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## Speaking for the Grotesques: The Historical Articulation of the Disabled Body in the Archive

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SPEAKING FOR THE GROTESQUES: THE HISTORICAL ARTICULATION OF THE  
DISABLED BODY IN THE ARCHIVE

by

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B.A. May 2016, Old Dominion University

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## ABSTRACT

### SPEAKING FOR THE GROTESQUES: THE HISTORICAL ARTICULATION OF THE DISABLED BODY IN THE ARCHIVE

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This project examines the ways in which the disabled body is constructed and produced in larger society, via the creation of and interaction with (and through) the archive. The archive, for the purposes of this project, is defined by scholars such as Jacques Derrida and Carolyn Steedman. It is a place where information is stored and documented, but through this process, history and power are also created and maintained. In order to properly examine the ways the archive helps shape the understanding of the disabled body and experience, I use three case studies: Richard III, Caliban and Joseph Merrick. Each of these case studies focuses on a historical study of the figure, and then moves into a theatrical and popular culture study. Primary documents are consulted first, and then the ways those primary documents inform later works is examined. Overall the goal is to show how the archive is a part of creating power dynamics within society, yet the archive can also be a place of *restorative possibility*—meaning the archive can be used to restore power and dignity to those that have been oppressed and silenced for so long.

*This one is for Dr. Imtiaz Habib—Thank you for helping me learn how to spread my wings  
and fly.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I start with a prayer and a thanksgiving:

*To those that came before, thank you for lighting the way.*

*To those that walk alongside, thank you for fighting onward.*

*To those that will come after, do not let our work be in vain.*

I owe so much to those currently with me on my journey. First and foremost, I must thank my parents, who, 25 years ago, were given some hard choices about what their options were for their brand new, one-pound, eleven-ounce, premature baby. Time and again, my parents chose life and love—they chose *me*. I am grateful to you, Mom and Dad, for giving me life, and always letting me be myself. Thank you for raising my amazing little brother. Logan, you're the greatest joy of my life and my favourite human. Watching you grow up is an honor. I love you three, and I am who I am because of your love and sacrifice.

To my thesis committee—there would be no thesis without a committee, and I am convinced I have the best committee. Drew, thank you for always being patient and level-headed, for being invested even as the project took unexpected twists and turns. Your actions reflect the answer to the question, “what would William Apress do?” Ruth, thank you for your infectious excitement, for pouring so much time and energy into a project that fell into your lap unexpectedly. Beth, you're the one that started this entire journey, by looking at me and declaring “you're an English major,” when I was a scared freshman thinking I was going to be a medical doctor. You made the right call. Thank you for nurturing me, for teaching me with passion and dedication. Thank you for being a mentor and friend, and for reminding me that I have a lot to be proud of. All three of you helped make this possible and kept me going. I am honoured to work with you, to be guided by you, and I look forward to more opportunities to do awesome work together.

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I have many friends and chosen family to thank, too many to list here, but I will start by thanking my godmother Jane for opening her heart and home to me, for giving me a port in a storm, for being gentle and wise, and always offering me quiet strength. I look up to you, one witch to another. I also am indebted to the following friends and colleagues: Megan Boeshart for her patience and love; Darryan Miller for life-long friendship and laughter; Jessica Zoby for spiritual conversations, amazing hugs, and mutual love of corgis; Sarah Glaser for sharing art, life, sushi, spirituality and always being up for an adventure; Raoul Lobo for always uplifting me and making me laugh; Kelsey Vint for sharing advice, food, beer, and for loving me even from several states away; Quintan Ana Wikswo for reminding me that there’s magic in the world and for being a role model for what it means to be proud of who you are.

Finally, everything in my life, including life itself, has been a miracle gifted to me by my higher power, which I call God, who I know has helped carve out the path I’m walking on. Thank you, God, for the miracles, and for the power of love.

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skeleton of Richard III. The relevant parties have been contacted for Figures 11 and 12, and as of the date of publication, usage permission is pending. All other figures are public domain in the United States. In the case of Figure 6, it falls under a Creative Common License, via the Folger Shakespeare library, to which I am grateful for their decision to share it as such.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION: THE SHAPE OF THE ARCHIVE

*Jaime: Even if the boy does live, he will be a cripple. Worse than a cripple. A grotesque. Give me a good clean death.*

*Tyrion: Speaking for the grotesques, I beg to differ. Death is so terribly final, while life is full of possibilities.* – Tyrion Lannister, *Game of Thrones*, George R.R. Martin

*History can you tell me over this broken telephone just what they knew?* – “In The Music,” KONGOS

**Statement of Research Question**

I sit in a dark theatre, mesmerized as a scene of water, the depths teal and blue, washes over me. It is only seconds into the film, and I already know that this is Guillermo Del Toro’s finest work. The film in question is Del Toro’s latest, *The Shape of Water*. As the movie progresses, my love for the movie grows, flowing from the unwavering sense that the film was *made for me*—a love letter to all the freaks of the world, all the outcasts and misfits, anyone who has ever hungered for love and remained unfed.

The film centers on a young woman, Elisa, who is part of the custodial staff for a top secret, governmental research agency. The year is 1962 and the U.S. is in an ideological war with Russia. Elisa is mute, but not deaf, and quietly navigates the world around her. Seen but unheard, she soaks in everything, unacknowledged. And it becomes quickly apparent that she feels stuck. Stuck in a routine, lonely—living in an oppressive, isolated state, conveyed in body language and without sound. Elisa has friends: a black co-worker named Zelda (Octavia Spencer), who acts as a mother or aunt, larger than life, always talking. Elisa also has Giles (Richard Jenkins), her quiet and meek gay neighbour, a struggling artist who is perhaps a decade into a mid-life crisis that doesn’t seem to shift. Though they are all misfits in some way, they have the one thing she doesn’t—a voice. It is apparent through the movie that this is what Elisa longs for: someone who understands the depths of her silence. Everything

changes when her agency—working to bolster the U.S. in the Cold War—brings in what they describe as their greatest “asset.”

The “asset” is an unnamed, amphibious, humanoid man who is simply called “The Creature.” Like Elisa, he has no voice. Out of all of his differences to modern humans, it is this voiceless nature that gives rise to the brutality directed towards him. But it becomes increasingly clear that he can think and, most of all, feel. Assigned to clean the lab room in which he is housed, Elisa begins to interact with the creature in secret. Elisa’s silent but gentle strength bonds her and this so-called “thing.” The rest of the film chronicles a surprising love story awash with espionage, intrigue, and sorrow. But the film opens the door for a more pressing conversation: the fate of those that society renders silent and unlovable. The film ends on a triumphant note and holds out the promise that us freaks will always find each other, and our love will win out. A greater attribute, however, is that the film acts as a gateway to larger conversations about power, representation, and freedom.

I wept at this movie because I was both Elisa and the monster. My body and soul have known pain, ostracization; have known what it means to be misunderstood, to be told that I am unlovable—and finding solace only in others “like me.” But until this movie, people “like me” had few meaningful, powerful roles in film, or anywhere else. The so-called cripple was almost always the monster, and the monster was almost always the villain. In this film, the villain instead is a white, cisgender, straight, able-bodied male—and more brutal and wretched than any “creature” or so-called “monster.”

*The Shape of Water* marked a watershed moment in my quest to spend my life writing and dreaming about bodies, souls, monsters, freaks—but a certain kind of freak. For where critical discussions of race, gender, sexuality, and nationality have had a visible and traceable lineage and history, disability has not. Yet, disability has existed for as long as any other facet of human identity and experience. Many scholars in disability studies, as well as disability

activists, have argued that there continues to be a lack of disability representation in both critical and social conversations. Simi Linton, in her work *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*, begins by saying that at one time, there were “no disjunctures between the dominant cultural narrative of disability and the academic narrative.”<sup>1</sup> Linton writes that these two narratives supported and defended each other, but that then, conversations slowly began to change over the course of two decades (Linton writes in 1998). The field of Disability Studies became the marker of these changes. Linton describes disability studies as “a location and a means to think critically about disability, a juncture that can serve both academic discourse and social change.”<sup>2</sup> But even with these changes, the lack is still present and Linton herself goes on to write that “[despite] the steady growth of scholarship and courses,” the field of disability studies “is even more marginal in the academic culture than disabled people are in the civic culture.”<sup>3</sup> Her reasoning for this is that all of the energy society puts forth to keep disabled people in positions of oppression is matched by “the Academy’s effort to justify that isolation and oppression.”<sup>4</sup>

Linton gives many reasons why disability has been out of the societal conscious and gaze for so long, notably institutions and segregation practices (creating wholly separate schools, buses, coaches, etc, for “special” people, “invalids,” or any other word that has come to be used to describe disabled people as a collective) or familial shame (keeping a disabled family shuttered in a home, or coddling them to the point of being totally dependent). But, she gives hope by saying that disability studies is the field to create change in these narratives and experiences, and, declares that “the material that binds us is the art of finding one another, identifying and naming disability in a world reluctant to discuss it, and of unearthing historically and culturally significant material that relates to our experience.”<sup>5</sup> This gets back to *The Shape of Water*, and the crux of my argument. I firmly believe the disabled body and experience has been as deeply silenced as Elisa and her mute lover, but less romantically

so—or perhaps not. The movie is quick to reveal that Elisa’s mute nature was caused by three gashes to her throat as an infant, where now there remain three faint horizontal scars. Just as this brutality has silenced Elisa, so too has the brutality of an able-bodied society (and history) silenced disabled people.

The archive is in many ways the handmaiden of this brutality. Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes that “[h]uman beings participate in history both as actors and as narrators. [...] In vernacular use, history means both the facts of the matter, and the narrative of those facts, both ‘what happened,’ and ‘that which is said to have happened.’ The first meaning places the emphasis on the sociohistorical process, the second on our knowledge about that process or on a story about that process.”<sup>6</sup> Trouillot goes on to implicate the construction of history, and the narrative-making that results, as the key cause of silences enacted within and against certain stories and experiences. Trouillot, as well as Jacques Derrida, among others, looks at the archive—and the processes that create it—as sources where power takes root.

Humanity constructs, de-constructs, and then re-constructs its history, its power, its existence time and again in the archive. From the halls of universities, to the sacred silence of church pews, to the hushed murmurs of library shelves—humanity imprints itself on the world by the traces of what it leaves behind. Yet, the things that are left behind by one wave of humanity are seized upon and built over by the next. Ink and paper, the sturdy structure of monuments, the crumbling of ruins, all inform one generation after the next, passing on a narrative of what each generation wants itself to be. And with these scraps, ever-building and weaving into a story, a more sinister force emerges: Corruption. Power. Domination. Upon securing the archive, forces of power—white supremacy; patriarchy; heteronormativity; ableism—make the archive bend to their will. Documents are destroyed or buried deep within a library’s holdings. Others are given preferential treatment and become so enshrined as history that false narratives begin to be *told as history*. Monuments go up, and rage sparks if

they are brought down. Facts become alternative but are rarely or inadequately questioned. At the end of it all, this power dynamic means that some voices are never heard, and some stories are never told; for others, it means that their stories are told for them—and at great cost.

Disabled people experience a silence, and an enactment of their history, all at once. The disabled body typically exists in the archive as a scientific curiosity, a figure to evoke mystery; the disabled body is stripped of its humanity and often becomes a mark of evil or shame. And the disabled body experiences a visceral archiving, as even today skeletal remains, or bodies in medical halls are on display, both in classrooms and museums. The disabled body, once it enters the archive, becomes a curiosity, a monster. Yet, to even begin to recover the traces of the lost voice of the disabled subject, one must revisit the very thing that condemns so many: the archive.

For my purposes, I use Derrida's definition of the archive as connecting back to the *arkhe*, which he describes as coordinating "two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence-physical, historical, or ontological principle-but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given-nomological principle".<sup>7</sup> Derrida establishes the archive as a place where the search for origin is constructed; though suspicious of origins, Derrida marks the archive as a place where humanity has attempted to create or define an origin, or a beginning point for history and our understanding of the past. Carol Steedman explains in her book *Dust*, that "Derrida presented his audience with the image of the *arkhe*, as a place where things begin, where power originates, its workings inextricably bound up with the authority of beginnings and starting points."<sup>8</sup> This can best be displayed through Derrida's beginning words, *let us not begin at the beginning, nor even the archive*, but instead at the *word* archive.

Derrida starts with breaking down the term *archive*, as it is the very establishment of the archive that then creates everything else that goes along with it—power, politics, memory, an attempt at understanding human knowledge and history. He goes on to say that “the term indeed refers, as one would correctly believe, to the *arkhe* in the physical, historical, or ontological sense, which is to say to the originary, the first, the principal, the primitive[...].” but that even earlier, the word comes from “the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded.”<sup>9</sup> Moving through the history of the archive itself allows for a closer examination of how power and the archive have always been connected, starting with that *arkheion*, the house or address where “those who commanded” reside. The archons were those who “held and signified political power” and as such, they were in possession of the right to “make or to represent the law.”<sup>10</sup> This means that not only is the home of the archons also the home of the archive, but that these figures of power are the guardians of documents; they “do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate [but they also are] accorded the hermeneutic right and competence”<sup>11</sup> They have the power to *interpret* the archives, and the documents entrusted to the archons become law, and help enact the law.

Derrida sums up thus: “[It is in this] domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret”<sup>12</sup> Yet, Trouillot makes moves to interrogate the idea that this institutional passage is not always from secret to not. Trouillot puts emphasis on the processes that construct archives, and the ways in which silences enter this process (and therefore the archive). *Because* the archive, according to Derrida, is a place of power, this power controls what the archive says, what it does, and the materials from which it is made. Steedman words it

another way: “In Derrida’s description [the archive] appears to represent the *now* of whatever kind of power is being exercised, anywhere, in any place or time.”<sup>13</sup> She goes on to say that the archive fever Derrida discusses has “to do with its very establishment, which is at one and the same time, the establishment of state power and authority.”<sup>14</sup> And therefore, the “feverish desire,” a kind of “sickness unto death,” according to Derrida, is not so much driven by the desire to “enter it and to use it, as to as to *have* it, or just for it to be there, in the first place.”<sup>15</sup> The magistrates, the archivists, demonstrate this desire, in the establishment of their power and the establishment of the archive. Because of this power, the archive, though it may allow silences to enter into it, often does this action of silencing *in secret*, away from a public consciousness or gaze.

For myself and my research, I break a silence created by the archive, by using the archive against itself--finding the cracks where untold stories can shine through. What exists in the archive that is not given the light of day? How do documents, images, sounds compare to one another—contradict or corroborate stories? The archive is full of restorative possibility: the constructions used to harm, can be re-examined and reinterpreted to restore power and justice to those it has been denied. Despite this, sorting through the archive, piecing together any semblance of truth and justice for those the archive has silenced, proves a daunting task. Where does one begin? The silence itself is multi-faceted. This is always the core of my dilemma—a project of this magnitude is lifelong, deeply personal, and often overwhelming. Perhaps even never-ending. But my stumbling through the chaos of the archive continues to lead me back to the same figures again and again.

In order to track the archive’s role in creating a performative tradition when it comes to disability, I am limiting myself to three case studies, each which focus on a particular facet of archival work, as well as particular moments of history. Further, each of my three case studies can be traced back to theatrical representations (and modern iterations thereof). My



first case study is Richard III, whose history was directly affected by what was written and produced about him—material that existed in the archive for centuries after his death. Upon the discovery of his bones in a Leicester parking lot in 2013, Richard’s corporeal being was also stored in the archive: his remains were put on display, and even after he was formally laid to rest, photos of his skeleton remain on display. Both the research surrounding his remains, and the lengthy theatrical tradition produce a Richard that is a dramatically altered figure as compared to other kings of his era. But by repurposing the archive as a location of “restorative possibility,” Richard also is able to highlight the changing tide of disability awareness within society, as Richard lived, died, and was subsequently chronicled in an era where fascination with the body was reaching its peak. Alongside Richard, we can include a second figure in the conversation to highlight the intersections of disability and race—and that is Caliban, from Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*. Though a fictional figure, Caliban operates as my second case study because he represents the ways that colonial powers used the archive and their knowledge of indigenous and other non-European figures to represent these people in the broader society of Early Modern Europe.

Caliban’s character is drawn from documents such as travel narratives and other national reports. These documents both created and influenced the way European travellers (and those that studied, read, and followed their journeys) viewed and understood the various groups of people that these forces were encountering on their journeys. Indigenous people across the world were being categorized and established not by their own narratives, but by the narratives of the colonial powers broaching their shores. Caliban as a character is a culmination of all of these factors at once. And Caliban, like Richard, has experienced a lengthy theatrical representation—he continues to remain a metaphor for so-called “primitive” people, even when Caliban is often cast as a non-human entity. Caliban also marks a shift when the knowledge created in earlier eras, such as Richard’s, expands as the

view of the world expands for many people. And while expansion resulted in new advancements, it also helped solidify negative stereotypes and beliefs. The documents and ideas created within this moment of change, were stored in the archive and carried down into the present. Thus, both Richard and Caliban represent a time in history when disability and monstrosity were linked, and society was struggling to come to terms with the disabled body; and, this time brought forth ideas that still have roots in the present moment.

The fifteenth and sixteenth century saw an increase in the creation of hospitals and places such as mental institutions (a good summary of which can be found in Michel Foucault's *A History of Madness*) as well as the production of various writings on subjects ranging from herbal remedies for various ailments, to treatises on conditions such as melancholia—the most well-known of which is Timothy Bright's *Treatise on Melancholia*, published in 1586<sup>16</sup>. In addition, there was an increasing focus on spectacles, such as medical marvels, “monsters,” and miracles of all kinds. This marked a turning point in the development of the archive. The archive is constructed of various materials—writing, images, and even sound. Yet, as stated earlier, the archive can be formed, too, of flesh, blood, and bone.

The increasing scientific study of humans began to necessitate that specimens of various kinds were collected, leading to various levels of the body being archived: from cadavers in a hospital, to tissue in jars, to skeletons on display in museums<sup>1</sup>. The disabled body was often a prime target for this kind of scientific objectification, being put under intense isolation and scrutiny, and becoming an object to be met with fascination and fear. Even in spiritual realms, the body—disabled and otherwise—was treated with fascination and

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<sup>1</sup> The collection or study of the human body has existed as far back as Greco-Roman times; Leonardo Da Vinci is said to have worked on cadavers in secret, as it was particularly frowned upon to harbour dead bodies in one's rooms. Medicine as a field and practice had long been established by Richard's time. But it reached an increase in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries that it had not seen before.

reverence, such as the bodies (or parts thereof) of saints, or a focus on healing theological practices (notably the exorcising of demons, often a “cure” for what are now known to be modern mental illnesses). This process made way for the disabled subject to be castigated as monstrous and evil. But this did not end when these centuries ended, but, rather, carried on for centuries after. Where Richard III and Caliban mark an early relationship between the archive, history, and the disabled body, this relationship reached its peak in the early nineteenth century in both the United States and England with the onset of freak shows. This brings me to my final case study: Joseph Merrick—known by his stage name as The Elephant Man.

