOE M** There's reason enough.  
You have to trust me...

**GINGER** These are strange times,  
A girl can't be too careful.  
You've heard of the monster  
roaming these streets?

**JOE M** I shall not hurt you.  
I shall not harm you.  
Do not be afraid.

*(He gives her his good hand.)*

**GINGER** Your hand is so soft,  
I want to see you...

**Soul Seeker (Aria and duet)**

**JOE M** No, listen to me instead... instead...  
 Listen to me instead...  
 In my dream women have no eyes,  
 No eyes that can betray what they  
 Truly feel when they see me.  
 Now in your blindness  
 I take on my true shape:  
 Soul seeker, magician man,  
 Spell weaver, angel chaser, magic maker...  
 Now I am a man,  
 Whole,  
 Digging with two strong arms,  
 Earth crumbling at my touch  
 Expecting stone,  
 But finding...  
 A woman's form,  
 Soft and yielding,  
 Come to life at my touch  
 Only then do her eyes open,  
 She looks up at me,  
 With moist eyes of love....

**JOE M/GINGER** Soul seeker, magician man,  
 Spell weaver, angel chaser, magic maker...

**GINGER** I see a man digging...  
 The shape of you in my dream,  
 Soul seeker, spell weaver,  
 angel chaser, magic maker...

**JOE M** *"It's true my form is something odd,  
 But blaming me is blaming God.  
 Could I create myself anew,  
 I would not fail in pleasing you."*

**GINGER** *"It's true my form is something odd,  
 But blaming me is blaming God."*

**GINGER** Your words are beautiful,  
 Who are you?

**JOE M** A man who would be someone else...

**GINGER** Then we are alike.  
 For I too, would be someone else...

**JOE M** No you are beautiful...  
 I would not change you for anything...

**GINGER** Why, I believe I have met a true gentleman...

*(Her words stop JOE M. He is moved to tears, breaks down. She reaches out for him – without removing the blindfold – and puts his left hand, his good hand, on her face, traces it down her neck, towards her breast.)*

**JOE M** Will you come and visit me again...

**GINGER** I will come to you...

**JOE M** I'll not ... I will not...

**GINGER** Shhh. Shhh.

*GINGER has undone her top, her breast is exposed. JOE M touches her. He shudders momentarily, and weeps.*

### **Scene 5: JOE's Death. London Hospital, Whitechapel.**

*(From the shadows, JOE S starts laughing.)*

**JOE S** Oh, if you could see yourself...*(Laughing)*  
*(GINGER takes off her blindfold and is horrified at the sight of JOE M. She screams in fright.)* A woman touched by a monster...*(Laughing)*

*(JOE M backs away frightened by the sudden entrance of JOE S. Confused, he resorts to the primitive being.)*

**JOE M** [Nooo, don't loooooook at meeeee]

**GINGER** Joe, what have you done?

**JOE S** *(Laughing;mocking)* Soul seeker, spell weaver,  
 Angel chaser, magic maker! *(Laughing)*

**GINGER** You brought me here,  
 To be with him...*(Attacking JOE S)*  
 You're the monster, Joe  
 You're the monster...

*(GINGER slaps at JOE S who easily parries her blows. He throws her to the ground and stands above her. He draws from within his coat his knife.)*

**JOE S** Don't touch me whore!  
 You're polluted!  
 Aaboomination...

**GINGER** Ah, no, please Joe, you frighten me...

*(JOE S reveals his true self as he threatens them with his knife.)*

- JOE S** You can be glad I was here, Joe,  
For temptation is a terrible thing.  
Temptation leads to infection,  
All women blood on their hands.  
*(Turns towards GINGER)*  
I shall deal with thee in fury,  
Shall take away thy nose and thine ears.  
And thy residue shall fall by the sword;  
And ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD *(Laughing)*
- GINGER** You! The monster! Murdered all my friends!
- JOE S** *(With a hoarse and deranged voice)* Whores all of them,  
Polluted me with the pox.
- GINGER** What did you do to my sister?
- JOE S** *(Almost to himself)* She paid for her crime.  
I might have been cured...
- GINGER** *(Weeping)* What did you do to her?
- JOE S** ...By pills of white mercury...  
I'm a young man cut down in my prime...  
No better than him!  
*(JOE S moves towards GINGER with his knife drawn.)*  
I shall strip thee of thy clothes,  
As I did the others!  
As I did the others!
- (JOE M has regained his composure and rises from the bed.)*
- JOE M** No, don't touch her!
- JOE S** And thy whoredom shall be discovered  
The rooms of the Elephant Man.
- JOE M** Leave her ... don't touch her...
- JOE S** What a knight you have, Ginger.
- GINGER** No! Monster!  
**JOE M** Leave her ... don't touch her...
- JOE S** But I fear he would save you for himself.  
**GINGER** What did you do to my sister?
- JOE M** Leave her! Leave her!  
Leave her! Leave her!