Many people hear the name Joseph Merrick and they find it familiar, yet difficult to place. If you change it to *John* Merrick, there may be more recognition. Ultimately, what will provoke the most recognition and response is more a title than a name: The Elephant Man. His life has been a much-studied figure due to the severity and shocking nature of his condition. Everything that makes up what is known of Merrick comes from a mix of writing about him from his lifetime, and popular culture pieces, most notably film and theatre. His life—which consisted in part of being a freak show performer, and then finished out as being a permanent resident at Royal London Hospital—was short (he died at 27) but he became a national sensation due to his friendship with Sir Fredrick Treves, a well-known surgeon based in London. Merrick began his life being known for his monstrosity, and ended his life being known for having a (surprising to many) gentle and intelligent mind and spirit. Merrick’s story is similar to Richard’s in many ways: he was written about after his death by many, including the figures that oversaw much of his life, notably Fredrick Treves. And, also like Richard, Merrick’s remains were studied intensely after his death, and they continue to this day to remain on display.

His story garnered the most traction in cinema and theatre. A play in 1979 by Bernard Pomerance, simply called *The Elephant Man*, drew upon the memoirs written about Merrick by Frederick Treves. Then in 1980, inspired by both the play and Treves' work, David Lynch directed the film *The Elephant Man*, which starred John Hurt in the title role and garnered both Hurt and Lynch several award nominations, notably eight Academy Award nominations for Lynch alone. Alongside these two creative works, there were academic endeavours being put forth to try and study Merrick and his life. Unlike Richard, however, Merrick has never been laid to rest, and both his actual remains and casts of them have been put on display for audiences ever since his death. His story and his body both continue to circulate through various media, and in many ways, there are still questions about his life and death that have not been answered. Instead, what is in the archive about Merrick—notably Fredrick Treves' memoirs and writings about him—are continually drawn from to construct a narrative for Merrick. Thus, Merrick is an example of the archive reaching a crystalline moment where the body was, and still is, a more visceral and literal part of the archive, and the narrative-building enacted through the archive exists in the open, in the *non-secret*, as Derrida and Trouillot both discuss.

Richard III, Caliban, and Joseph Merrick each mark turning points in history. Richard stands as one of the beginnings of the English archive's formation and is a key example of how far reaching the archive is on history and legacy. Caliban continues this, with particular relevance for the colonial usages of the archive. Merrick marks the final turning point that carries into the present moment—where the archive and its work operates out in the open, and directly upon non-normative bodies, with mass media bearing the weight of this change. And at the core of each of these case studies, the bodies of these figures are the source of their abjection and the alteration of their histories.

## Critical Review

As has already been discussed, Disability Studies as a field and a critical conversation is still emergent. It may be no surprise, then, that there is still some general disconnect between Disability Studies and other fields. My research makes use of, and connects Literary Studies, Disability Studies, and Archive Studies, with particular attention paid to Early Modern Literature and history. Out of all of these fields, literature and early modern studies (be it history alone or history and literature both) are the most well developed. Disability Studies, as mentioned earlier by Linton, is the still-developing field (even after decades). As a field, Disability Studies focuses primarily on the present moment and ways to empower (currently living) disabled people as they navigate an ableist world. Much of the groundwork that is done when studying disability addresses historical contexts and constructions of disabled people and their experiences as a way to discuss issues facing them in the present. A focus on the historical often stops with introductory material and is not given much attention after the fact. Disability Studies (as well as Literary and Archival Studies) then fractures into a variety of fields and ideas: medicine, Bioethics, rhetoric just to name a few. But an interdisciplinary connection between any field, especially Literary Studies and Archival Studies, and Disability Studies, is much less common.

It is not to say that there aren't strides being taken to cross the gaps between disciplines. Jay Dolmage, in his groundbreaking work *Disability Rhetoric*, offers approaches to rhetoric that are guided by and created from a Disability Studies perspective. Various Disability Studies readers focus on pulling together work across disciplines. Many scholars focus on popular culture, with Rosemarie Garland Thompson's work *Extraordinary Bodies* offering perspectives of disability representation in various media, or Lennard Davis' article "The Crips Strike Back," where he discusses the film *Freaks*. There is also always an intense focus on disability rights and activism, both within the conversation of representation, and

broader conversations of policy in the political realm. In the popular culture realm, for example, disability activists of all kinds, scholars and layperson alike, have launched fierce criticism against books such as *Me Before You*<sup>2</sup>. Thus, conversations are happening, but these conversations now seem to be taking the same talking points and rehashing them, and the emphasis often seems to remain on trying to get disability (both the identity and the field) taken seriously.

This work is important work and must continue. Representation matters, as does activism across the board. When it comes to matters of representation, most scholars seek to examine the ways in which these material representations of disability are incorrect and based on stereotype. This survey of literature and other media as perpetuating stereotypes has been useful; yet, even as this work tries to offer empowerment to disability history and disabled people, there is little work, if any, that pays attention to how these material items— books, film, monuments, TV, written documents, etc— are part of a larger archive that is created to uphold oppressive views. Those scholars that *do* study history with a disability slant, tend to focus on a general picture rather than specific figures. There is even less work that focuses directly on archival studies and disability matters. And, even the works that try, often only scratch the surface of the potential conversations to be had, and discoveries to be made.

Disability Studies work focuses most on examining the two common models of disability. Tobin Siebers, one of the founders of the movement, describes the common approach to disability in this way: “The medical model defines disability as an individual defect lodged in a person, a defect that must be cured or eliminated if the person is to achieve full capacity as a human being.”<sup>17</sup> Whereas, the approach that Disability Studies offers is less

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<sup>2</sup> The movie was about a young man who became a quadriplegic after an accident. He contemplates suicide, his parents hire a woman to companionship for him. They fall in love, but he decides after 6 months that being in a wheelchair is no quality of life and he chooses assisted suicide. The movie sparked rage not only because of the narrative of disability as worse than death, but also because the character in question was a billionaire and would have been able to afford THE BEST quality of life, instead of choosing to throw away that chance. Meanwhile, most disabled people most often live in incredible poverty, and are still attempting to live their lives to the fullest.

prescriptive in nature. This model, called the social model, “defines disability as not an individual defect but as the product of social injustice, one that requires not the cure or elimination of the defective person but significant changes in the social and built environment.”<sup>18</sup> These two duelling models of disability have caused not just the social prejudice disabled people face, but the struggle of the field to germinate. Regardless of the lack of connections between fields, there is enough research and common ground to unite them, and much of this starts with early writers such as Shakespeare (and the archive that helped produce and uplift him).

Within literary circles, when it comes to disability, there has always been a focus on Shakespeare with Richard at the forefront of most conversations. The common thread is a focus on his role as villain, and this means that this work stays confined to a fictional Richard within the play. It is only after the 2013 discovery of his remains that the work on Richard III began to shift and began to bring into question a historical figure to examine alongside the well-known fictional one.

Writings and studies on and about Richard are numerous and cross several disciplines (even if the disciplines don’t cross themselves). The top results of a general search of “Richard III,” are still the Shakespeare play, video of stage performances, or movie versions of the play. But since 2013, some of the search results afterwards all deal with the discovery of Richard’s body itself: from books written by the research team (*The Bones of a King: Richard III Rediscovered*); to biographical work on Richard’s life and death (*Richard III: A Ruler and His Reputation*); to more scientific studies, such as an in-depth examination of his scoliosis, and the affects it would have had on the medieval king, or close analysis of the perimortem trauma of Richard’s bones. Within history and literature, the focus remains most on theatricality, Richard’s role as a villain, and numerous studies of gender and politics in the play. An entire Richard III critical reader was published in 2013, on the tail of the discovery.

And though study on Richard is prolific, both before and after the discovery of his remains, thanks to the discovery and the questions it raised about both his moral and bodily reputation, Richard is now gaining traction within the larger body of work on and within Disability Studies.

There are now complete collections of essays engaging with the still-developing concept of an “early modern Disability studies,” and they all feature work on Richard III. The primary essay collection is *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*, by David Wood and Alison Hobgood. Aside from Richard, there is focus on medieval discussions of disability, as well as figures from other Shakespeare works (and that of his contemporaries). But no figure appears to be as studied within Shakespeare, in regard to disability, than Richard III. Dolmage’s aforementioned *Disability Rhetoric* gives reference to Richard III, as does the work *Bodies in Commotion*, which is a study of disability and stage performance. These essay collections focusing on disability in Shakespeare, or disability in the medieval and early modern are beginning to slowly crop up, and this is where studying Richard is beginning to take shape.

What these works lack is an examination of the archive’s place in disability’s history and existence, and what’s more, most of this work shies away from making connections between a historical and a fictional Richard. There is work on Richard III as he was thought to be in life, and then there is work about the play, but there is little work that combines the two. Connecting these ideas to figures such as Caliban is even more uncommon. Scholarship on Caliban centers on his identity as a colonized, racialized figure, and as a metaphor for the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. Work has been done that connects *The Tempest* to the Jamestown settlement, through the narrative of the wreck of the *Sea Venture*, but Caliban is often on the outskirts of these projects, as most of the focus is given to the play as a whole, and more significantly, to Prospero and his daughter Miranda. Caliban’s



deformity comes into play as a product generated by the colonizer's gaze, but without digging into the nuances of what this means for the relationship, why disability is significant in this, and what the consequences are of studying the intersections of race and disability.

Joseph Merrick is the last sole figure who is a connecting point of disability, history, and the archive. Most all of what can be found on Merrick in a critical sense has to do with medical study of his deformity. Other work about Merrick tends to be entertainment. Two major works that will be examined later in this project are the 1979 play by Bernard Pomerance, entitled *The Elephant Man*, and the 1980 film by David Lynch, also given the same title. Primary documents on Merrick can be found, but also have been republished in various writings on him—be they from medical journals or in pop culture works, or in the few scholarly works that have been produced (which will also be discussed in detail further on). But just as with Richard and Caliban, Joseph Merrick's disability operates as a way to begin a conversation or an examination of him, but does not remain a focal point throughout. Or, if the focus is on his disability, the focus remains on how his disability and his humanity relate (much in the way people alight on the perceived connections between Richard's personality and his disability). Little to no work is being done on the effect the writings, studies, and various other documents produced about these figures had or continues to have on their lived experiences and the legacies of those experiences.

Overall, the work that is starting to address disability and its place in history can be found within dissertation projects and up-and-coming scholarship within the last five years, extending into the present. I place myself within this cohort of researchers, in that my research is seeking to bridge gaps between currently disparate ideas that are connected beneath the surface.

## Methodology

My research rests on detailed close readings and engagement with archival material and a conceptualization of the archive itself that views it as a location of restorative possibility. Each chapter will consist of a case study of a disabled figure that has a traceable lineage in the archive, and a presence in both history and culture even today. My primary case studies are Richard III, Caliban, and Joseph Merrick; I examine the ways that they are constructed within their texts and track the history of these representations over time: from their first arrival into the archive, to the ways they are perceived (and still archived) today. Alongside these figures I wish to use other figures as supplementary examples, to show that the work of the disabled archive did not begin or end with Richard, or in England. The main figure I wish to address is Grendel from the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*. I use all of these figures as major examples of the way the archive has constructed disability throughout time.

The primary critical work I use for these examinations is Michel Rolph-Trouillot's work, *Silencing the Past: The Power and Production of History*. Trouillot discusses at great length the ways the archive is constructed, and how the archive allows history to be created and re-created. I make direct use of his framework for how silence works within the archive, and how silences first enter historical production. Paired with Trouillot, I draw upon Derrida's *Archive Fever*, most notably his discussion of the archive being a place of power, and a place that continues to uphold power. Derrida discusses the origin of the word archive deriving from *the archon*, which was both those that created the law, but also the very place that law and order was established. This remains true for the archive today. Finally, I briefly use Foucault's work on *Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History*, to emphasize that history is written upon the body. Though Foucault complicates the idea of one explicit origin, he also maintains that history starts with the body, and that it is inscribed upon the body. While this is true of any body, I find that this connects in an incredibly visceral manner to the disabled

body especially. Aside from the theoretical work, the remainder of my sources will be from the archive itself.

### **Chapter by Chapter Breakdown**

Every chapter follows a similar pattern: I offer background information on the figure in question, one of the three case studies. Then I provide any relevant context having to do with history or critical discussions on the figure. I follow this by performing an in-depth analysis on the primary source materials I am working with, and I finish by engaging with ways that current cultural and critical materials continue the conversations and ideas that were first put into the archive. I also begin every chapter with some sort of reflective, typically imaginative, epigraph to draw my reader into the work. While some may question the need for this gesturing, I am trying to offer a nod to the idea that the archive is a way to enter into conversations with our own humanity, and the humanity around us—that which came before, but also that which will follow after us. Some of this imaginative posturing is purely fictional, but some of it (as is the case in Chapter 2) draws from real life experience and is a recollection of a memory. My work focuses on that which is tangible, and is driven as much as is possible by fact and intense research. However, when working within the archive, it is difficult to not feel as if there is something beyond the reach of research—and these opening paragraphs are a nod to that feeling.

As said above, each chapter is focused on one of three case studies. In my first chapter, I focus my work on Richard. In this chapter, I draw from three key sources. First, I draw from the primary texts written about Richard, with an emphasis on the English history chronicles written by Tudor historians such as Polydore Vergil, Thomas More, and John Rous; second I examine the work surrounding the 2013 discovery: chronicles of the journey from parking lot to reinternment, the archaeological work done after the fact (reconstructing his skeleton) and related medical and historical findings. In all this, I am most interested in

looking at how his bones were treated during these various processes, and I am also interested in how mass media disseminated these findings to the larger public. My final and third focus looks at media representation of Richard, mostly his reputation and representation on stage. I draw connections between the fictional Richard on stage, and the Richard known in history and who was documented during the 2013 excavation. I track the ways all of these things have connected to and informed each other, passing down through history to create what is known of Richard today.

Similarly, the second chapter is dedicated to Caliban. I examine the first-person accounts of early explorers' interactions with indigenous people, and their similarities to the way Caliban is described in *The Tempest*. I also connect these documents to other writings such as tracts discussing cannibalism, as well as racialized figures (such as Browne's *On the Blackness of Negroes*). These primary texts include reference to the story of the *Sea Venture*, the ship that, on its way to Jamestown, was shipwrecked for 9 months, before the crew finally made its way back to the settlement. I then analyse the way Caliban, like Richard, is represented on stage and in popular culture. The other supplementary figures I have mentioned (such as Petrus Gonsalvus, mentioned previously, or Grendel from *Beowulf*) will be referenced throughout, albeit briefly, as markers for these trends occurring beyond early modern England.

My final chapter examines Joseph Merrick and the movement towards the present, in examining the archive's role in a public construction of disability and the disabled body. As stated previously, Merrick represents a shift towards the literal body being enfolded into the archive. Merrick's story and body also point towards ways in which entertainment and the medical field both, participate in and continue the practice of the archive's construction and marginalisation of the disabled body. I examine how Merrick, similar to Richard, has generated a prolific popular culture tradition, through plays and film, as well as academic

study—and yet this has created more questions than answers, and Merrick still remains on display in his death, much as he did in life.

In my conclusion, I speak to the present moment and return heavily to the restorative possibility of the archive. This holds more questions or speculations than definitive answers. I take up some of the current trends in disability representation and connect them back to the historical moment. My greatest focus is on *The Shape of Water*, which connects to performative traditions of the ‘fish monster’ that reach as far back as Caliban, but also offers an example of projects that are moving in the right direction when it comes to disability representation. Treatment of these things are brief but are used to show how there is still a specific trend and belief surrounding what disability is and what it means to be disabled in society. I show that though we have made some progress, we have not made as much progress as we would like. I finally offer some solutions, notably, to return to the archive and attempt to reinterpret what it has given us, and to work to add new, more ethical and inclusive material into it—ending with the hope of the restorative possibility the archive can offer us.

## CHAPTER II

THE MONSTER IN THE ARCHIVE: RICHARD III AND THE SILENCING POWER OF  
TUDOR MYTHOLOGY

*“Not all the water in the rough rude sea can wash the balm off from an anointed king.” – William Shakespeare, Richard II, Act III, Scene ii*

*I wander through my imagination, seeking out stories to tell and knowledge to gain. On this particular journey, I am looking for a king, though in many ways it feels as if I am looking for a ghost. Hunting through not even whole remains, but merely scraps of what was once a life. My quest is to find Richard III—The historical Richard, the once-living Richard, that was human and tangible remains elusive. He is always on the margins of history. I walk through libraries, down empty hallways of crumbling castles; I stare out at empty battlefields, still scattered with broken husks of armour and swords. I only find him when I enter the theatre, everything dark except for a well-lit stage. And there, suddenly, he is. Or perhaps not Richard, but a monstrous reincarnation of him, created without his consent or participation. All I can hold on to are fragments, whispers through time and space; yet even as I stumble to get my bearings in the darkness of the archive, I can sense a presence—the haunting presence of a man that lived and died centuries before me, yet whose body is all too familiar. It is that figure that greets me and extends his hand.*

**Setting the Stage**

In 1485, after several raging battles, Henry Tudor struck down the last Plantagenet king, thus ending the War of the Roses<sup>3</sup>. According to first person accounts and various legends, the crown was plucked from the head of the now dead Richard III, and Henry VII

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<sup>3</sup> In reality, the War of the Roses did not officially end until 1487, after a small skirmish with a group of dissenters. But, the Battle of Bosworth was the culmination of this ongoing feud, and most scholars consider this to mark its ending.

was crowned king on a hill, under an oak tree.<sup>4</sup> A subsequent, more formal, and certainly more official, coronation would take place. But this romanticised coronation, out in nature, still on the battlefield, the body of the enemy loaded onto a horse to be taken away--all this imagery helped establish one thing that Henry VII so desperately needed: legitimacy. But there is another story buried beneath this history. And that is the story of the fallen king.

Once he was killed, Richard III was nothing more than a dead body to the Tudors. Yet, the Tudors clearly understood they had a problem on their hands; in the quest for legitimacy, the Tudor regime had almost the entirety of history stacked against them. Richard III was a lineally legitimate King, and Henry Tudor himself had no legitimate claim to the throne.<sup>5</sup> In monarchic rule, the kingship was meant to be passed from father to son, *ad infinitum*, in an unbroken line comprised of fresh male blood. Barring this, there were other protocols in place, such as uncles passing the crown on to nephews or cousins. But, in any case, the monarchy was a family affair and legitimate claimants to the throne had to hold some blood connection through the male line. Even a feud, such as the War of the Roses, was fought between two branches of the Plantagenet line that were still, despite dramatic upheaval, all blood relatives descended from the original male line, Edward III. In the case of Henry Tudor, his connection was incredibly tenuous: descended from a Welsh Rebel, Owen Tudor, Henry's *maternal* line provided him access through marriage. In the patriarchal system of English monarchy, a maternal connection was not enough, and being descended from a rebel was even more problematic. This vague connection could (and would) prove

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<sup>4</sup> The main account of this is from Polydore Vergil's account of the reign of Henry VII, though various similar descriptions can be found in almost every other account or description of this battle.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Tudor was related to the Plantagenet line through his mother—and, as stated in medieval political theory, claim to title (such as the crown) derived from the father. Henry Tudor's father was descended from Owen Tudor, a Welsh rebel, and was thus ill-favored by the English. All that to say, Henry Tudor *was* blood related to the Plantagenet line, but not by a close relation, and he was not *legally* legitimate in any sense of the word.

detrimental to his rulership and allow for contention to grow.<sup>6</sup> What's more, Henry had usurped the throne from a legitimate king. War made various relationships and political mores tenuous, but it was a common truth that no one could take an anointed king from his throne except, perhaps, God himself. For the new regime, work had to be done immediately to establish itself as a credible and viable option for the throne.

Removing the crown from Richard's head would mark the beginning of the corruption and destruction of one legacy to make room for another. Working with Derrida's explication of the archive and its place in the house of power, in European (in this case English) history, there is no greater place of power than that of the monarchy. The monarchy and all who served it, operated as Derrida's *Archons*, those who hold power, make laws, and manipulate the archive to suit their needs. For the Tudors, this corruption of a legacy would be led by historians, working within and for the Tudor dynasty. Their jobs were twofold: they were tasked with chronicling the history of England, but within the creation of that timeline, they were also tasked with constructing a historical narrative that put the Tudor dynasty within a positive light. If the Tudors could say that history—and God himself—had destined their rule, resistance would be futile.

And there began the new story. This was not a king betrayed, a crown snatched by a thief, nor a bastard taking the throne; this was not a broken body paraded around, given humiliating wounds before being hastily buried; within this newly written history, Richard would become what was known as the Scourge of God. It would be written after his death that Richard was the long-awaited punishment from God for England's past sins. Richard III—King, Plantagenet, Father, husband, brother, warrior, complex man and undeniably human—would die that day, at thirty-two years of age. Something else, a new Richard, would

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to say, of course, that Richard himself did not have trouble with his own reign—legitimacy would haunt any and every king—but Richard could at least prove a direct and stable connection back to the core Plantagenet line, where Henry Tudor could not (See note above).



be resurrected to take his place. This new Richard was nothing short of a monster. And the archive helped the Tudors create this monster. This new Richard was the result of Tudor historians constructing an archive for England, ultimately rewriting history itself. Through their creating a new history for England, the Tudor historians ensured that Richard himself would be archived forever as the monster the Tudors needed everyone to believe he was.

Richard III is a ghost that haunts the annals of British history. For five centuries, he has been a figure of mystery and intrigue to all who come upon his story. For many, knowledge of Richard III begins (and often ends) with the 1597 play by William Shakespeare. Upon reading the play, it is obvious from the opening lines that Richard is deformed in both body and mind. Throughout the play, Richard proves a charming and wicked villain. The play is scattered with not only murders, deceits, and various other twists and turns to rival any modern murder mystery, but it is also filled with references to historical events and figures that are not simply fiction. The archive has both helped construct and keep alive this history, accuracy or inaccuracy be damned. Yet, a survey of this history shows that it is comprehensive, even if potentially problematic.

By the time Shakespeare's quarto version of *Richard III* was first published in 1597, the archive's work in regard to Richard was already long established. Shakespeare's play was one of a protracted line of what were known as Chronicle plays, or history plays. These works took on English history and attempted to chronicle the rise of England as a nation, from some of the earliest and well-known Kings, through to the Tudors—notably Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. Beyond this, British history was incredibly well reinforced across the board. Plays, miscellanies, books, manuals, travel logs—all were ways of chronicling Britain's triumphs and its growth as a nation. Despite this, the literary imagination is where much of this documentation culminated, as all of these ideas reached a peak within the cultural and literary imagination. Writers of the time would be well-versed in the various resources that

informed their productions, and Shakespeare was no exception. In the case of Richard III, there were defining sources in particular: Machiavelli's satirical work *The Prince* influenced understandings of leadership and tyranny; there were publications such as *A Mirror for Magistrates*, that told stories of various figures throughout history, Richard III being one of them; but there were none so influential as the various (mostly) Tudor historians and their writings about Richard. These works in particular spanned from Richard's own life through to Queen Elizabeth I's reign.

Regardless of their form, all of these works contributed to the archive's construction. These documents play an integral role in producing what would be looked back on as British history, and that includes what is known and thought of about the figure of Richard III. Richard is many things: King, son, father, husband, soldier. According to history as written by playwrights and others, Richard is also tyrant, spy, murderer, usurper. Richard is both man and myth, human and monster. This is not to say that all accounts of Richard were necessarily incorrect. It is obvious however, that what is known of Richard is a mixture of legend and lies, fiction and fact. And upon his death in 1485, Richard would be unable to represent himself and instead his life and his legacy would be represented for him. This would enact a 527-year silence that would not be broken until 2013, with the discovery of a king in a carpark.

### **Unearthing A King: The Archaeological Dig and Its Aftermath**

The quest to find Richard III began long before the highly publicized archaeological excavation that occurred in the fall of 2013. Contemporary interest began with the historian, Dr. John Ashdown-Hill, being asked to find and then sequence the Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) of Richard III, in order to help identify bones that researchers were speculating belonged to Margaret of York, his sister. Ashdown-Hill was successful in this, and publications on this work in later years inspired a member of the Richard III Society, Phillipa

Langley. Langley and Hill, together, worked for years to try to start the dig to find Richard's grave, and it was not until 2011 that Leicester University and the City Council agreed to fund and run operations for the project<sup>7</sup>. In August 2012 a collaboration was formed between the Richard III Society, the Leicester City Council, and the University of Leicester with the hope of finding the lost grave of King Richard III. By 2013, the site of the old Greyfriar's Church had been discovered in a Leicester public parking lot, and along with it, skeletal remains. Excitement built, as all signs pointed to this being Richard III; only DNA testing would confirm it. The world waited to find out if this was indeed the long-lost king.

On February 4, 2013, the world received its answer. University of Leicester announced to the public that the identity of the bones found in the car park had been confirmed and did indeed belong to King Richard III. Though the dig had been successful, now the project would turn into the aftermath—studying the bones in detail, sorting through the history that surrounded them, and putting them to rest formally. Richard, after being lost for 527 years, was found again. The long-lost king's homecoming would not be without its turmoil, as the discovery of his remains would let loose all of the opinions, facts, and unanswered questions surrounding him. Suddenly five centuries worth of information would be brought to the forefront once more.

Richard's bones were able to answer questions mere primary texts couldn't. Though primary source history was important, the science of his bones gave new life to the understanding of Richard III as a once living figure in history. The various first-hand accounts of Richard's life and death told of his reign, the state of his body, how and where he died, and what became of his remains after his death. The bones were able to prove—or disprove—what was stated throughout various first-hand accounts. The primary questions

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<sup>7</sup> Archaeologists were hesitant to invest in such a risky project—they could find everything, or they could find nothing at all, and most archaeological projects had to either have a very clear, definite goal (with a high chance of success) or they had to be less planned with more of a 'let's see what we find' approach.

were surrounding his death: how he died and where he was buried. The greatest curiosity was related to his body: everyone wanted to know if Richard III indeed had a hunchback or a withered arm. The analysis of his remains, as well as studying the ruins of the Greyfriars cathedral provided many of the answers scholars were hoping for.

One of the biggest revelations of Richard's remains came simply upon first glance. When the skeleton was unearthed, there was an unmistakable curve to the spine. This was the first clue that the team was onto a major discovery, but the real discoveries were to be made with further examination of the remains. It was quickly determined that many of the accounts of Richard's death proved to be accurate, in that he was given several wounds at once, with a blow to the head being the leading cause of death. They also were correct in the story of Richard receiving a "humiliation wound" to the backside, after his death. Then came the curved spine—the most important myth of them all was about to be either proven true, or debunked. The truth was perhaps a mix of both.

Cutting past all of the intensely medical jargon, the findings from an examination of Richard's spine proved that the king was no hunchback, at least not as extreme as modern portrayals present. There was a curve to the spine, that would indeed cause one shoulder to be higher than the other, but only slightly—enough to be visible, surely, but a good tailor and well-made armour could hide this. Further, there was no withered arm, and Richard would not have walked with a limp, as the bones of his hips were even, and the lower section of his spine was straight. This means that Richard, though having a slight spinal abnormality, was not significantly disabled as most writings depict him to be. What, then, gave us the Richard known today? This goes back to the textual history, which despite not having proof to back it during its time of creation, still held strong throughout centuries.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot categorized four distinct moments in the production of history into which silences enter: first, there is a moment of fact creation, which Trouillot defines as

*the making of sources*; second, there is the moment of fact assembly, defined as *the making of archives*; third, there is the moment of fact retrieval, which is defined as *the making of narratives*; fourth, and finally, is the moment of retrospective significance, defined as *the making of history in the final instance*.<sup>19</sup> Tudor historians necessarily went through each step of this process as they created their version(s) of English history, and their work then spread outward to the larger production of history overall. They began with the first instance, the creation of sources, which then influenced every other step of the process. And though there are many facets of this history to discuss, and many writers that had a hand in creating it, everything goes back to the struggle of legitimacy, and a history that haunted all of England. (See Figure 1 below for his remains).



***Figure 1 - Skeleton of Richard III***

## Legitimacy: The Spectre Haunting the English Throne

When writing about English history, especially when discussing the monarchy, one could not proceed without upholding the various ideals that constituted medieval monarchic political theory. The basic principles that established kingship in early modern England all pointed back to the supreme power that the current ruling monarch had—commonly called the Divine Right of Kings. As briefly mentioned earlier, the idea was that a king had a God given right to rule. Once anointed by God (and by extension, the Church) no one could remove him from his seat of power. Lineage was equally important to this theory, emphasizing that a king's lineage went right back to God himself. This lineage would pass from father to son, *ad infinitum*. This meant that writing *against* a king, as the Tudor historians did, was on the verge of treason. This theory was not infallible, however, and the Tudors took full advantage of that fact.

The two biggest issues that faced English royalty were problems of legitimacy and what can appropriately be titled 'supply and demand.' In order to be suitable for the throne, a potential heir had to meet several criteria. First, the laws of primogeniture mandated that the eldest son would always be the one set to inherit property or title from a father, and in the case of royalty, this meant the crown.<sup>8</sup> Second to this, the son had to be of a certain age to rule on his own (usually 16) and he had to be both able of body and mind, fit for war, and well versed in all of the various responsibilities expected of him. There could be conflict between the idea of being fit to rule and being legitimate in one's rule<sup>9</sup>, but a more pressing

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<sup>8</sup> If a king died, and had no children to speak of, the throne would then go to the king's eldest brother, or his eldest child, if the brother were not alive. This allowed for proper order to follow, ensuring that the law of primogeniture was always followed—the *eldest male*, in any case, always had the throne.

<sup>9</sup> There was often concern that a king would be fit to rule, but illegitimate, or that a king would be unfit to rule, though he was legitimate. These two interconnected, and often duelling, aspects to the kingship also connected directly to the idea of *de facto* rule, and *de jure* rule. A true king had both kinds of ruling—he was king via *de jure* (by right) but, this

concern was a lack of male blood in the first place. Having no male heirs, or no heirs at all, was a dangerous position for a king to be in.<sup>10</sup> These issues made being king an incredibly complicated ordeal, yet also a sacred and almost unstoppable force. If an heir had both blood lineage and ability, this was the perfect scenario. It should be no surprise, however, that perfection was not often what occurred.

There was almost never a situation more precarious than that of a child king, as evidenced by the line from *Richard II*: “Woe to the land that's govern'd by a child!” (II.iii.1444). An heir too young (usually younger than sixteen) to rule on their own created opportunity for various intrigues and scandal. Provisions for the occurrence of a child king were relatively simple on the surface: the child’s uncles, the King’s brothers, if there were any, as well as other advisors, would become the *Lord Protectorates* to the child in question. These men would rule in the child’s stead until he was of age, while also educating the young king in the ways of leadership. Upon reaching maturity, and proving himself worthy of the crown, the king would claim his throne officially. However, corruption created unease when there was a child king. In many cases, ulterior motives took hold of the men in power, and there was never any guarantee that a Lord Protectorate would not try to seize the crown for himself. This unease is where the Tudor historians chose to begin their narrative, with a different Richard—Richard II.

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right then made him the king by fact. However, in the various dramas that would unfold throughout history, *de jure* (which relates to lineal legitimacy) was often pitted against *de facto* (which often related to conquests in battle—seizing the power by force).

<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that women were not ever given opportunity to rule, as history shows several Queens of England taking the throne. However, in these instances, they were often given the throne in acts of desperation, lacking any male blood whatsoever. And in the case of a Queen ruling supreme, such as Elizabeth I, her marital status, as well as her child-bearing capabilities, were always brought into question.

## The Deposition of Richard II

Before even describing Richard III, Tudor historians had to situate what they considered the start of it all, or the “original sin.” This was considered the deposition of King Richard II. While there were various factors that contributed to Richard II’s ultimate deposition<sup>11</sup>, the Tudors focused on the challenging of Richard by his cousin and rival, Henry Bolingbroke<sup>12</sup>. After several years of unstable peace, Henry, who had been exiled, returned and raised a coup against Richard (with the support of various nobles). The Tudors took these events and exaggerated them, suggesting that Richard’s trouble was due to his starting out as a child king, but also because he was not as strong a king as he needed to be. Yet, he was ultimately portrayed as a victim to corrupt men, with his deposition being marked as a sin because he had declared an heir that was both lineally legitimate (though not his own son) and fully capable. Bolingbroke was not the next in line for the throne, making his ascension to the throne a usurpation. The Tudors framed this as haunting this line for several generations, starting with Bolingbroke (Henry IV) through Henry V and VI, respectively. The argument was that God would punish England for years to come, with the culmination of God’s wrath resulting in Richard III himself. With the stage set, the Tudors could then work on changing Richard III’s legacy to make the usurpation of *his* throne much more palpable.

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<sup>11</sup> War with France, the Black Death, and his own start as a child king all created unrest within his people, eventually leading him to be challenged by several nobles within his court, and eventually Bolingbroke.

<sup>12</sup>Henry Bolingbroke was the son of John of Gaunt, Richard II’s uncle, and the fourth son of Edward III.



## Delving Into The Archive: Analysis of Tudor Material

John Rous was perhaps the first of the Tudor historians.<sup>13</sup> His work, *The History of the Kings of England*, was originally written in Latin (*Historia regum Angliae*) and finding an English translation anywhere proves difficult. The British Library, which holds the last remaining copy, provides digital reference entries on John Rous's work, including digital scans (see Figure 2 below) of the manuscript and excerpts translated into English.

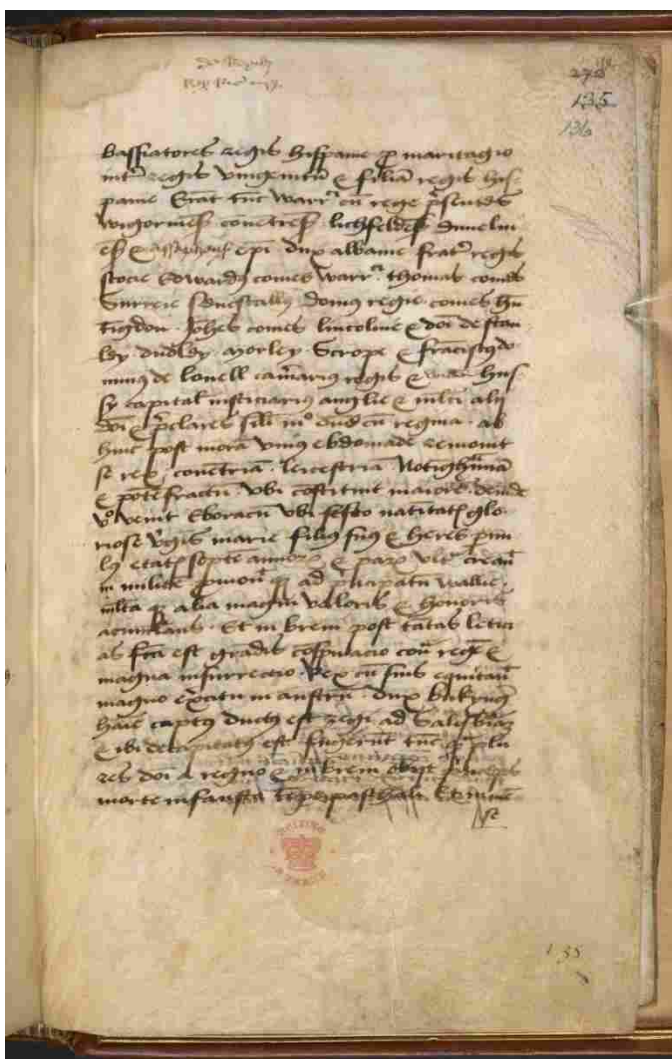


Figure 2 - Rous, *Historia* - Details Richard's appearance

<sup>13</sup> Most writing previous to John Rous, recorded Richard in a generally positive manner. Most of this kind of record is various snippets of comments from diplomats or foreign visitors to court and are nowhere near as substantial as that of larger histories.

Rous originally composed his *Historia* as a way to give King Edward IV the needed knowledge about both kings and high-ranking clergy, who would potentially be commemorated with statues in St. George's Chapel, in Windsor.<sup>20</sup> However, Rous did not finish his work before Edward's untimely death in 1483. Thus, the work chronicles Edward IV's death, the subsequent turbulence that resulted from his young son's brief reign, and Richard's ultimate ascension to the throne and his violent deposition<sup>21</sup>. As its composition did not end until 1486, Rous dedicated his finished product to the then current monarch, Henry VII. Due to the changing nature of the time period of its composition, this work cast Richard in an unfavourable light. Rous writes of Richard:

Richard was born at Fotheringhay in Northamptonshire, retained within his mother's womb for two years and emerging with teeth and hair to his shoulders. ... At his nativity Scorpio was in the ascendant, which is the sign of the house of Mars. And like a scorpion he combined a smooth front with a stinging tail. He received his lord King Edward V blandly, with embraces and kisses, and within about three months or a little more he killed him together with his brother. (f. 134v)<sup>22</sup>

Rous goes on to describe Richard as "small of stature, with a short face and unequal shoulders, the right higher and the left lower" and that Richard "who was excessively cruel in his days, reigned for three years [sic] and a little more, in the way that Antichrist is to reign."<sup>23</sup> These lines, most significantly describing Richard as short statured with unequal shoulders, would become the basis for every Tudor historian that succeeded him. Yet, Rous also offers a small bit of praise for Richard, saying thus: "For all that, let me say the truth to his credit: that he bore himself like a noble soldier and despite his little body and feeble strength, honourably defended himself to his last breath, shouting again and again that he was betrayed, and crying 'Treason! Treason! Treason!'"<sup>24</sup> This slight nod of approval towards

Richard perhaps comes from the fact that Rous, who wrote during Richard's reign, had once written favorably of Richard.