**JOE S** When men recall me in years to come,

**GINGER** What did you do to her?

**JOE M** Leave her! Leave her!

Leave her! Leave her!

**JOE S** They will recall me with flattery.

*(Completely deranged)* It was I who gave birth  
To the twentieth century!

*(JOE M moves forward and picks up the cane which he points at JOE S.)*

**JOE M** Leave her! Leave her!

Leave her!

*(JOE M waves the cane ineffectually at the laughing JOE S, who grabs the cane to throw it aside. In so doing he pulls the knife free from its scabbard. JOE M stumbles towards him and inadvertently the knife sinks into JOE S's throat. He collapses on the floor clutching his throat and dies. Ginger runs from the room. JOE M collapses in a chair and holds his head, weeping. After a moment TOM B enters.)*

**TOM B** Now here's a thing!

You've done him in, Joe.

**JOE M** I did not mean to...he wanted to hurt her.

[Help me, Tom, help me..].

*(TOM B starts to tidy up the room.)*

**TOM B** This will be our secret Joe.

No one need know...

**JOE M** [Dr Treves... I will have to go...]

*(TOM B begins to remove the body.)*

**TOM B** Tom Barker will fix everything.

No need to worry;

No one needs to know.

*(TOM B drags out the body of JOE S.)*

## **Finale**

*(The Siamese Twins enter and assist him to lie down on his bed. JOE M lies on his bed and drifts between waking and consciousness.)*

**S TWINS** There's a boy that we know  
Who wanders to and fro  
We see you, Joseph Merrick,  
We know you only too well.  
Remember there's a place

For you in this world,  
And a purpose, too.

*(JOE M watches them leave. He holds the portrait of his mother)*

**JOE M**                    Carry me out to the ocean,  
where my drifting thoughts... flow free.  
Guide them to a far distant land,  
that only the mind can see.  
There I shall paint a great portrait  
of what this world, this world should be.  
A place without sadness,  
A place without pain,  
or human deformity.

*(JOE M lays his head down to rest on the pillow as normal person would. He breathes slowly for a moment and then as if choking, his good hand moves above his face, reaching for something and then falls by his side. He dies.)*

*(TOM B enters)*

**TOM B**                    After they found poor Mary more dead than alive,  
The murders of the Ripper stopped at number five.  
And no one knew for certain who Jack was.  
But I knew, oh yes, I knew because in the river Thames  
Rots a certain Mister Joseph Silver.  
*(Makes a sign of the cross)*  
God have mercy on his soul...

*(GINGER enters)*

**GINGER**                    God have mercy on his soul... on his beautiful soul...  
We all came to see the Elephant Man on display.  
And when I met him face to face I ran away.  
A man who would be someone else,  
No different from you or I...

**TOM B**                    Now here's a thing to send you on your way:  
Remember he was not here to frighten you,  
But to enlighten you, to enlighten you.

*(Spoken)* So can I have a drum roll, please?  
The lights turned up bright  
For all that's left for me to say is...  
A very Good Night!

*(TREVES enters and sings.)*

**TREVES**                    Carry him out to the ocean,  
Where his drifting thoughts flow free...

**S TWINS**

To the Ocean,

**COMPANY**

Carry him out to the ocean,  
Where his drifting thoughts flow free.  
Guide them to a far distant land,  
That only the mind can see.  
There I shall paint a great portrait,  
Of what this world should be.  
A place without sadness,  
A place without pain,  
or human deformity.

*End of Act 2*

## HISTORICAL NOTE

**Joseph Carey Merrick** was born on August 5, 1862, in a slum neighbourhood of Leicester. When Joseph was two years old strange growths started erupting on his skin. His head grew larger and his right arm became deformed. As he grew older, the condition worsened. When Joseph was ten years old, his mother died of pneumonia. His father remarried and his new bride rejected young Joseph, now twelve, and sent him to work in a cigar factory, but his right arm was now so deformed that he could not fill his quota. He was fired. After trying other jobs he signed himself into the Leicester Union Workhouse. After several years, Merrick wished to leave the workhouse and wrote to Tom Norman, a showman, and asked him for a job. He was immediately hired and worked in Norman's travelling "Freak Show".