During Richard's reign, Rous created what is called "The Rous Roll," which the British Library describes as "an illustrated armorial roll-chronicle."<sup>25</sup> This roll was possibly commissioned by Anne Neville, Richard's wife, and was created to highlight the incredibly influential Beauchamp family, commemorating "the deeds of the Earls of Warwick and benefactors of the town, including members of the Beauchamp family as well as Edward IV and Richard III."<sup>26</sup> The roll contains 65 drawings that are all created in pen, and are unframed. Each individual drawn has their coat of arms accounted for, and drawn above them, and below them are written biographies of each figure represented. Somewhat surprisingly, considering how he writes of him after his death, Rous has nothing but glowing praise for Richard, who is depicted in full armor holding "a sword in his right hand and Warwick Castle in his left hand, with a charter looped over his wrist and a boar at his feet."<sup>27</sup> (See figure 3 below)

Rous writes of Richard as "a myghti prince" and when mentioning his birth at Foderingday Castle, there is no mention of Rous's later claim that Richard was born two years late, cut from the womb with teeth and hair. The second depiction of Richard is similar, with him once again in the armor (see Figure 4) and this time he is described with even more high praise, being called the "moost mighty prince," and claiming that he "Rewled hys subjettys In hys Realme ful commendablylly poneschyng offenders of hys laws specyally Extorcioners and oppressors of hys comyns."<sup>28</sup>



*Figure 3 - Richard III, Rous Roll*



**Figure 4 - Second Appearance of Richard III in Rous Roll**

This imagery of Richard is strikingly different from his later *Historia*. What's even more striking is that in Rous's Latin version of the Roll, according to the British Library, Richard III is literally cut from it, only mentioned in passing as the husband of Anne. Speculation posits that this was one change, along with the writings in *Historia*, that was brought about under the reign of Henry VII. While one can never fully know Rous' intentions, it is clear that under the Tudor regime, Richard III needed to be viewed in a much different light than

when he or his siblings were in power. And once Rous set his *Historia* into motion, every other Tudor writer after him followed his claims, sometimes word for word.

Polydore Vergil was the next influential Tudor historian. Vergil was an Italian scholar, a native of Urbino, but he spent most of his life in England, even becoming a naturalized citizen. Writing shortly after Rous, his works became more well-known and followed in a similar vein—chronological histories of England, with a particular focus on the kings of the realm. Vergil, however, was even more closely aligned with Henry VII, with Denys Hay's explaining that it was at Henry VII's request that Vergil write a history of England. Hays writes that Vergil began writing his *Anglica Historia* shortly after his arrival in England, where he was welcomed warmly by Henry VII. Hays goes on to note that "Henry VII had more reasons than many other sovereigns for welcoming a defence of his dynasty which would circulate among the courts of Europe. [...] Henry VII had every reason to encourage Vergil to undertake a history of England which would justify the Tudors to the scholars of Europe."<sup>29</sup> Vergil's work was also written in Latin, but there were various translations created years later, most notably an 1844 translation and printing edited by Henry Ellis, for the Camden society, which is the edition that is widely available today. In his history, Vergil provides much of the same details that Rous does, repeating almost word for word some of the various descriptions. However, it is Vergil that expands in more detail on several aspects, and these are the ideas that are later passed down to Shakespeare.

Aside from Vergil rehashing the idea that Richard was "little of stature, deformyd of body, the one showlder being higher than the other," he also claimed that Richard, "when he was thinking of any matter," did "continually byte his nether lyppe."<sup>30</sup> In addition, it is Vergil that describes Richard as having terrible dreams before the battle of Bosworth, claiming that it "ys reported that king Rycherd had that night a terryble dreame;" which is described as Richard seeing "evell spyrytes" that cause him to have a heaviness upon him even into the

next day and during battle.<sup>31</sup> Another significant contribution of Vergil, is that it is in his history that the story of Henry VII being crowned on a hill, right on the battlefield, was first written. He describes the event as follows:

[...the soldiers cryed, God save king Henry, God save king Henry! and with hart and hand utteryd all the shew of joy that might be; which whan Thomas Stanley dyd see, he set anon king Richards crowne, which was fownd among the spoyle in the feilde, upon his head, as thoughe he had bene already by commandment of the people proclaymyd king[.]<sup>32</sup>

This exact imagery would continue to be replicated by all other Tudor historians after Vergil, and would always be used to bolster Henry VII's triumph over Richard. This imagery comes directly before Richard is described as having his now dead body "nakyd of all clothing" slung upon a horse, his arms and legs dangling, to then be brought "to thabbay of monks Franciscanes and Leycester" where Richard was "a myserable spectacle" and buried two days later "without any pomp or solemne funeral."<sup>33</sup> Though this perhaps sounds sympathetic, Vergil also made sure to emphasize that Richard was deserving of this fate. Thomas More would, later, make no exception to this and carry on these exact same narrative traditions.

Thomas More's *History of King Richard III* is not comprised of just one text and is a prime example of the complexities of the archive. More wrote the manuscript of the text in 1513, and wrote not one manuscript, but *two* distinct texts in two languages: one in English, with a more vernacular style, and the other in Latin—the formal language across Europe. Though essentially the same story, the narratives were not identical. Having composed both of these texts, More never published them within his lifetime. His contemporaries, those that had been exposed to the *History*, began to publish parts of it within other history Chronicles. Richard Grafton was among the first to publish or make use of More's work, but even he was using a corrupted, unfinished, and half-gathered manuscript. It was More's nephew, William

Rastell who first published the work in a whole, coherent format, and his text then became the basis for all further publishing of the text. Yet, this shows that More was already being taken into the fold of the archive, and the further writing of history that was taking place around him.

Richard Sylvester, editor of the Yale edition of More's *History*, explains that More was not the first to write of Richard, and he is not the one that originated the tales of Richard. More was a man who grew up surrounded by the earliest of writers of the Tudor history, and he was undoubtedly influenced by these men. In fact, Sylvester makes a good point in that throughout More's work he uses phrases such as "as it is reported," "as wise men have said," "as it was told to me." More took the history he was familiar with and did what everyone else was attempting to do—constructed a chronicle of England. More's intentions are as varied as many others, though Sylvester notes that it is important to understand that More was not an anti-Yorkist (Richard's line and side in the War of Roses) figure. He was instead, perhaps, attempting to understand tyranny through writing about a figure that had become the epitome of tyranny. Regardless of Moore's intentions, his work became the basis for the bulk of Tudor propaganda written after his death. In the context of the archive this is significant in that the leading historical account used to construct almost all other accounts was not one clear, coherent text, and had to be fashioned into such by someone other than More himself. Further, More and all other Tudor historians were writing about Richard from a place of second-hand information; most of the writers of Richard's history were not alive themselves during his reign or the aftermath of his death. They had to rely on first-person accounts, that were mostly oral in nature. Regardless of intentions or sources, it cannot be denied that Thomas More proved to be one of the most influential Tudor historians, as it is his work that gathered many of the other pieces into one form. It was from More's work that Shakespeare primarily drew his own version of Richard, even if other aspects of the story were found



before More. More's work is where some of the most intense or direct descriptions of Richard occur, taking what was already said and exaggerating ten-fold.

Though certainly not the first to describe Richard in certain terms ("short of stature," as a prime example) More's work goes further than anyone else (with the exception, perhaps, being Shakespeare) in setting up Richard against the greater English monarchy and history. More begins his narrative with the death of Edward IV and describes him with high praise. He says of Edward that he was "a goodly person, and very princely to behold: courageous, politic in counsel, in adversity nothing abashed, in prosperity rather joyful than proud, in peace just and merciful, in war sharp and fierce, in the field bold and hardy, and nevertheless — no farther than wisdom would — adventurous." More continues to describe Edward's physical appearance, saying that Edward was "of visage lovely, of body mighty, strong, and clean made[.]"<sup>34</sup> Even when describing some of Edward's faults, such as a poor diet or having great lust in his youth, More always finds a way to come back to declare Edward as a good king, a good man. Then he goes on to tell of Edward's brothers, and this is where Richard is first described. In describing the three brothers More at first treats them all with a general portraiture of sons of royalty. They were "great states of birth, so were they great and stately of stomach, greedy and ambitious of authority, and impatient of partners."<sup>35</sup> But he then makes moves to set up each of these men as individuals. It is Edward who "revenging his father's death, deprived King Henry and attained the crown." George Duke of Clarence "was a goodly noble prince, and at all points fortunate, if either his own ambition had not set him against his brother, or the envy of his enemies his brother against him."<sup>36</sup> But though More provides each man with both of their faults and their fortunes, More holds nothing back with Richard. The tone suddenly darkens and turns menacing.

More gives Richard an entire paragraph dedicated to his description alone. This of course could come from the fact that the narrative does, after all, describe the history of

Richard, and not that of his brothers. But it is also important to note that where it takes only a few lines to describe Richard's brothers—who were warriors, politicians, and mere mortal men, just as Richard was—it takes entire pages to set up Richard's character. More begins thus:

Richard, the third son, whom we now entreat, was in wit and courage equal with either of them, in body and prowess far under them both: little of stature, ill-featured of limbs, crook-backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard favored of visage, and such as in states called warly, in other men otherwise.<sup>37</sup>

He does not stop there but beginning with this he already sets up Richard as both more and less than his brothers. Richard is a good warrior, he has courage, but he is twisted and ugly, and where his brothers can know peace, Richard is warlike, always. More furthers this, by saying that he “was malicious, restful, envious, and from afore his birth, ever forward.” It is with his next line, however, that More creates the most exaggerated, and most talked about, rumour of Richard III in any of the Tudor writing about him. More details a report of Richard's birth that helps explain such a wicked character:

It is reported that the duchess his mother had so much ado in her travail, that she could not be delivered of him uncut, and that he came into the world with the feet forward, as a man be borne outward, and (as the fame runneth) also not untoothed—whether men of hatred report about the truth, or else that nature changed course in his beginning, which in the course of his life many things unnaturally committed.<sup>38</sup>

This idea that Richard's birth marked his later evil in life would carry forward into every other writing after More, most notably in Shakespeare (and not only in Richard's play, but in all of the history plays where Richard appears as a character). Though only a few lines, these

were the lines that would be repeated over and over, and influence an entire legacy for centuries to come. More, despite being so influential, was not the last great archivist, as it were, and instead seemed to only provide the fodder for future writers. The Tudor propaganda culminates with Richard Grafton's *History of England* and William Shakespeare himself, and it is in Grafton's work that the insistent carbon copying of Tudor historians is made most evident.

I was searching for various historical chronicles, to see what would appear, and saw that my institution's own Special Collections had an 1809 printing of *Richard Grafton's Chronicle, or, History of England*, first published in 1569. Grafton's work was a surprise archival find. When asked, the archivists were almost unable to find the books in the beginning, but after much searching, the books made their way to the viewing table. I sat down to two massive, dusty tomes that awaited me.

As I perused through Grafton, I was struck by several things. First, I found a family tree of Edward III listed, which I quickly scrawled down in my notebook.<sup>14</sup> The tree briefly describes all of Edward III's family, through to Richard's father.<sup>15</sup> After this, I quickly flipped through to Richard II, Edward IV, Edward V, Richard III, and Henry VII, to see how Grafton worked through his own writing of this massive history. I was not surprised to find that in many cases, Grafton copied the likes of Rous, Vergil, and More, word for word—as they had all done before him, pulling from each other. However, the difference was that I had access to the entire work, both volumes, and in a language I could understand (English). Grafton, like the others, lays out every event in detail, going so far as to describe Richard sending a John Greene to one “Robert Brakenburie, constable of the tower,” to arrange for the killing of the Princes in the Tower, with Grafton writing that Richard sent Green with a

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<sup>14</sup> The rule was pencils only!

<sup>15</sup> Curiously, though the daughters are mentioned, none of who they married, nor the children they bore, are listed—those items are only listed for the male children.

letter “and credence also, that the same sir Robert should in anye wyse put the two children to death.”<sup>39</sup> Grafton goes on to even name James Tyrell, the supposed murderer of the children as well as the Duke of Clarence, who makes an appearance in Shakespeare’s play. Grafton says that “James Tyrell devised that they should be murdered in their beds and no blood shed[.]”<sup>40</sup> He also rehashes other aspects of the histories as well, using More’s exact words in describing Richard as being born untoothed, with his feet forward, and having to be cut from his mother. Grafton is even so explicit in his source material that he at one point writes that a certain passage, marked with an asterisk, was written “by sir Thomas Moore.”<sup>41</sup> His uses of the previous sources don’t end there, either, as he pulls directly from Vergil as well. Grafton copies Vergil’s accounts of Richard’s crown being plucked from his head and placed onto the head of Henry VII, word for word. Throughout his work, he also will place the names of other historians, such as Froissart, above passages that they influenced. Grafton revealed to me that these histories were no doubt passed onward forever to continue a vicious cycle of silence. For it is these documents that became archived, and these documents that became what was consulted as history. Shakespeare’s play was merely a nail in the coffin.

Shakespeare drew directly upon Vergil’s description of Richard’s nightmares in an Act IV scene where Richard is awakened by the ghosts of all of those he has murdered. As with the “evil spirits” of Vergil, these ghosts haunt Richard and he interprets their sighting as an omen of the battle to come.<sup>42</sup> Shakespeare further draws upon the various histories to construct Richard as having the hunchback, an evil countenance, as Richard declares quite openly that he is “not shap’d for sportive tricks” in the beginning of his play.<sup>16</sup> Yet the insistence of these histories do not silence Richard only in the past. Trouillot deems both “the making of archives” and the looking back at history as moments where silences enter. For

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<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that this project doesn’t cover the actual text of Shakespeare’s play, instead merely glosses over it. This is due to the fact that Shakespeare’s treatment of Richard is already much studied—and with more time, perhaps, a more involved study of it needs be done, as it relates to my work. It is more pertinent in this case, however, to look at all of the work and archival machinations that created Shakespeare’s work. Shakespeare was only one writer in a much wider circle.

Richard, the making of the archive extends into film, television, and every single reproduction of Shakespeare's play on every stage.

### **Richard III in Modern Theatre and Popular Culture**

Kevin Spacey's rendition of Richard III sports a crooked body, but also a full leg brace. Ian McKellen's Richard is an all too obvious symbol for Hitler; in Peter Dinklage's rendition, he has to physically climb into the throne, as he is too "small of stature" to be able to fit it. Even Philippa Langley, who led the charge to find Richard, gathered her evidence of where he was buried from these accounts—giving them even some credibility, as they were right at least about his location. Modern historians try to parse through these archives, but there are also enough historians that bought into these myths; various early scholarship on medieval history (mostly from the 1950s) often deems Richard the murderer of his nephews, though that has never been proved. Richard, to draw from Spivak, has become a subaltern—one incapable of speaking on his own behalf or shaping his own place in documented history. Though he was not a subaltern in life, through not only death but a lack of clear truth in the archive, the real Richard is little more than a ghost.

### **Loyaulte Me Lie: Loyalty Binds Me**

Often it feels too easy to abandon any project to give Richard his due—a better portrayal, a defense of life with a disability. My work, however, rests on the archives even still. For even within the slander, there are small moments where it seems that a more accurate, once-living Richard, shines through. Vergil and Grafton both wrote that Richard, when surrounded by his enemies, was told to flee by his soldiers. Richard, according to them both, not ignorant of what people thought of him, cast away "all hope of fortunate successe and happye chance to come," and answered to his men "that on that day he would make an ende of all battles, or else there finishe his life."<sup>43</sup> I see in this Richard a moment of courage; I see a man that will go forward and carry onward, that will fight for his kingdom until his

death. Other scholars have described other accounts of Richard's men describing Richard's last words in a similar fashion, but even more brave: "I was born King of England, and on this day I will die King of England."<sup>44</sup> The archives have cast Richard as a monster, but their own words fall apart on them.

But where can we go from here? The archive still stands, it is still constructed. The 2012 discovery and his subsequent reburial in 2013 brought some sense of closure, perhaps, but also continued the mystery. People still wanted to know if he actually killed his nephews, people continued to flock to see his bones as they were on display (akin to a modern day freak show, perhaps) and numerous newspapers reported on Leicester finding the "notorious" king. For my research, I argue for simply looking at the archive as it is, and finding the gaps, finding the cracks where Richard's voice can slip through. Digging further—past the bones, past the saintliness or the monstrosity, and, yes, reading Shakespeare, or *rereading* it. The very words used to damn Richard (and disabled people) can be sources of strength, found by building onto the archive, building our own archive, one piece at a time.

## CHAPTER III

CRIPPLING CALIBAN: *THE TEMPEST* AND THE GEOPOLITICAL ARCHIVE

*“What’s past is prologue.”* – William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act II, Scene i

*Lie where I land let my bones turn to sand  
I was born on the lake and I don't want to leave it  
Every eye on the coast ever more  
Will remember the sight of the ghost on the shore  
Die if I must let my bones turn to dust  
I'm the Lord of the lake and I don't want to leave it  
All who sail off the coast ever more  
Will remember the tale of the ghost on the shore.*  
– “The Ghost on the Shore,” Lord Huron

*I am sitting with a friend in front of a ship at Historical Jamestown. We are only a few minutes into a supposedly authentic production of *The Tempest* put on as it would have been in the original Jamestown settlement. On the ship, the narrator, a woman dressed in a plain settler’s dress, discusses Jamestown, the history behind the play—its rumoured connection to the voyage and stranding of *The Sea Venture*. She then says this: “And in 1619, things much improved.” I cast my friend, a fellow scholar, a side-eyed glance. 1619, the year the first slaves were brought to Jamestown, deemed the year when things much improved. The woman goes on to talk about the establishment of the General Assembly, and later the House of Burgesses. My friend and I both shake our head sadly. I think of Caliban, standing on his island, ready to defend it, never thinking of the life that will await him at the hands of Europeans. Later in the evening, I notice that in this version of the play, Caliban is a white man portrayed with a hunching, crouched walk, his language a snarl. In 1619, things much improved—but for whom, and at what cost?*

By Shakespeare’s death in 1616, England—and the greater world at large—had witnessed dramatic upheavals and shifts. Thus, is it no wonder that in what is considered to be Shakespeare’s final play, the primary theme was that of exploration, navigation, and a

voyage: on water, on land, but also in life. *The Tempest* was, like much of the literary imagination of the time, a culmination of all of the ongoing changes. Though exploration of the world was not a new idea, England was coming off of the settlement of its first permanent colony—Jamestown. By 1616, not only had Shakespeare died, but the famous navigation writer, Richard Haklyut, had also died, leaving behind an impressive list of travel narratives and dialogues, as well as status as one of the figures that had pushed for the letters patent that allowed for Virginia to be settled. England had a new king and was beginning to push past its usual boundaries; this progress was proving more successful than perhaps expected (for travel by sea was not an easy task). With the thrill and excitement of these explorations, came other, more practical (and much more sinister) motivations: nation building and conquest.

England was not the only great European nation expanding its territory, and while explorers were discovering what was deemed “the New World,” they were also learning that this so-called “New World” was not so new at all. Explorers as early as Columbus were encountering indigenous people of the supposedly new worlds they were discovering. And though the presence of people already living and thriving in a place would perhaps bring into question whether or not one has actually “discovered” something, this did not stop colonial forces from writing about the people they were encountering and creating narratives to explain their existence. In the writings of essayists from Montaigne to Hakluyt, indigenous people began to appear, becoming figures in what I am here calling the *geographical archive* of England. These people would not be known for their unique identities and cultural practices; they would not be known for all of the qualities that shape a civilization or society; they would not be known in human terms at all. Through the gaze of this colonial, geographical archive, indigenous people would take on an entirely different shape. The body of a non-European figure would become a site of myth and monstrosity.



As with other elements of the archive, there is a great deal of source material to pull from in the explication process of analyzing the colonial representation of the indigenous body. Yet, as with Richard III and the disabled body in the archive of the medieval era, the social anxieties of the newly expanding English colony could best be seen within the literary imagination of the time. Like his contemporaries, Shakespeare would try his hands at writing a play that embodied the struggles of nation-making. Inspired by the archive around him — full of travel narratives, first-hand reports of shipwrecks, grotesque accounts of interactions with indigenous peoples, and continued rejection of the body of the other—Shakespeare produced *The Tempest*, and with it added yet another piece into the archive of colonization. Similar to *Richard III*, however, Shakespeare pulled from a long history and list of sources when it came to writing his last play.

### **The Geopolitical Archive: A Definition**

The geopolitical archive is that which is constructed of writings and other documents having to do with the creation and maintenance of geo-political identities. This archive draws upon sources such as travel dialogues, maps (see Figure 5 below) reports from colonists, letters patent and other government documentation. However, this archive is also constructed of rumours and mythology, folklore and the understanding of humanity in the early modern moment. *The Tempest* is influenced by countless aspects of this archive, as much as it informs and adds to the archive itself. But the greatest elements of this construction date back long before Shakespeare ever picked up a pen, before Shakespeare even had a presence upon this earth. For the archive that informed Shakespeare was being compiled long before his time.



**Figure 5 - Florimi Map of Africa**

## **Christopher Columbus and The Imperial Audience**

While there were countless sea voyages that predated Shakespeare, perhaps none is more famous and revered than that of Christopher Columbus. The old saying goes, “In fourteen hundred ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” The saying has been taught, both by itself and part of a larger poem, to schoolchildren for decades. With a little digging, it doesn’t take long to learn that the poem comes from a 1948 children’s book written by Jean Marzallo and illustrated by Steve Bjorkman, entitled *In 1492*. The poem is the narration of the book, which tells the story of Christopher Columbus and his discovery of the Americas. In full, the poem is as follows:

*In fourteen hundred ninety-two*

*Columbus sailed the ocean blue.*

*He had three ships and left from Spain;  
He sailed through sunshine, wind and rain.*

*He sailed by night; he sailed by day;  
He used the stars to find his way.*

*A compass also helped him know  
How to find the way to go.*

*Ninety sailors were on board;  
Some men worked while others snored.*

*Then the workers went to sleep;  
And others watched the ocean deep.*

*Day after day they looked for land;  
They dreamed of trees and rocks and sand.*

*October 12 their dream came true,  
You never saw a happier crew!*

*“Indians! Indians!” Columbus cried;  
His heart was filled with joyful pride.*

*But “India” the land was not;  
It was the Bahamas, and it was hot.*

*The Arakawa natives were very nice;  
They gave the sailors food and spice.*

*Columbus sailed on to find some gold  
To bring back home, as he’d been told.*

*He made the trip again and again,  
Trading gold to bring to Spain.*

*The first American? No, not quite.  
But Columbus was brave, and he was bright.*

The first rhyme of the larger work has become a staple in the greater imagination of the West, most especially America. The understanding is that Christopher Columbus was a brave, courageous man who discovered what we now know to be the Americas. Most people would list this in connection with Columbus without much thought. Children are taught to celebrate him, and America honours Columbus with a national holiday. The poem aligns itself with the

basic understanding of the narrative, even if it does try to present in some ways the facts of the matter that many may forget: Columbus was, it turns out, royally lost, and was nowhere where he had expected himself to be; further, his voyage initiated the genocide and destruction of the indigenous people living there.

The poem, whether it intends to or not, participates in the continuous (and long-standing) tradition of creating history from an imperial colonial framework. This poem is merely one of a long line of historical documents and narratives that tell the story—of discovery, of nation building, of imperial history—a certain way. This poem, however, does good work of showing how ingrained the narrative is in the current moment, so much so that it is still to this day taught to children and recited by people everywhere. This indoctrination is not new, however, and this is another example of how the archive is a part of the cultural tradition of history-making. The *1492* poem participates in creating or upholding a grammar of empire, and along with it a certain writer-audience relationship, making the audience imperialist in its participation in the narrative.

Michelle Burnham, in her work *Captivity and Sentiment*, explains the ways in which early American writers—particularly those in the Jacksonian era—structured their writings in a way that justified the genocide of indigenous people, and removed the agency of colonizers as the enactor of that genocide. Burnham explains that a core component to the Jacksonian era model of the imperialist audience “is the subtraction of agency from the historical stage, so that causal aggression looks like inevitability.”<sup>45</sup> She moves on to cite Abdul R. JanMohamed, who suggest that “those who have fashioned the colonial world are themselves reduced to the role of passive spectators in a mystery not of their own making.”<sup>46</sup> Burnham goes on to add that “the imperialist nation imagines itself as an unaccountable audience, affected by a tragic disappearing act that no perceptible agent has effected. The convenient elision of agency allows mourning to be free of responsibility.”<sup>47</sup> This removal of agency was

focused on early American works, in Burnham's examples, but her argument here fits with the Marzallo poem, and all other instances of imperial narratives (such as that of Columbus and other explorers).

The larger implication of this, however, is that the writer and overall imperialist construct—nation, kingdom, Derrida's *archons*—has some control over how history is written and portrayed. By removing agency from its actions, imperial forces also remove responsibility. The archive factors into this through the ways history is written about, and by whom. The Marzallo poem is only one example of how history has been passed down, and carefully constructed, over the centuries. But it gets to the heart of beliefs that were created as early as the fifteenth century and pushed onward centuries past it. Even Columbus, however, is not the first instance of this removal of agency.

### ***Beowulf* and the Image of European Triumph**

Another classic tale of conquest and imperial strength begins with a voyage across the ocean blue. The epic poem *Beowulf* chronicles the heroic deeds of the mighty warrior (and later king) Beowulf, as he fights monsters and protects Anglo-Saxon society. The poem is a commonly read, widely known tale, and yet its own role in the archive is still shrouded in mystery. Both the author and the exact date of composition is still widely debated. The manuscript of *Beowulf* that has made its way to the present is part of a collection of medieval texts, the others being a homily on St Christopher; a text called *The Marvels of the East*; the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*; and another Old English poem, entitled *Judith*. *Beowulf* is the second to last in this collection.<sup>48</sup> The authorship of the poem is suggested to be the work of either a single poet, a Christian, or a pair of Anglo-Saxon scribes, working collaboratively. In any case, the Christian influence upon the poem is clear (an influence which will be discussed in greater depth later in the chapter). Along with the uncertainty of authorship, the exact date of the poem's composition is also unknown. Scholars have reached a general

consensus that it was most likely written in the early eleventh century. Despite its questionable origins, *Beowulf* remains the longest poem in Old English, and continues to hold a lofty position within medieval studies and beyond. Within the context of the creation of a geographical archive, the poem bears mention due to it being one of the earliest examples of the mixing of history and myth, to create a narrative of a nation-state.

The poem focuses on the heroic exploits of the titular character, beginning with the mighty warrior travelling to the Shyllum-Danes to assist in fighting off a monster known as Grendel. Because of his feats, and his overall strength of character, Beowulf is later requested to be king, and the poem finishes out with his last great feat, with his life being the ultimate sacrifice to save the life and legacy of the Anglo-Saxons. The epic operates as both a history and a fantasy, both a reaching back to the past and a looking forward to the future. The poem treats all the history that predated the Anglo-Saxons; it deals not with the English, but with their Germanic ancestors, in particular, South Scandinavian tribes. The historical period of the poem is deemed to be a time after the invasion of England by Germanic tribes in the middle of the century, before the Anglo-Saxon migration was completed. Thus the poem incorporates history and a mixture of cultures. Even with this mixture, however, the focus is on the titular character of Beowulf, and the greatness of Germanic (and later Anglo-Saxon) society. The epitome of Anglo-Saxon values, Beowulf is physically strong, loyal, and willing to sacrifice everything for his people. His life embodies the qualities of a good leader in a tribal warrior-centric society. This poem is not without an underlying *otherness*, however, and this otherness is where the archive comes into play. For Grendel, the primary villain of the poem, embodies everything that Anglo-Saxon society *is not*, and the lore and the cultural

creation of Grendel did not die or burn with either him, Beowulf, or the manuscripts of the Cotton codex.<sup>17</sup>

Due to the influence of myth on the epic genre as a whole, the epic hero is not just an ordinary hero, and thus the villain will not be an ordinary villain. Beowulf was an exaggeration of the perfect man and in many ways was symbolic of the perfection and high achievement of his people. As previously mentioned, it is widely believed that the manuscript of *Beowulf* was written, in whole or in part, by either one or two Christian scribes living among the Anglo-Saxons. This holds several implications, many of which there is not time to treat here. But in any case, *Beowulf* surely has elements of “Christian colouring.” F.A. Blackburn, in an early examination of the Christian influence on *Beowulf*, notes that “its materials are drawn from tales composed before the conversion of the Angles and Saxons to Christianity, and that there was a time when these tales were repeated without the Christian reflections and allusions that are found in the poem that has reached us.”<sup>18</sup> What is important in this statement is the usage of materials both from pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon society, and post-Christian Anglo-Saxon society. This collision of cultures and ideals thus informs not just Beowulf’s character and journey, but that of his opposition—Grendel.

### **Grendel: The *Other* Made Monstrous**

Grendel is derived from a variety of myths all working together at once. While the Anglo-Saxons were encountering and converting to Christianity more and more by the time Beowulf was written, they still held many of the beliefs of the Germanic tribes that were reflected in the poem. As Ruth Staver emphasizes in her book *A Companion To Beowulf*,

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<sup>17</sup> The Cotton Codex is the organization system, still used today by the British Library, that was taken from the original Cotton Library—the library of an antiquarian and bibliophile, Sir Robert Bruce Cotton, who had in his collection a great number of early British manuscripts, *Beowulf* among them. The library was destroyed in a fire, as were many of the documents, but many were unscathed or salvaged. The British Library now holds what remains, and honors the original library with the cataloguing system put in place by Cotton.

<sup>18</sup> F.A. Blackburn, “Christian Colouring in Beowulf.” 205.

when the Anglo-Saxons became Christians, they did not see any reason to stop believing in elves, trolls, dragons, and other creatures that coloured the Anglo-Saxon imagination.<sup>49</sup> Much of the Germanic mythology still held in their minds—gods like Odin, Thor, and Freya, were well known, as was the story of the war between the Giants (supernatural beings that had control over storms) and the gods, which ended with the defeat of the gods. In the Germanic mind, the gods were heroes, because even in their defeat, they did not go down without a fight. The gods stood for civilization, order and for upholding what men valued, harnessing the forces of sunlight and growth; the giants, on the other hand, were on the side of the destruction of civilization, and their goal was to bring about the end of order. Thus, even after being introduced to Christianity, the Anglo-Saxon people were familiar with monsters and found ways to connect their old beliefs with new ones.

Alongside the old view of monsters and other mythical forces, a common Christian belief was that monsters and all similar creatures descended from Cain, the firstborn son of Adam. Cain is known for killing his brother Abel in Genesis 4. The reason monsters were descended from Cain, it was argued, was because after Cain killed Abel, God banished him from the land and sent him into exile; Cain was fearful that he would be killed in exile, and he begged God to kill him then and there instead of risking death at the hand of a stranger, or, equal in measure, suffering in exile. God refused his request and instead told Cain that he would mark him so that anyone encountering him would know that he was marked by God, and that if he was harmed, the wrath of God would rain down on the perpetrator of the crime. The marking of Cain, though never specified in the Bible itself, was said to be monstrosity, or some sort of outward appearance of evil. Thus, the evil blood that Cain held was passed on, and his children and all descendants were deformed and vastly different from those of regular men. Grendel's form is derived from this compounding of old and new myths.



The story of Cain would have resonated with Anglo-Saxons because it dealt with ‘kin-slaying,’ which was the ultimate betrayal of the most important bond: blood. Greenblatt, in his introduction to *Beowulf* in the *Norton Anthology of British Literature*, explains that the “relationship between kinsman was also of deep significance to the society. If one of his kinsmen had been slain, a man had a moral obligation either to kill the slayer or to exact the payment of *wergild* (man-price) in compensation.”<sup>50</sup> He goes on to say that Hrothgar’s anguish over the murders Grendel committed “is not only for the loss of his men but also for the shame of his inability either to kill Grendel or to exact a ‘death price’ from the killer.”<sup>51</sup> This means that a story such as that of Cain and Abel would have high significance to the people—as would the idea of Cain being an outcast, bearing a mark of evil and shame, for his crime. Connecting this to Grendel then would have been no difficult leap for an Anglo-Saxon audience. The *Beowulf* poet says that Cain and his descendants were in constant battle with God and man and this feud had continued into the current moment, through various bloodlines, most notably that of Cain (monsters) and that of men, descended from Adam’s third (and blameless) son, Seth. The only problem this story runs up against later on is what to make of Cain and his descendants after the Christian story of Noah and the Flood. The common narrative of sin equating to a corrupt bloodline manages to once again provide an answer.

The great Flood wiped all creations from the Earth, except for those aboard Noah’s boat. The story goes that sometime after the Flood, Noah became drunk and fell asleep, naked. One of his three sons, Ham, saw Noah and, thinking he looked foolish, told his brothers. However, instead of reacting negatively, the other two brothers proceeded to gently cover their father without waking him. When Noah woke up, he cursed Ham for making fun of him, instead of caring for him as his brothers did. Medieval interpreters suggested that this action of Noah’s third son resulted in more monsters. This line of thinking posited that Ham

continued the work Cain had left off, and this line was also plagued with monsters, so much so that one Medieval Irish text affirms that leprechauns, giants, and "horseheads," as well as all other deformed creatures came from Ham.<sup>52</sup> Some other traditions also argue that a few monsters were able to survive the flood, but it seems more fitting and more consistent, that a new line of monsters was descended from Ham in his inherent wickedness.

Grendel fits perfectly within these frameworks, and the Beowulf poet directly addresses the connection of monsters to Cain (and therefore the later stories as well). The Beowulf poet writes:

[...]For the Maker had prescribed him with the race of Cain.  
 That bloodshed, for that Cain slew Abel,  
 the eternal Lord avenged: no joy had he of that violent deed,  
 but God drove him for that crime far from mankind. Of him all evil broods  
 were born, ogres and goblins and haunting shapes of hell, and the Giants too,  
 that long time warred with God – for that he gave them their reward.<sup>53</sup>

Here the connection between the old belief of giants versus the gods (now made singular to fit the Christian God) and Cain is made, and both are mixed to help describe Grendel's origin. Grendel is then set up as everything Beowulf and Anglo-Saxon culture at large is not. In this way, even before colonial dominance was more properly established, the writing of Beowulf is the beginning of a writing of a colonial dominant narrative and an archiving of the lore that upholds it. Grendel is hard to give an identity, other than the opposite of that valued by Anglo-Saxon, Christian culture. Where Beowulf is Anglo-Saxon, Grendel is not—not even human. Where Beowulf is connected to Christianity, if not a proto-Christian himself, Grendel stands as the heathen that refused Christianity, was the result of warring against God (Cain and Ham).

Grendel is the result of centuries of sin and chaos. It could be suggested, therefore, that Grendel is also most likely a stand in for some sort of tribe or people that was not Anglo-Saxon. Without going through a detailed history of early Germanic tribes, it is difficult to ascertain what or who Grendel represents; but it is clear that he represents all that is *other* to Anglo-Saxon society. This discussion is important as it is these early forms of folklore and a construction of Christian versus heathen, civilized versus uncivilized, that carry onward into later eras—and influence the colonial geographical archives and dominance that results.

### **Travel Narratives and Writing the *Other***

Grendel is Caliban's predecessor. The ground that works like *Beowulf* began to cultivate made way for the fertility of the colonial imagination. By the time *The Tempest* had been written, there were several other pieces that had been added to what has so far been called the geographical archive. Though the story of Cain and Ham had resurfaced, even before this there were various essays and writings about navigation and travel that influenced Caliban's creation—and destruction—as a character. Sparacino states directly that "Caliban is, among other things, Shakespeare's conception of 'a salvage and deformed slave.'"<sup>54</sup> He lists voyage literature, epics, pastoral and medieval romances, and Italian commedia dell'arte as the primary influences on Caliban's characterization. Sparacino explains that "[t]he Bermuda pamphlets as well as other documents and news from the New World, including Hakluyt and Purchas's respective accounts of travels and discoveries, added to the interest that the Renaissance Englishman already had for the natural man as he could be found in Old World sources."<sup>55</sup> The key point Sparacino makes is that in the tales taken from the Old World, "the wild man is not only grotesque but evil[...] where in the lust of the savage is strongly emphasized."<sup>56</sup> He goes on to say that this man is "portrayed as being inhuman and unintelligent, with no more mentality than that of a slobbering beast."<sup>57</sup> Sparacino lists

Hakylut and Purchas in his source material, and they are chief among the travel writings of the time that influence Caliban's formation.