When surgeon Frederick Treves discovered Merrick in a back room freak show, across the street from the Royal London Hospital, he assumed that the man was severely retarded. Treves made arrangements with Tom Norman, to study the man and present him to a meeting of the London Pathological Society. It was then that Dr Treves made an astounding discovery. Not only was Merrick highly intelligent, but he was literate and a great lover of prose and poetry.

Merrick was a victim of Proteus Syndrome, an extremely rare condition that caused abnormal growth of the bones, skin and head. The mere sight of his distorted face caused some women to faint, so he donned a mask that covered his misshapen head – a head so large that the cap that he wore measured three feet in circumference. His body was horribly twisted and contorted. His right hand and forearm was a deformed, useless club. Cauliflower-like growths covered his skin. And he emitted a terrible stench that sickened anyone who came near him.

Due to the intervention of Dr Treves, Mister Gomm, the hospital administrator, and the royal family, Joseph Merrick was allowed to stay in the hospital. Merrick was moved downstairs to Bedstead Square where he was given a small apartment. Treves discovered that if bathed twice a day, Merrick's odor would vanish. Money was donated to buy Merrick new clothes and, suddenly, he became socially acceptable. The crème dé la crème of London society came to visit – some out of curiosity and others because it was the fashionable thing to do. One of these however, a popular actress named Madge Kendall, proved to be a lasting and valued friend.

One night in 1890, Merrick decided to lay his enormous head to rest, no doubt knowing that if he lay prone, his windpipe would be crushed by the weight and he would suffocate. The next morning he was found dead – strangled. He was 28 years old.

Dr Treves posits in a pamphlet he wrote some years after Joseph's death that the Elephant Man grew tired of being a Victorian "other self" and his fear of people's gaze might indeed have accounted for a desire to sleep forever. Merrick felt so deeply marked by the eyes of others that he told Treves he wanted his next move to be to an asylum for the blind. Thus, there was darkness still in this man's life. Gentle, unselfish, and without guile he might have been, free from sadness and anxiety he was not.

Merrick was converted by Victorian doctors, blue bloods, and show people from Elephant Man to Everyman. His life was rewritten not as that of a monster but as that of a pilgrim, echoing one of the Victorian's favourite stories. Small wonder his death was sentimentalised in the London press. Despite the inquest and Treves's concern over "peculiarity" in the manner of his death, there could be little official talk of suicide in Merrick's case. The life of Joseph Merrick symbolised Victorian principles of goodness and divested of all taint of the demonic or bestial. Joseph Merrick had become a symbol of

perseverance in the face of affliction. In the end, he came to embody the “other self” as angel, not devil.

### **Joseph Silver**

Joseph Lis was born in Kielce, Poland, in 1864, one of the nine children of a Jewish tailor and petty criminal. When he was fifteen years old Joseph Lis travelled to England and joined the thousands of Russo-Polish Jews in the East End, where he changed his name to Joseph Silver. He gravitated to the congested sectors and lived with his uncle, Lewis Lis, who had set up business as a “general dealer” in Plumber’s Row, just south of the Whitechapel Road, directly behind London Hospital.

He could not have chosen a worst time to arrive in London. By 1880 wages had dropped by half and immigrants were particularly hard hit, with every second Jew dying in the greater London area given a pauper’s funeral. Economic circumstances and his predatory personality led Silver to embrace some of the less savoury activities of the East End underworld. He perfected his gambling skills at faro, was a pugilist of some renown, indulged his need for beer and spirits and quickly saw that real money could be made from “fallen women”. In the mid 1880’s, the “City of Dreadful Delight” was served by at least 75,000 full-time prostitutes. Poverty drew unskilled females to urban areas and then, unable to provide them with a living wage, recycled them through the streets as “unfortunates”.

These “unfortunates” might have been the source of his improved financial status (in an undated photograph Silver has a jaunty, almost dandyish look, with a flower in his buttonhole) but also his “pathological misogyny”. Silver had at least three wives, all of whom worked for him as prostitutes. He routinely assaulted the women with a ferocity that suggested that he blamed them for the syphilis he contracted in the year 1888.

It is the very same year that saw London enthralled by the Whitechapel murders committed by Jack the Ripper.

Was Joseph Silver the man behind those brutal murders? Charles Van Onselen, the author of *The Fox & the Flies*, believes that he has shown “beyond reasonable doubt” that Joseph Lis-Silver was indeed the Ripper. I have chosen to believe his compelling evidence but this is not the place to lay out his argument and I will leave that pleasure for those wishing to read this fascinating book.