Though travel writings were meant to be viewed as credible and well thought through endeavours, simply truthful narratives of the voyages being taken, they were nonetheless scattered with fantastical claims. Hakylut himself did not do much of the traveling he wrote about, but instead would catalogue and record the tales that explorers brought back to the mainland. His most famous writings were *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of America*, published in 1582, and *The Principall Navigations, Voiages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, published in 1589. Much of the descriptions of both people and places in these works bordered on fantasy. This is not to discredit the work, but, rather to emphasize the awe that the New World inspired in early modern English readers, and the understanding of travel narratives as not simply information but entertainment. Hakylut was not alone in these writings, and if anything, drew upon his own predecessors in great detail. Alden Vaughan gives in-depth examples of the various travel writings of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, as well as those that came even earlier. Special treatment is given to the *Travels* of John Mandeville which, according to Vaughn, despite being deemed now to have more fancy than fact, was for several centuries taken literally. Vaughn writes that “[Mandeville’s work] shaped the expectations of many early explorers, including Columbus in the 1490s and Martin Frobisher in the 1570s, and reached a wide popular audience.”<sup>58</sup> The *Travels* were first published in manuscript, then later in Continental editions. In 1499, editions with woodcuts added images to the textual document, which “gave readers and illiterate browsers alike a graphic introduction to remarkable creatures and places.”<sup>59</sup>

Vaughan states that Richard Hakluyt himself included a Latin version of *Travels* in the first edition of his *Principall Navigations*. Vaughan lists several pointed examples of the

kind of ideas being published about the peoples encountered in the New World, most notably Sub-Saharan Africans. Mandeville and other contemporaries (Boemus, Thevet, Gainish) had lines such as the following: From Mandeville, it is reported that in Ethiopia, “are such men that have but one foote, and they go so fast that it is a great mervaile,” and that the food is so large, “that the shadow therof covereth the body from Sun or raine when they lye upon their backs[.]”<sup>60</sup> Thevet gave a common explanation for black skin, which Vaughan paraphrases as “extreme heat draws warmth from the heart and other interior parts to the surface, leaving the dark Africans with scorched skin but inwardly cold.”<sup>61</sup> Thevet also explained that the intense heat gave these people “curly hair, white teeth, large lips,” and crooked legs, among many other traits. He even goes so far as to use the word “villaines” and “imps,” associating these people with wickedness. Various other writers would continually emphasize a lack of Christianity and morals amongst these so-called primitive peoples, and the physical descriptions continued in a grotesque pattern. Vaughan references *Trodlogitica*, and quotes from the ancient authors that “the people inhabit caves or dens, eat serpents, and ‘have no speache, but rather a grynnyng and chatteryng. There are also people without heades, called *Blemines*, havyng theyr eyes and mouth in theyr breste”<sup>62</sup> All of these writings occur either before or alongside Haklyut’s work, or it is Haklyut that often would republish or collect them together (as well as Samuel Purchas later). Haklyut himself never travelled to these places, but was simply an archivist of sorts, gathering data and presenting it to the wider public. A notable line from one of the accounts found in Haklyut’s *Voyages*, describes some sort of creature “who shewed himself three times unto us from the middle upwards, in which parts hee was proportioned like a man, of the complection of a Mulato, or tawny Indian.”<sup>63</sup>

Though these are varied and plentiful descriptions, they all have one narrative thread in common: they construct indigenous peoples, notably those of African nations, as savage, deformed, lacking intelligence and all of the ideals that European society valued

(Christianity, a traditional understanding of language and education, etc). This aligns with the ways in which Grendel was constructed, but especially connects to Caliban. Caliban is also drawn from three other sources in particular: two essays on “blackness,” that connect back to the traditional story of Cain, and Montaigne’s essay *On Cannibals*. Shakespeare would know of the various travel documents spreading through Europe, along with other writings on race. Montaigne’s work was used almost verbatim in many instances, with passages making their way directly into *The Tempest*. The play is an amalgamation of sources, with a colonial narrative at its heart.

### **Prospero Equals Hero**

As mentioned previously, Caliban is representative of an early modern English understanding of not only blackness, but indigenous experience. Caliban, like Grendel, stands in direct opposition to all that Prospero is meant to embody. Prospero is a white, European member of the highest society—once being the rightful Duke of Milan—who also has potential for continuing this lineage, in his daughter Miranda. The play centers around Prospero’s desire for revenge, and his desire to return home; home, here being, Milan and European society. Prospero is immediately set up as a figure of great strength. He can control the weather; he can communicate with various spirits on the island; and, most importantly, he has captured and enlisted the help and servitude of the sprite Ariel, who is able to enact incredible feats of magic. Prospero’s language is always filled with references to magic as well a general lust for education and knowledge. In one of his more poignant lines, he tells Miranda that while he had the Dukedom, he was so engaged with his studies that he let his responsibilities go—saying, that “me, poor man, my library was Dukedom large enough” (I.ii.211-212).<sup>64</sup> Prospero is written as a misaligned, slighted hero, and his history and backstory is set up in detail before the audience is greeted by either Ariel or Caliban.

The first instance of Caliban comes not even as a visual, but from Prospero's laying out the history of all of those that were on the island before him: Caliban, Ariel, and Caliban's mother, Sycorax. Prospero uses this story to set up the power dynamics between himself and the rest of the Island's inhabitants, notably Caliban and Ariel. Prospero coerces Ariel into a back and forth narrative, describing the witch, Sycorax, and her time on the island, as well as her relationship to Ariel. Prospero describes Sycorax as a "blue-eyed hag," who was "hither brought with child/And here was left by the sailors." Ariel, whom Prospero calls, "my slave" was at that time in service to Sycorax. Prospero describes how Ariel "wast a spirit too delicate/To act her earthy and abhorr'd commands," and that upon Ariel's refusal to do her biddings, she imprisoned him:

...she did confine thee,  
By help of her more potent ministers  
And in her most unmitigable rage,  
Into a cloven pine; within which rift  
Imprison'd thou didst painfully remain  
A dozen years; (I.ii.410-415)

He goes on to say that she died during Ariel's imprisonment, and that all that was left, then, was the Island, though he does make special mention of Caliban, as "the son she did litter here/A freckled whelp hag-born—not honour'd with/A human shape" (I.ii.419-420). Prospero finishes his story by reminding Ariel in detail the misery that he was in when he was found, and that "it was *mine* art,/When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape/The pine and let thee out" (I.ii.429-430).

After telling the tale, Prospero goes on to warn Ariel that if he talks back to him again, "I will rend an oak/And peg thee in his knotty entrails till/Thou hast howl'd away twelve winters" (I.ii.432-434). It is here that we see many things at once: first, we are given a taste of

Prospero's power and his dominance over the island and those that inhabit it. The binary of slave versus master is also already apparent, and Prospero makes good use of the threat of both torture and later the bribe of freedom, to accomplish his goals. In the passage above, Prospero reminds Ariel that he is at his mercy, for he both holds the power to give freedom, but ultimately holds the power to take it away once more. What is even more clear in this history is what it means for Caliban and his role within the play.

Prospero identifies Caliban's lineage as being drawn from two sources: that of witchcraft, and that of Africa. Though scholars debate over the meaning of "blue-eyed hag," it is not without noticing that Sycorax is said to be from Argier, otherwise known as Algiers, which is today the capital city of Algeria. This identifies Sycorax, albeit somewhat loosely, as an African woman. Further, not only is she an African woman, but a witch. This gets back to the heart of the folklore and the myths that were attached to non-normative bodies (both racially and physically) such as Caliban (and earlier, Grendel).

### **Folklore As Archival Evidence of Disability**

In her study of the Folklore of disability, "Fairies and the Folklore of Disability: Changelings, Hybrids, and the Solitary Fairy" Susan Schoon Eberly asserts that congenital disorders (which were the basis of her study) have "produced feelings of fear and awe since earliest time."<sup>65</sup> She goes on to give myriad examples, in excruciating detail, of a whole host of disorders and the folklore attached to them. Her key points that connect most to Caliban however, are the notion of hybridity, as well as the relationship of a mother's thoughts and actions to that of her child. Eberly starts off by explaining that physical disability, like congenital defects, was common enough that a distinct vocabulary began to be created to describe people, especially children, with disabilities. Eberly explains that "the old term for children born with marked deformities was *monster*, a word derived from the Latin *monstrum*, something marvelous, originally a divine portent or warning."<sup>66</sup> She then goes on



to say that there were often two overlapping theories of causation for congenital disorders, with the first focusing on the mind and thoughts of the mother.

The belief was that maternal impressions and responses created obvious 'psychogenic' effects upon the unborn child. For example, a woman who is frightened by monkeys at the zoo, might give birth to what was called a 'monkey-headed child,' or a child who was anencephalic (this idea will appear later in the third chapter, as this belief was carried into the nineteenth century understanding of disability). Similarly, a child may be born with a defect caused by some sort of sin or lack of action in an important time in a mother's life — Eberly gives the example of a mother who denies a beggar food and six months later gives birth to a child who has no mouth. The second and equally as common view was that children with disabilities were the result of divine or supernatural intervention, whether this was for punishment or otherwise. Eberly affirms that a parent's sin "might result in divine chastisement in the form of a sick or malformed child."<sup>67</sup> This is where her exploration of hybridity comes in. Hybridity is described as "a belief which postulated that human beings could, and frequently did, have sexual relations with non-human beings, relations which produced offspring. One form of hybridity involved human pairings with supernatural beings — gods, devils, incubi and succubi, fairies, and so forth."<sup>68</sup> She continues that "[t]he children of these unions traditionally bore a special sign of their unusual parentage — webbed fingers or scaly skin, for example."<sup>69</sup>

Caliban is a perfect example of this notion of hybridity. Witches were commonly thought to make pacts with the devil, or other supernatural, inhuman beings, and often these pacts were viewed to be sexual in nature. Sycorax, then, would of course beget not a human child, but something "not honour'd with a human shape." Prospero even goes so far as to connect Caliban with the devil, summoning him forth by calling out to him, "Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself/Upon thy wicked dam[...]" (I.ii.468-469). Caliban from there

on out is called various names, never Caliban, by characters throughout the play. By the time Caliban is given a chance to speak, he is already set up to be a villain, or at least a character treated with suspicion.

When Trinculo first comes upon Caliban, he ponders his appearance, going as far to say that he could be taken to England to earn money as some sort of spectacle:

TRINCULO: What have we here? a man or a fish? dead or alive? A fish:  
 he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish  
 like smell; a kind of not of the newest Poor-  
 John. A strange fish! Were I in England now,  
 as once I was, and had but this fish painted,  
 not a holiday fool there but would give a piece  
 of silver: there would this monster make a  
 man; any strange beast there makes a man:  
 when they will not give a doit to relieve a lame  
 beggar, they will lazy out ten to see a dead  
 Indian. Legged like a man and his fins like  
 arms! Warm o' my troth! I do now let loose  
 my opinion; hold it no longer: this is no fish,  
 but an islander, that hath lately suffered by a  
 thunderbolt (II.ii.1101-1123).

Trinculo eventually discovers the truth, that “this” is “an islander,” but even upon that discovery, he has set up Caliban to be subhuman and has already pointed towards a common feeling that deemed him to be *other*—a thing to garner money. His description of people paying to see a “dead Indian” connects to common practice even centuries later, where slaves and other non-normative people were put on display for the public, with money going

towards those than ran the shows (freak shows, circuses, etc). Caliban is always described in these dehumanising terms by the white European characters that interact with him. Stephano describes him as a monster with four legs and uses alcohol to subdue him—a common practice, it should be noted, used most notably by American colonists in interacting with Native Americans. Every interaction with Caliban further marks him as other, and as subject to those that deem themselves superior to him. Even when Trinculo and Stephano agree to assist Caliban in overthrowing Prospero, they do so partly in jest, and partly under the assumption that Caliban will swear servitude to them. He will still be a slave, this time beneath a different master.

Caliban's twisted nature in *The Tempest* is consistently connected back to his otherness. His mother, a witch; his body and mind both deemed to be deformed. He is time and again made to bend beneath a colonial will. All of the previous archival material listed—and others not listed here—come together within the play and Caliban's body. Even in modern reiterations of the play, it is often difficult to find a Caliban that is black, or not deformed in some way, or not played as an ultimate evil figure. Images of Caliban also continue this view of a deformed creature, rather than a man. A woodcut (see Figure 6 below) by Walter Crane, created in the mid-nineteenth century, shows a Caliban that looks not only bestial, but perhaps could be compared to the modern interpretation of J.R.R. Tolkien's Smeagol: elongated ears, what look to be wings on the back, and clawed hands, to list a few of this incarnation's startling features. This is the common perception of Caliban and has remained so over time. Yet, looking back to the restorative possibility of the archive, a new glimpse of Caliban can be found.



*Figure 6 - Walter Crane Woodcut, Caliban Act III, Scene ii*

### **A Black Tempest**

There are two places where Caliban is provided perhaps some justice and a sense of voice: first, a close reading of his own lines within the original Shakespeare play; secondly, and most importantly, within the play *A Tempest* by Aimee Cesaire, published in 1969.

Though Caliban is portrayed as deformed, and in many ways evil, his own words in the play

speak to a sense of defiance. His first words to Prospero, as soon as he comes into view of the audience, is a curse upon Prospero and Miranda. He swiftly follows this with a declaration that the island rightfully belongs to him, via his lineage from his mother: “[...]This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother/Which thou takest from me” (I.ii.482-483). He goes on to recount that when Prospero first arrived, he offered Caliban kindness, and Caliban offered kindness in return. Caliban says that when “thou camest first” Prospero gave him water with berries, and taught him language, taught him how “[t]o name the bigger light, and how the less, That burn by day and night” (I.ii.486). Caliban says that he loved Prospero and showed him “all the qualities o' the isle/The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile” (I.ii.488-489). This narrative Caliban recounts sounds much like the common narratives of colonization today, with a happy narrative of settler-colonials meeting and exchanging ideas and goods with indigenous peoples. But Caliban quickly enters back into curses and tells Prospero “For I am all the subjects that you have/Which first was mine own king: and here you sty me/In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me/The rest o' the island” (I.ii.491-495). He is quick to show that Prospero has taken from him what rightfully belongs to him. When Prospero tries to switch this on him, by accusing him of raping Miranda, Caliban instead responds triumphantly, that he wished he had succeeded, so as to “[people] else this isle with Calibans” (I.ii.502). There is no shame here, no regret, instead a desire to further his own humanity.<sup>19</sup> And Caliban then says that Prospero taught him language, and that it is all the more worthwhile, so he can know how to curse him. Even within his first few appearances, Caliban is already finding ways to defy the narrative he was written into.

Caliban does eventually submit and change his ways near the end of the play, and he is continually dominated by the other characters. Thus, his defiance is in many ways short-

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<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that this line is complicated by further gender/sexuality relations, in regard to the idea of rape. Saying that Caliban is triumphant in this declaration is not condoning rape, but rather speaking to the fact that Caliban is not so easily allowing himself to be pinned as a criminal or a monster.

lived. This is where Césaire's work steps up and takes the lead. Before even getting into the text of the play, Césaire makes known that the following character changes must be made in the play: *Ariel, a mulatto slave; Caliban, a black slave*. He also adds *Eshu, a black devil-god*. This ensures that the racial and colonial components of *The Tempest* cannot be ignored. The play opens with a Master of Ceremonies calling together the cast to don their costumes and begin the play. There is an element of humour beneath it. Then the play begins, and the changes are stark. The play is written in a modern dialect and emphasizes humorous elements. But what is most apparent from the beginning are the differences in character.

Prospero is snarky and much more cruel and boisterous in Césaire's rendition of Shakespeare's play. It is Ariel and Caliban that go through the most change, however. Arielle openly speaks of his discussed in anger in having to work to Prospero. Arielle says at one point, "I have obeyed you but — well, why not come out with it? — I did so most unwillingly."<sup>70</sup> Later, when Caliban appears, his defiance is clear. His first word is in his native tongue. When Prospero calls him ugly, Caliban responds with "You think I'm ugly... Well, I don't think you're so handsome yourself."<sup>71</sup> He laughs at Prospero and calls him a vulture. Prospero's connection to colonialism is much clearer in his response to this joke. He tells Caliban that he could at least thank him for having time to speak at all. He describes him as a Savage, "a dumb animal, a beast I educated, trained, wrapped up from the beastie out even still clings to use."<sup>72</sup> In this, Caliban pushes back once more. Caliban says that he was only taught "to jabber in your language" so that he could understand orders, and that the actual learning Prospero kept for himself in his books. When asked what he'd be without Prospero, Caliban is direct in answering: "the King, and that's what I'd be, the King of the Island. The king of the island given me by my mother, Sycorax."<sup>73</sup> Caliban even goes on to tell Prospero that the only reason he thinks Sycorax is dead is because "the earth is dead." The play goes on like this in its entirety— full of a triumphant and powerful Caliban.

Caliban tells Prospero that “Caliban” is not even his real name. He says that it is “the name given me by your hatred, and every time it’s spoken it’s an insult.”<sup>74</sup> He says that it would be better to call him X, “Like a man without a name. Or, to be more precise, a man whose name has been stolen.”<sup>75</sup> Caliban declares “you talk about history... Well, that’s history, and everyone knows it! Every time you summon me it reminds me of a basic fact, the fact that you’ve stolen everything from me, even my identity!”<sup>76</sup> Similar to the original play, Caliban lays out the truth of colonialism; but Césaire is much more pointed and direct, and the blame is placed squarely at Prospero’s feet. Césaire also provides room for Ariel and Caliban to interact one on one, and to discuss their differing relationships with Prospero. Both know that they are subjugated, but Ariel does not see any way out other than to follow orders. Caliban thinks he is foolish, and that the desire should be for freedom immediately. Caliban even calls Ariel an Uncle Tom; but, regardless of their differences, they call each other brother, and they can agree that Prospero is no good. Césaire provides room for a discussion of colonial forces not from the view of the colonizer, but from the view of the colonized. Prospero is not writing himself, not able to prop himself up—he is being written from the gaze of the other, and under this scrutiny, he does not have the power he thinks he does. Instead, Caliban has a certain might that was originally denied him.

The scenes with Trinculo and Stephano are more telling than the original. Trinculo call Caliban a Indian and is open in his mixture of disgust and fascination, beginning with an emphatic “Yukkk!” He begins to discuss his plans, that if Caliban is dead, he will use his clothes to make a shelter; but if he is alive he will “make him my prisoner and take him back to Europe and then, by golly, my fortune will be made! I’ll sell him to carnival! No! I’ll show him myself at fairs!”<sup>77</sup> Upon his arrival, Stephano comes to the same conclusion, with reference to bearded ladies and other sideshow freaks, continually calling Caliban a “Nindian.” When Trinculo and Stephano band together to take advantage of Caliban, they say

directly to each other that they'll "exploit him together," and their presenting Caliban with booze is made into a comedic spectacle. Though the events play out similarly to the original play, Césaire makes no bones about the intentions and history of the colonizers. Gone is the flowery speech of Prospero, and the airy beauty of the magic. Eshu, a black devil-god, crashes the magical, goddess-filled betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda, and Caliban is full of spite. The final triumph of Césaire's work comes with the ending, an ending that reduces Prospero to a shell of a man.

*A Tempest* ends with Prospero choosing to remain on the island, in order to continue to fight with Caliban. Unlike Shakespeare's play, where everyone is taken to Europe, with Caliban being potentially left behind (the play is somewhat unclear about this), Prospero stays, so as to try to maintain his power. However, the last scene shows Prospero, an old, frail man, raving and insane. He is no longer the magical powerhouse he was, and Caliban has the last words of the play, which is a screaming call to freedom. With this play, Césaire has taken the archive that has been set up for centuries and has turned it on its head. Though the colonial forces had their narratives written, with Césaire's play, the narrative can be adjusted to include a more accurate representation of marginalized voices and bodies. *A Tempest* is a triumphant beginning to using the archive for restoration and positive change. In the hands of a black writer, Caliban becomes a brave, angry, unstoppable force, and Prospero is merely a whisp of magical air, a caricature of what he is meant to represent: colonial might and conquest. Via Césaire, Prospero's books and learning have at last turned against him, as the archive has been broken open by new forces, bent towards justice and restoration.



## CHAPTER IV

## WELCOME TO THE FREAK SHOW: JOSEPH MERRICK AND THE VICTORIAN

## ENGLISH ARCHIVE

*God damn everything but the circus* – Jonatha Brooke, “Damn Everything But the Circus”

*People see me I'm a challenge to your balance*

*I'm over your heads how I confound you*

*And astound you*

*To know I must be one of the wonders*

*God's own creation*

*And as far as they see, they can offer*

*Me no explanation*

– “Wonder” Natalie Merchant

*As people crowd a line of old shops, a man stands out in front of one, shouting “Come and see sights like you’ve never seen before!” People flock around him, and the shop, now converted to almost a stage, shows a figure. Moving slowly, lumbering, a man—or what looks to be a man—comes forward. The crowd gaps, a woman screams, and the man leading the show cracks a smile; “His mother, almost trampled by elephants...”*

On March 26, 2015, King Richard III was buried at Leicester cathedral 530 years after his death in an elaborate, yet solemn, funeral service with full military and royal honours. His body and remains, roughly treated directly after death, and pored over by scientists and historians centuries later, had been through a long and arduous journey before being given the proper respect due to a king. At long last, he would be buried; his tomb bore his motto, in Old French: *Loyaultie me Lie*—*Loyalty binds me*. And though the discovery of his remains did not set to rest the rumours and fascination surrounding Richard, there was a sense of closure that came from his remains being given a proper, comfortable resting place. Though long overdue, Richard would no longer be a king in a carpark. Yet, another figure, familiar to Leicester, would find his corporeal existence to remain in waiting.

Just 122 miles away from Leicester cathedral, where Richard III was given a final resting place, stands the Queen Mary University of London. In a private room within the hospital, behind a glass case, stands a skeleton. The bones are twisted and enlarged at various points across the body, and the head sits heavy upon the thinner frame. Replicas of this exact skeleton are found elsewhere, most notably in the Royal London Hospital museum and archives. For these remains, and the soul they once harboured, there is no rest. And so, waits Joseph Merrick, the Elephant Man. Not a king, instead a lowly sideshow freak, Joseph Merrick has stood behind glass for 128 years, visited only by medical professionals and students. Merrick was a son of Leicester, and like Richard, has had his body and his history poked, prodded, and questioned—both in life, and in death. Unlike Richard, Merrick has become trapped in the archive in ways unimaginable to other figures. Where many of the archival roads began with Richard, they all lead in the end back to the circus, and the freakshow.

### **The Greatest Showmen: P.T. Barnum and Tom Norman**

By the start of the eighteenth century, the archive was moving into the public gaze (and more public access) more than ever before. Libraries and hospitals alike held records and the idea of an archive was now taking a more definitive shape. But this turn meant that the ways in which information was collected and stored was also beginning to change. With the dawn of the camera, and other means in which to communicate and represent the world around us, society was beginning to enjoy the idea of a “spectacle” more than ever. Though there were countless ways to find entertainment, the freak show was becoming increasingly popular across both Europe and America. In America there was the famous (or infamous) P.T. Barnum, and in Europe he had a counterpart named Tom Norman, who was better known as The Silver King.

Barnum began his trade with a museum located in New York called The American Museum (1841). The American Museum housed various curiosities, and many of the displays or spectacles would rotate out and change over time. But the standard exhibits were a bearded woman, and a family of “midgets.” Tom Norman, in Europe, would rent out abandoned storefronts and would allow showmen to bring their displays to line the streets. It is in places like these that non-normative bodies of various kinds—folks with visible and startling disabilities; those that had many tattoos or body piercings; people of various races, often deemed to be “savage” or “primitive”—were put on display for the public. And while these conditions did not seem favourable, many of these sideshow performers took on these jobs willingly. And it is in these conditions that Joseph Merrick, known then as the Elephant Man, met his friend and confidant, Fredrick Treves.

### **An Unexpected Meeting**

Though my imagination, I often feel the introductory paragraph above reflects the scene in which Joseph Merrick was discovered by Sir Fredrick Treves. Tired, beaten, withering under the gaze of strangers, Joseph Merrick perhaps felt he had no choice, and had no way out. Treves undoubtedly felt he was doing a good service, by getting Merrick out of the sideshow life, and Merrick spent his remaining years in much more humane conditions than those of his show days. But even if the feeling or intent was not there on the surface, Merrick would, in some ways, simply change hands and “ownership,” when taken in by Treves. For Treves became the arbiter of all of Joseph’s life and story—his very history and very name.

Merrick’s history—and the archiving of that history—starts with Sir Frederick Treves’ account of his meeting The Elephant Man, and their eventual friendship and connection to each other. Treves’ narrative was published in 1923, as part of his last written work, entitled *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences*. Though relatively short compared to

other works—coming in at only twenty pages—everything known about Joseph Merrick rests upon this document. The document itself helped create a picture and history for Merrick, but also later went on to inform every other piece of work written about him. Two of the most widely referenced works on Joseph Merrick, *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity*, and *The True History of The Elephant Man* by Michael Howell and Pete Ford, both draw upon Treves' account. These works went on to elaborate upon the story set up by Treves, and in many ways attempted to establish a wider archive for Merrick's life (both with differing rates of success). But even with attempts to expand upon Merrick's story, the archive that surrounds and engulfs Joseph Merrick has Sir Fredrick Treves as its foundation.

### **A Study in the Archive's Influence—Ashley Montagu**

In his work, *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity*, Ashley Montagu in many ways structures his arguments and analysis almost around a kind of hero worship of Sir Frederick Treves. There is an entire first section dedicated to Treves' childhood, school days, and his love of literature. Montagu praises him as a writer and artist, before even discussing his medical career. Even when he goes on to write about Joseph Merrick himself, there are incredible differences in the way that Merrick and Treves are written about. He describes Merrick in this manner:

The hero of this story, 'the Elephant Man,' whose real name was John Merrick, lived just short of twenty-six years, most of them spent in a living purgatory. Hideously deformed, malodorous, for the most part maltreated, constantly in pain, lame, fed the merest scraps, exhibited as a grotesque monster at circuses, tears [fears? Tents?], and wherever else a penny might return, the object of constant expressions of horror and disgust, it might have been expected that 'the Elephant Man' would have grown into a creature

detesting all human beings, bitter, awkward, difficult in his relations with others, a gentle, unfeeling, aggressive, and unlovable.<sup>78</sup>

Montagu goes on to use psychology and scientific understanding of trauma to discuss how when a human does not have the love and nurturing that it should, it is often common for that person to develop into someone who is bitter and unsociable. He then explains “‘the Elephant Man’ seems unaccountably to have escaped the blight that usually so seriously befalls the deprived and disadvantaged child.” He describes Merrick’s story as “tragic” but also “doubly fascinating and heartening.”<sup>79</sup> So far Merrick seems to be under a gaze of pity, at the hands of Montagu. He then immediately turns to discussing Treves, and this is where the turn in vocabulary and focus is noted.

Montagu says that before proceeding into studying Joseph Merrick’s story, the story itself must be told. He then says this can be best done in the words of Merrick’s “benefactor and liberator, Frederick Treves.”<sup>80</sup> He emphasises that had it not been for Treves, “for his compassion and devotion the world would probably never heard of John Merrick.”<sup>81</sup>

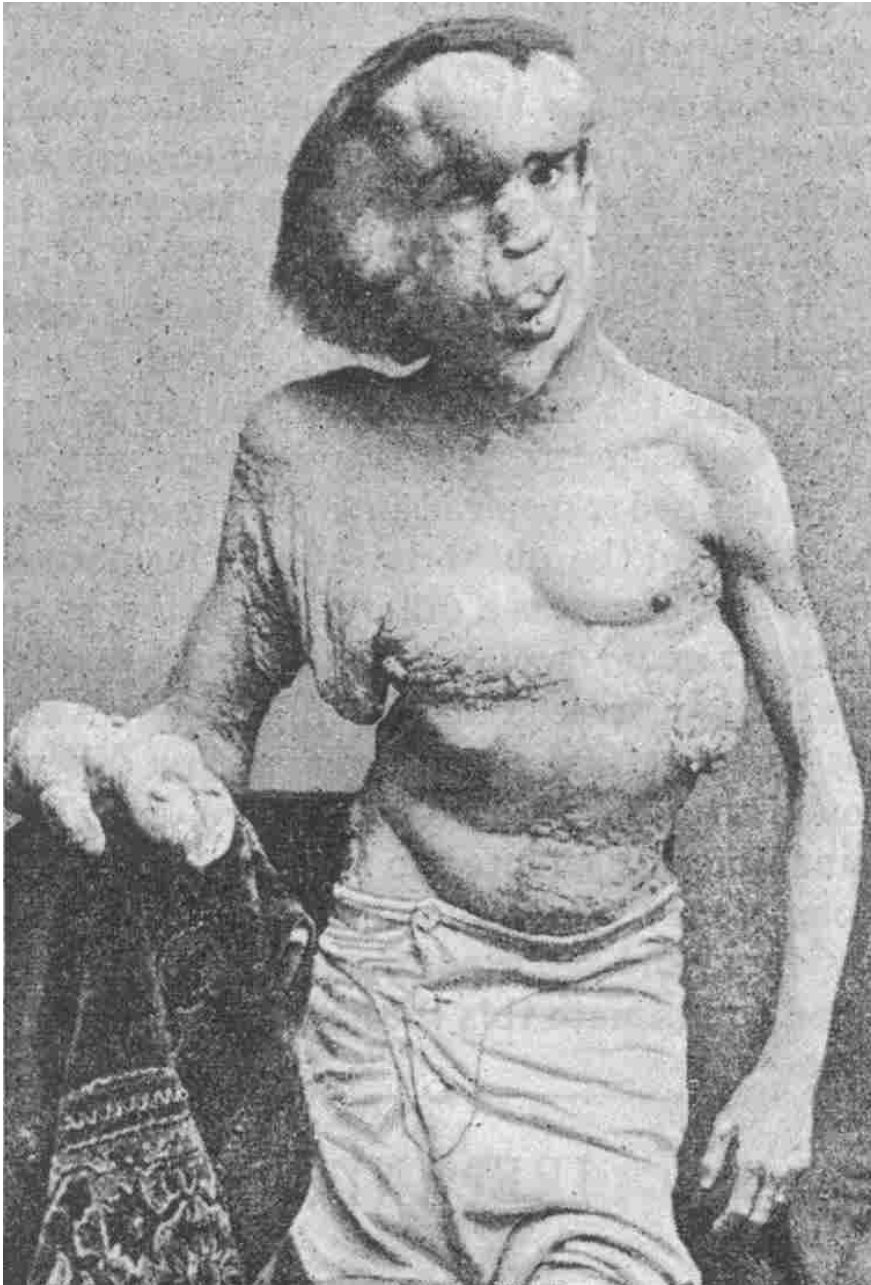
Montagu says plainly that “this is as much Frederick Treves’ story as it is John Merrick’s.”<sup>82</sup> Already Montagu is making a common mistake of uplifting an abled figure almost as a saviour. He goes on, as it has already been said, to praise Treves and his writing, and lay out his accomplishments in life as if this book is written about him, and not Joseph Merrick. Then directly after laying out Treves’ life, Montagu places Treves’ writing of Joseph’s life in the next chapter. Montagu offers no direct intervention in this story, and instead lets Treves’ writing speak for itself. It is Treves’ story that is held up as Merrick’s story. Treves writes of Merrick in the manner one might expect from a medical doctor: with a practiced, measured tone, reporting facts and occasionally interlacing them with opinion. Though there is a strong undercurrent of compassion and care, there is from the beginning—as there is with Montagu—an intense tone of pity or sympathy.

Treves' narrative is twenty pages, and begins with how he came upon (or, as other's have worded it, "discovered") Joseph Merrick. Then he goes on to explain the rest of Merrick's days at the Royal London Hospital (and sometimes beyond it). His narrative is well written and clear; it is concise, and it offers as much detail as possible without being overbearing. But even as Treves seems to try to emphasise Merrick's humanity, he does so in ways that end up limiting the scope of what he makes a man. Treves begins by describing the front of the shop and its location, explaining "with the exception of the door [it was] hidden by a hanging sheet canvas on which was the announcement that the Elephant Man was to be seen within and that the price of admission twopence."<sup>83</sup> He goes on to describe the portrait of the supposed Elephant Man, saying that there was "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 demand than of the beast. This fact – that it was still human — was the most repellent attribute of the creature."<sup>84</sup> Treves explains that there was "nothing about it of the pitiableness of the misshapened or the deformed, nothing of the grotesqueness of the freak, but merely the loathing insinuation of a man being changed into an animal."<sup>85</sup> Treves details how he was able to gain access to the exhibition, despite it being closed, by bribing the showman, who gave him a private showing on "payment of a shilling." This is when the good doctor first encountered the figure being advertised as "the Elephant Man."

Inside a dimly lit room with few furnishings, the showman "pulled back the curtain and revealed a bent figure crouching on a stool and covered by a brown blanket."<sup>86</sup> He describes this figure as a "creature," and says that "[locked] up in an empty shop and lit by the faint blue light of the gas jet, this hunched-up figure was the embodiment of loneliness."<sup>87</sup> The descriptions only get more severe when the doctor watches the figure stand—prompted by a harsh word from the showman—and drop the blanket covering it from. It is then that

Treves says there “stood revealed the most disgusting specimen of humanity that I have ever seen.”<sup>88</sup> He continued by saying that even in the course of his profession, where he had seen severe deformities and afflictions, he had never “met with such a degraded or perverted version of a human being than this lone figure displayed.”<sup>89</sup> He describes Merrick’s body in detail: he was of small stature; covered in hard, bony growths; almost fungal flesh hanging in folds over his body. And, to make matters worse, because of the state of his skin, Treves said that there was a foul odor that came from him. He was lame, having developed disease of the hip, and he had to lean upon a walking stick.<sup>90</sup> Treves goes on to break from description of the figure and explained how he worked a deal to bring the man—whom he had learned was named John Merrick, twenty-one years of age—to the Royal London Hospital.

Treves brought Merrick to the hospital and examined him, presenting him to a group of his colleagues. He took his findings and later published them in a medical journal (see Figure 8 below for an image of Merrick). He alternated in his descriptions of Merrick, describing him as a man, a creature, a recluse. And Treves also admits some of his earlier thoughts of Merrick that turned out to be false. He explained that he first assumed Merrick to be an imbecile, incapable of speech or rational thought. Treves thought it impossible that Merrick would be able to think of or appreciate his current condition. Treves says that “here was a man in the heyday of his youth who was so vilely deformed that everyone he met confronted him with a look of horror and disgust.”<sup>91</sup> Merrick was “taken about the country to be exhibited as a monstrosity and an object of loathing.”<sup>92</sup> He could only see the world from a small hole in the showman’s cart, lame and unable to make his voice understood. Treves stated clearly that he didn’t think he would see Merrick again. But, as Treves then writes, fate had other plans.



*Figure 7 - Joseph Merrick, aka The Elephant Man*

Once the shop in London was closed down, Treves writes that Merrick was taken to Europe (or as he calls it, “the Continent”) and ended up in Brussels. There, when the show was shut down once again, Merrick was “no longer of value. He was no longer a source of profitable entertainment. He was a burden. He must be got rid of.”<sup>93</sup> It was easy to abandon such a figure, and Treves says that “the impresario, having robbed Merrick’s paltry savings,



gave him a ticket to London, saw him into the train and no doubt in parting condemned him to perdition.”<sup>94</sup> Treves says that when Merrick arrived to Liverpool Station, he was greeted with mobs of curious and raucous people. Treves says that a panicked dog would have been greeted with more sympathy, but that Merrick received none. He was only reunited with Treves when the police rescued him and found Treves’ business card on Merrick’s person.

Treves goes on to detail how Joseph Merrick made permanent residence at the Royal London Hospital—an event that was allowed by funding from the public, when the head of the hospital, one Mr. Gomm, wrote about Merrick’s “plight” in the local paper. It is here that Treves of course changes his tone and his course, trying to detail Merrick’s personality and the friendship the doctor shared with him. He emphasises that Merrick was intelligent, contrary to his initial beliefs that he was incapable of complex thought or speech. He describes Merrick’s love of books, poetry, and his inclination to romance. Treves lays out the social visits Merrick had, his hobbies, the things he loved and desired most. Yet, even in this, Treves slips into a lovingly patronizing tone.

In describing Merrick’s love of reading and his cheerful imaginative outlook on life, Treves says “he was a child, yet a child with some of the tempestuous feelings of a man. He was an elemental being, so primitive that he might have spent the twenty-three years of his life immured in a cave.”<sup>95</sup> Treves makes clear that Merrick did not like to talk about the past, for it was “a nightmare, the shudder of which was still upon him.”<sup>96</sup> Treves tries to offer an understanding of the nightmarish life that Merrick had and it is here that Treves, even in his slipping into questionable language, offers a clear understanding of what disability is like even today for many.

Treves reminds the reader that Merrick was “dragged from town to town and from fair to fair as if he were a strange beast in a cage. A dozen times a day he would have to expose his nakedness and his piteous deformities before a gaping crowd who greeted him with such

mutterings as ‘Oh! What a horror! What a beast!’”<sup>97</sup> Because of this upbringing, Treves says that Merrick “had no childhood. He had no boyhood. He had never experienced pleasure. He knew nothing of the joy of living nor of the fun of things. His sole idea of happiness was to creep into the dark and hide. [...] At the age of twenty he was a creature without hope. There was nothing in front of him but a vista of caravans creeping along the road, of rows of glaring show tents and circles of staring eyes with, at the end, the spectacle of a broken man in a poor law infirmary.”<sup>98</sup> Treves remarks that it is amazing that Joseph Merrick never complained, never felt remorse or cynicism or bitterness. He again compares him to a child in the way that he offered love and gratitude to all. He lands even more accurately on the anxieties of disabled life when he explains that as he learned more of “this primitive creature,” he found two anxieties which were most prominent in Merrick’s mind.

Merrick struggled to understand that he would never have to move again. He continually asked where he would be taken next, and he remarked that he would like to go to either a blind asylum or a lighthouse. He was not used to the idea of a permanent home. Further, and the most pressing anxiety of them all, was the “dread of his fellow-men, his fear of people’s eyes, the dread of being always stared at, the lash of the cruel mutterings of the crowd. [...] it seems to him as if the gaze of the world followed him still.”<sup>99</sup> His desire to go into exclusion was a dream because there, “he would escape the vampire showman.”<sup>100</sup> Treves does a good job here in this section of describing the plight of the freak. To a reader, these glimpses of Merrick’s life elicit pity and shame for the cruelty of humanity. But to those that are familiar with this life—the life of being different, deformed, *other*—this fear of the gaze of others is all too real. And yet, Treves still goes on to talk of Merrick as if he is not fully man.

Whether described as a creature or a child, the picture Treves paints of Merrick is one of a pitiful being given a second chance at life. Treves explains openly that he asked women

to pretend to greet Merrick warmly and kindly, so as to let him grow used to people treating him with kindness rather than cruelty. While many of the women that made his acquaintance did go on to be his friends, in many ways, Treves' decision opens another anxiety faced by many freaks, even today: is this friendship due to pity, or genuine interest in me and my humanity?