Van Onselen states that Silver epitomised the burgeoning internationalism of commercial sex at this time – the white slave trade. Those transatlantic steamers and long-distance trains carried thousands of desperate and duped young women to their distant points of sale. Silver travelled to New York at the end of 1888, thereafter his operation expanded, mainly but not exclusively in the sex trade, first into Southern Africa (where he came under the attention of then Attorney General Jan Smuts and future prime minister of South Africa), and then to France, the Low Countries, Scandinavia, and across to Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. He “cruised the Atlantic searching out microclimates capable of sustaining his frightening physical and psychological needs”. The last record of him is in a military prison in Jaroslaw, Poland, close to the Eastern front, in the last months of the Great War; he had been found guilty of theft and espionage, and was probably executed in mid-1918, although some accounts suggest he died in a “lunatic asylum” from advanced syphilis.

This racketeer and psychopath is given a more extensive curriculum vitae by Van Onselen who lists the following accomplishments: “arsonist, bank robber, barber, bigamist, brothel-owner, burglar, confidence trickster, detective’s agent, gangster, horse-trader, hotelier, informer, jewel thief, merchant, pickpocket, pimp, policeman, rapist, restaurateur, safe-cracker, smuggler, sodomist, special agent, spy, storekeeper, trader, thief, widower, wigmaker and white slave trafficker”.

Others will probably conclude that Van Onselen has not solved the world's greatest whodunnit but what he has done, is to probe deeply and incisively, into that underworld of late 19th-century sex and violence and provided me with an enigmatic – and not so improbable - premise for this new opera.

## NOTES ON *THE ELEPHANT MAN*

1. 1895: City of London ordinance: *“It is hereby prohibited for any person who is diseased, mutilated, or deformed in any way so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object to expose himself to public view.”*

In researching *The Elephant Man* I have read about various models that have been identified as our response to disability. The **Morality Model** of looking at disability: In most cultures people link physical handicap with moral culpability. The disabled did something in their past to cause the handicap. **The Demonic Cripple:** Richard III, Melville's Ahab, Shelley's Frankenstein, James Bond's villains. This image reflects the cultures fears and taboos around the “corrupted human form”. Here the ‘injury’ subsumes the selfhood. The semi-human consciousness views its tragic existence and itself thru the cracked mirror of their self-hatred. They live bitterly until their self-destructive rage explodes on the world. **The Charitable Cripple:** Dickens' Tiny Tim, springs to mind. This image reflects the society's desire to show pity at those who disabled. “People love their freaks” P.T. Barnum. **The Survivor Cripple:** Theodore Roosevelt, Steven Hawking. Our “inspirational” model which, due to the individual's achievement gives us an invitation to gawk. **The Medical Model:** The “damage” done by the Medical Model (Defining an individual by their disability) is that the person's possible inability to overcome the disability makes them a failure. If either a cure or the eradication of difference is the paramount goal, then the blame for not overcoming it rests squarely on the shoulders of the disabled individual. How this attitude devalues the lives of disabled people! The disabled are defined as a person from outside their own existence: They see the disability and not the person.

2. “... there was an announcement that the Elephant Man was to be seen within and that the price of admission was two pence. Painted on the canvas in primitive colours was a life-size portrait of the Elephant Man. This very crude production depicted a frightful creature that could only have been possible in a nightmare. It was the figure of a man with the characteristics of an elephant. The transfiguration was not far advanced. There was still more of the man than of the beast. This fact – that it was still human – was the most repellent attribute of the creature. There was nothing about it of the pitiableness of the misshapen or the deformed, nothing of the grotesqueness of the freak, but merely the loathsome insinuation of a man being changed into an animal. Some palm trees in the background of the picture suggested a jungle and might have led the imaginative to assume that it was in this wild that the perverted object had roamed.” Dr Treves, *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences*.
3. Syphilis manifests itself in four successive, but unequal, phases. The primary stage is marked by a lesion on the penis, the “pox” of yore, which soon clears but, four to eight weeks later, is followed by the secondary stage which gives rise to eruptions and skin rashes on the face or back. In the tertiary stage, spirochetes embed themselves in the soft tissues of the body and brain, and can take from one to five years to manifest themselves as sub-acute, chronic symptoms including headaches, lethargy, and

malaise, a loss of concentration, emotional instability and irritability. Abnormalities in pupil size and responses to light are accompanied by shooting pains in the lower limbs, difficulty in controlling handwriting and the development of a high-stepping gait. In its final phase, the disease affects the central nervous system, resulting in insanity and, in its terminal stage, a general paralysis. The onset and development of insanity, which varies from patient to patient, can manifest itself in bombastic behaviour during which the victim may have delusions of power. K. Dewhurst, "The Neurosyphilitic Psychoses Today", *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 115, 1969 pp. 31-38

4. We make a small excursion into Mansell Street, which is quiet. All about here and in Great Ailie Street, Tenter Street, and their vicinities, the houses are old, large, of the very shabbiest-genteel aspect, and with a great appearance of being snobbishly ashamed of the odd trades to which many of their rooms are devoted. Shirt-making in buried basements, packing-case, or, perhaps, cardboard box-making, on the ground-floor; and glimpses of very dirty bald heads, bending over cobbling, or the sorting of "old clo'," through the cracked and rag-stuffed upper windows. Jewish names - Isaacs, Levy, Israel, Jacobs, Rubinsky, Moses, Aaron - wherever names appear, and frequent inscriptions in the homologous letters of Hebrew. Many of these inscriptions are on the windows of eating-houses, whose interior mysteries are hidden by muslin curtains; and we occasionally find a shop full of Hebrew books, and showing in its window remarkable little nick-nacks appertaining to synagogue worship, amid plaited tapers of various colours. *Description of Whitechapel, East End Gazette, 1888, M. Barnaby.*
5. Jekyll he represented as a young, sallow, melancholy student, with cleanly shaven face, very dark and heavy eyebrows, and long, black hair. Far from being the jovial, debonair man of the world, he was haunted by the terrors of his position, a sort of Hamlet in a frock coat. Hyde he made a nightmare of goblin hideousness, a white, leering vampire, with a ferocious mouth and glazing eyes, deformed, lame, palsied, and infirm. A loathsome object, certainly, and, to a certain extent, like a medieval demon, suggestive of evil, but not half so appalling or infernal as the shriveled Hyde of the original, with his horrible lightness, activity, and energy, impressing the observer with a sense of a deformity which did not actually exist. *Critic on Mr. Mansfield's depiction of Dr Jekyll & Mr. Hyde at Lyceum Theatre, West End 1888.*
6. "MEANWHILE," writes an eccentric correspondent, "you, and every one of the papers, have missed the obvious solution of the Whitechapel mystery. The murderer is a Mr Hyde, who seeks in the repose and comparative respectability of Dr Jekyll security from the crimes he commits in his baser shape. Of course, the lively imaginations of your readers will at once supply certain means of identification for the Dr Jekyll whose Mr Hyde seems daily growing in ferocious intensity. If he should turn out to be a statesman engaged in the harmless pursuit of golf at North Berwick - well, you, sir, at least, will be able gratefully to remember that you have prepared your readers for the shock of the inevitable discovery."

However, some went further than simply comparing the murders to the story. Rather, a section of the public began to state, the story for may have been itself the inspiration behind the murders. The Daily Telegraph of 3 October included the following in its "Letters From The Public":

‘G C’ has a fancy ‘that the perpetrator is a being whose diseased brain has been inflamed by witnessing the performance of the drama of 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' - which I understand is now wisely withdrawn from the stage. If there is anything in this, let the detectives consider how Mr Hyde would have acted - for there may be a system in the demonic actions of a madman in following the pattern set before him.’ And the Pall Mall Gazette of 4 October printed:

Possibly the culprit is an army doctor suffering from sunstroke. He has seen the horrible play, lives in Bayswater or North London, in perhaps a decent square or terrace, dressed well. Goes out about 10pm straight to Whitechapel. Commits deed. Home again to breakfast. Wash, brush-up, sleep. Himself again – Dr Hyde. Meantime, everybody scouring the scene of the tragedy for the usual type of a murderer. *Correspondence to the London newspapers about the Whitechapel murders and the Stevenson’s play on the West End, September 1888.*

7. **People of the Streets:** The Salvation Army was established by William Booth (1829 – 1912) in the East End. Booth’s message was clear: he rejected the Victorian idea of the ‘deserving poor’ and believed that the poor should be taught how to help themselves. Many of his volunteers were women who visited the slums and common lodging houses in the East End to try to guide the poor on to the straight and narrow of Christian values and abstinence. In 1888 Booth opened up a warehouse in Whitechapel for the purpose of lodging and feeding of prostitutes who were terrified of the killings in Whitechapel. Prayers and an invitation to be ‘saved’ were part of the deal and a rejection of their life on the street.

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