Treves also wrote of Merrick's intense emotional reactions to these encounters. Upon being greeted so warmly by a beautiful woman, Treves says that Merrick sobbed uncontrollably: "[He] bent his head on his knees and sobbed until I thought that he would never cease."<sup>101</sup> He had never been treated so well by women—they would often scream in terror (even nurses had, according to Treves, fled in terror in the beginning of Merrick's tenure at the hospital). Merrick told Treves that "this was the first woman who had ever smiled at him, and the first woman, in the whole of his life, who had shaken hands with him."<sup>102</sup> The social visits only grew in number and fame, until even the Queen of Alexandra — then Princess of Wales — had come to see Merrick and make his acquaintance.

Treves goes back and doubles down on Merrick's likening to a child. Even with all of the socialization and change of circumstance, "Merrick still remained in many ways a mere child. He had all the invention of an imaginative boy or girl, the same love of 'make-believe,' the same instant of 'dressing up,' and of impersonating heroic and impressive characters."<sup>103</sup> Treves gives the example of when Merrick asked for the gift of an elaborate dressing bag. In it was a collection of razors, combs, perfumes, all manner of things that a man of his age might need to groom himself and make himself presentable. Treves expresses the strangeness of this, as Merrick could make no use of these items, and yet he understood that this was one way Merrick felt more like a "real man." But in all of these discussions, Treves reverts right back to establishing that Merrick can only ever *hope* to be real, can only ever make minor

attempts. He has an imagination like a child, clings to material makings of a man, and yet he cannot fully reach the goal of being a man.

The highlight of Merrick's life, Treves said, was two events: being able to go to the theatre, and being able to take holiday in a cottage on the estate of a friend of Merrick's and Treves. Treves explains that Merrick was ecstatic at the play, talking about it for weeks, musing over what happened to the characters "after we had left."<sup>104</sup> On his holiday in the country, he collected wildflowers, wrote gleeful letters to Treves, and made friends with the gamekeeper and his wife. Treves again connected these actions to a childish nature in Merrick. Yet, Treves also seemed to recognize that the vacation in the country in particular gave Merrick a sense of freedom. He says thus:

There is no doubt that Merrick passed in this retreat the happiest time he had as yet experienced. He was alone in a land of wonders. The rest of the country passed over him like a healing wind. Into the silence of the wood the fearsome voice of the showman could never penetrate. No cruel eyes could peep at him through the friendly undergrowth. It seemed as if in this place of peace all stain had been wiped away from his sullied past. The Merrick who had once crouched terrified in the filthy shadows of a Mile End shop was now sitting in the sun, in a clearing among the trees, arranging a bunch of violets he had gathered.<sup>105</sup>

Treves says that these traits make Merrick childish, yet somehow also display the understanding that these experiences are such wonders to Merrick because he had, for so long, known nothing but horror and squalor. Despite speaking of Merrick in a tone that held a slight condescension, Treves still offers a glimpse into the mind of the common freak, the lowly cripple. Yet it is the ending of his narrative that sticks the pin, once and for all, into his somewhat contradictory narrative.

A few months after returning home, Merrick was found dead in his bed. Treves says this was in April 1890. He was found, Treves writes, lying on his back to sleep. Treves immediately speculates that Merrick had tried to sleep on his back, a position that was impossible for him due to the large size of his head.<sup>106</sup> He would, usually, have to sleep sitting up, with his head resting on his knees. Treves reiterates Merrick's desire to sleep laying down, "like other people." Treves goes on to say "I think on this last night he must, with some determination, have made the experiment. The pillow was soft, and the head, when placed on it, must have fallen backwards and caused a dislocation of the neck. Thus it came about that his death was due to the desire that had dominated his life — the pathetic but hopeless desire to be 'like other people.'"<sup>107</sup>

Treves finishes his narrative by saying that as "a specimen of humanity, Merrick was ignoble and repulsive; but the spirit of Merrick, if it could be seen in the form of the living, would assume the figure of an upstanding and heroic man, smooth browed and clean of limb, and with eyes that flashed undaunted courage."<sup>108</sup> His final paragraph says that in death, Merrick was finally truly free, having loosed his burdens of body and mind and soul. This ending is highly emotional and does seem to give Merrick his due, in many ways. But in taking the patronizing tone together with the fact that Treves made errors that continued to be repeated centuries later, the narrative is not without great faults.

From an archival perspective, Treves' narrative became the basis of everything that was ever known about Merrick. Montagu relied heavily on Treves' narrative, and seems to trust it firmly. He comments upon Treves' errors in the telling—the shop where Merrick was on exhibition was not in Mile Road, but Whitechapel Road; his name, on his birth certificate, and even printed in newspapers, was Joseph, not John; the details of his childhood were scattered and vague—dismissed as simply lapses of memory. Montague supplemented Treves' writing with other archival finds: newspaper articles published about Merrick; the

reports on him in medical journals; the inquest at the time of his death. But Montagu places all of these things in the back of the book, in an appendix, and spends the remainder of his book scrutinizing on how Merrick could come to be such a strong man of character despite his harrowed life, and, Montagu also, like many others, tries to deliberate upon the question of what was *really* wrong with Merrick? Montagu also tries to expand upon or explain Treves' narrative, and tries to speculate on truths—Merrick's background, the details left out by both Merrick and Treves. Most interesting, Montagu also pulls in other stories of freaks and other disabled figures to compare to Merrick, and he offers pages of images of Merrick's body, both before and after death. He offers pages upon pages of sociological, psychological, and anthropological explanations as to how Merrick developed into the man Treves describes him as, all the while continuing to revert to similar language as Treves: creature, pitiful, poor man, childish, etc.

A most telling detail, especially, is that Montagu compares Merrick to Caliban in one instance, saying "Merrick was undoubtedly limited in his horizons, and possibly 'primitive' in the sense that he had not matured in many of the traits that a normally socialized man develops, but he was scarcely 'an elemental being,' for childlike as he may have been in many ways, he was no illiterate Caliban, no 'freckled whelp,' discovered by a putative Prospero."<sup>109</sup> Montagu here does push some against Treves describing Merrick's simplicity, but Montagu still in this moment creates a divide between normal and not, pitting two "freaks" against each other, without realising their similarities. As evidenced in the former chapter, the displaying of indigenous people, especially African slaves, was common in fairs and freak shows. Caliban and Merrick would have had more in common than many would first believe. They are cousins, in many ways, having both experienced much of the same mockery and outcasting.

Montagu's book is the beginning of the process of archiving Merrick. Published in 1971, and then reprinted again in 1979, it relies heavily upon Treves and other sources, and yet does not antagonise these sources and their intentions (nor their reliability) as strictly as he interrogates and prods at Merrick and his life. In many ways, Montagu puts Merrick back before the public gaze. This is especially true when considering that the famous play, *The Elephant Man*, by Bernard Pomerance, was inspired by both Treves' work and Montagu's book. But before approaching the play, the inaccuracies and inconsistencies in Treves and Montagu's book must be addressed.

**Setting the Record Straight: Howell and Ford's *The True History of The Elephant Man***

A second book, published in 1980, entitled *The True History of the Elephant Man*, written by Michael Howell and Pete Ford, sets much of the record straight on Merrick's life.<sup>110</sup> Howell and Ford take much of the work Montagu was trying to do and expand on it radically. Unlike Montagu, who relies most heavily upon Treves' work, Howell and Ford combed through various historical documents, as well as pulling from scholarly sources. They emphasize that his name was Joseph Carey Merrick, as stated on his birth certificate, whereas Montagu claimed it was John Thomas. It is Howell and Ford that connect Merrick to Tom Norman, the Silver King, and provide more detailed background on that relationship. Though they offer details about Treves' life, it is all in a much more measured way—there is no hero talk here—and they state more facts than anything else (dates and times, people that were important to his career or later to Merrick, etc). Howell and Ford also provide more detail on the uses Treves made of Merrick, when he first encountered him and summoned him to the hospital.

They describe the process in which Joseph Merrick was brought before the Pathological Society of London, to be displayed and assessed by a group of esteemed medical practitioners. Pictures were taken, reports were drawn up: though it was different in nature on

the surface, this process was closer to a freak show exhibition than perhaps first realized. Howell and Ford even say that for Merrick to “have allowed himself to be exhibited before a group of medical grandees might, in any case, have been no worse a prospect than exposing himself to the ill-informed curiosity of the majority of freak show patrons.”<sup>111</sup> They even remarked that “it must have surprised [Joseph] somewhat to find himself the only living exhibit being presented, or, for that matter, the only complete exhibit there. All other displays consisted merely of the organs or sections of tissue removed from patients during an operation or at a postmortem.”<sup>112</sup> This points to the similarities between showing Merrick for medical purposes and showing him for entertainment purposes.

Howell and Ford continue on through the book to provide more details on Merrick’s family life, that Montagu and Treves could not provide or provided incorrectly (his mother’s name was Mary, not Jane, as Montagu wrote, and she did not abandon him, as many thought, but she died when he was 11—and it was later a stepmother, as well as hard economic conditions, that influenced Joseph’s father to push his son out into the world to find work, and to be away from a cruel home life). Howell and Ford also offer some insights into what a workhouse was like, making special mention that Joseph would have found himself amongst many like himself. The populations that were often sent to workhouses were “broken workmen, the drunkards and dissolute, the inadequate and handicapped, crippled and retarded.”<sup>113</sup> They describe the rough and cruel treatment that would have been common in workhouses, and this picture offers some understanding of why a “freak” would resort to exhibition to make a living of their own will. Further, the question is raised as to the ethical nature of freak shows in the first place: Howell and Ford explained that when Tom Norman, The Silver King, was criticized for his exhibitions, he would defend himself by asking what people thought the freaks would do otherwise. In a world that shunned them so, what other way were they to make a living? Thus, the book continues on in this manner, offering chapter



after chapter of information that contextualises Merrick's life. What is most telling, however, is the structure of their appendices and the sources they relied upon, in comparison to Montagu.

Montagu placed Treves and his story of Merrick front and center. There is no mention at all of Joseph's own words, no attempt to place him into context, other than to overtly analyse him, his "affliction," and his life. Montagu's appendices are full of primary documents relating to Merrick, but they consist mostly of reports in medical journals; letters to newspapers by Carr Gomm (the head of the hospital); the inquest and subsequent news report of Merrick's death; a brief account of Merrick from a female friend, a famous actress Mrs. Kendal; descriptions of his skeleton; and, a reference to Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and the possible shared condition of both Merrick and the Hunchback. Treves' work is not even in the appendices, but instead in the main body of the text—and is the primary focus. By comparison, Howell and Ford fill their pages with their primary sources, connect them all, and their appendices is where Treves' account is placed. And the first item, Appendix I, holds the greatest primary source of all: a brief autobiography written by Joseph Carey Merrick himself. Howell and Ford offer a chance for "The Elephant Man" to speak for himself.

### **The Elephant Man Speaks**

There are many lines in Merrick's autobiography that caused some confusion in contradiction when compared with other sources. Though his birth certificate places his birthdate as August 5, 1862, Merrick offers his birthdate as August 5 of 1860<sup>14</sup>. This discrepancy perhaps could be attributed to years of neglect and abuse and being so isolated from humanity that much of his own was forgotten. But in any case, most of Merrick's story can be corroborated with all of the other primary documents that Howell and Ford offer. Merrick offers that his condition did not become noticeable until he was around five years of

age.<sup>115</sup> Montagu tried to claim that it occurred at only a few months of age. The source that Montagu pulled from was that of unnamed relatives in the inquest of Merrick's death. Instead, Howell and Ford try to center Merrick's own details of his life, even if they themselves are somewhat uncertain at times. Merrick describes his body in detail, offering the measurements of his body and the limitations that he has.<sup>116</sup> He explains the neglect and abuse that he suffered at the hands of his stepmother and stepsiblings, on account that they were more handsome than he was. He does not talk ill of those that put him on display, does not even talk ill of the public that he faced. In fact, Merrick says that now, in his new home, he was treated kindly by the public and says "in fact I may say I am as comfortable now as I was uncomfortable before."<sup>117</sup> The most telling part of this narrative is the ending— Merrick writes "I must now bid my kind readers adieu," and then he leaves the reader with a few lines of his own writing, an alteration of the hymn "False Greatness" by Isaac Watts. The version in Howell and Ford's copy only shows the ending from the Watts poem (bolded below) but the full of Merrick's version, is as follows:

"Tis true, my form is something odd

But blaming me, is blaming God,

Could I create myself anew

I would not fail in pleasing you.

*Was I so tall, could reach the pole,*

*Or grasp the ocean with a span;*

*I would be measured by the soul,*

*The mind's the standard of the man."*

All or some of these lines were said to be used by Merrick in many of his letters. The voice that shines through in this work is not that of a broken, ugly monster, nor of a child. Instead it is the voice of a courageous man that only wants to love and be loved in return. Thus, even if

not intentional, Howell and Ford do Merrick a greater service by adding *this* writing to the very beginning of their appendices. It is Merrick's voice that is given priority, not Treves or others.

Howell and Ford produced their work ten years after Montagu, in 1980. And yet, it is an unfortunate reality that it was Montagu's work (and as a result, Treves') that influenced the most well-known work on Joseph Merrick of all: the Bernard Pomerance play, *The Elephant Man*, written and put on stage in 1980. The play is the ultimate combination and culmination of all writing on Joseph Merrick. Pomerance states directly in a foreword to the play that it was inspired by Montagu's work, and also Treves' narrative.<sup>118</sup> He also makes instructions that images of Joseph Merrick should be projected above the actors on stage, to give the audience a clear view of what Merrick looked like. The actor that plays Merrick, it was directed, would contort his body to look similar to Merrick, but would otherwise don no makeup or costuming to create the effect. The audience was meant to use their imagination. The play, then, a mixing together of the two sources, furthers some of the inaccuracies. Yet the play also offers some emotional aspects that are important to understanding Merrick.

### **The Elephant Man on Stage**

First, it should be noted that each scene is given a title. The title of the scene in which the audience first meets Joseph Merrick is *Art is as Nothing to Nature*. Tom Norman is here replaced with a man named Ross, who is Merrick's showman (Scene III)<sup>119</sup>. Ross speaks with the usual showman language, "step in and see," describing Merrick as "a despised creature without consolation."<sup>120</sup> When Treves asks to bring Merrick back to the hospital, Ross says that Merrick is his capital. He says "the bank. Go anywhere. Want to borrow capital, you pay interest. Scientists even. He's good value. You won't find another like him."<sup>121</sup> The next scene, entitled *Who Has Seen the Like of This?* pulls word for word from Treves' description of Merrick in his reports and in his narrative, as Merrick on stage displays his body to the

doctors Treves brought him to. The next scene departs from reality and shows the audience Merrick in Brussels, where he meets a group of pinheads. The culture and degradation of the freak show is displayed here and eventually it is seen where the showman robs Merrick of his earnings and abandons him.<sup>122</sup> The next scenes are short and show Merrick adjusting to life in the hospital, but it is scene VIII that offers an interesting dynamic between Treves and Merrick. The scene is entitled *Mercy and Justice Include Our Minds and Actions*. In this scene there is a conversation between Treves and Merrick, where it seems that Treves is teaching Merrick rules and ways of thinking of society. After Mr. Carr Gomm sends away a man trying to peek in on Merrick, Treves encourages Merrick, almost like a child, to “say thank you.” The following exchange then occurs:

Treves: we always do say please and thank you, don't we?

Merrick: Yes, sir. Thank you.

Treves: If we want to properly be like the others.

Merrick: Yes, sir, I want to.

Treves: Then it is for our own good, is it not?<sup>123</sup>

It goes on like this, a strange back and forth where Treves interrogates Merrick, reminding him that he has three square meals a day, is comfortable and safe, and then he explains to Merrick that this is his home now.<sup>124</sup> When Merrick seems confused, Treves begins to make him repeat words. He says things like, “Say it, John.” He tells him what to say, and repeats to him that “if I abide by the rules, I will be happy.” When Merrick tries to say that he will be happy because he has a home, Treves corrects him and says that it is abiding by the rules that will make him happy.<sup>125</sup> The conversation almost resembles that of the white European “saviour” teaching a slave or an indigenous person how to “be civilized.” When the othered figure, in this case Merrick, talks back, he is reprimanded and told that it is *this* way, not *that*

way. The play offers the first instance, perhaps, to question Treves motives, and to place him in a context of conquest—medical, social conquest, instead of national.

But the play also offers a chance for Merrick to speak for himself. In a later scene, when he is talking to Mrs. Kendal, Merrick remarks that “but sometimes I think my head is so big because it is so full of dreams. Because it is. Do you know what happens when dreams cannot get out?”<sup>126</sup> Merrick is shown to be philosophical and intelligent, and the scene directly following shows the procession of visitors he had, back to back, all reciting the same phrase: “it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.” The almost fake sheen of these interactions is shown, and yet the sociable nature of Merrick is also made apparent. The play also offers a scene in which Treves has a dream that Merrick found *him* and brings him to a congress of freaks. Merrick presents him, examines him, and it is his normality and his self-righteousness that is scrutinised.<sup>127</sup> Disability and a life of freakshow performance is offered as a cure to his “condition.” By reversing roles, the questionable nature of abled society’s “saving” of Merrick and other freaks (*vis a vis*, Treves) is brought into question.

The play ends with Merrick’s death, and with Gomm and Treves agonising over how best to write his obituary. They struggle, and by the time Treves comes in with a decent line, Gomm has already sent off what he wrote, and says “it is too late, it is done.”<sup>128</sup> The play itself seems to be, in some ways, critiquing the narrative making and history building that Treves, Montagu, and even Pomerance himself are taking part in. Unfortunately, however, even if the play offers some sense of self-awareness, the play was another addition to the inaccuracies that were presented to the public. The play went on to influence the famous 1980 film by David Lynch, that while moving, beautiful, and well done, also carried the inaccuracies—his name, John; his history, scattered and mixed; Treves, a “benefactor and liberator.” Merrick would become a creature of piecemeal. And, the archive would continue to put him on display, continue to question: will he ever have his desire to be ‘like everyone else?’

Merrick's answer always seemed to be, 'I already am.' To pull his moving quote from the Lynch film: "I am not an animal. I am a human being. I am... a man!"

### **Buried in the Stacks**

And so then we return to Joseph Merrick's bones. Casts were made by Treves, and his actual skeleton displayed in hospitals. Treves wrote reports on his body, and even today, there are museums that have the skeleton on display to the public. Though many go to visit the Royal Hospital's exhibit on Joseph Merrick out of a respect or admiration for him, there is a twisted irony that he is, thanks to the archive, still under the public's gaze. I would not have the museum, or its contents, destroyed or abandoned. But it must be questioned, constantly, whose story is being centered, and who gets to do the telling? Merrick stands as the modern cripple's Patron Saint—his voice and his truth must be carried forward, and not lost in more spectacle and flash. This can be done by taking all of these sources and trying to find as much that focuses on him, as possible, and by centering artefacts such as *his* autobiography, *his* letters, and by emphasising that it is not without irony that his skeleton is gazed and gawked at by passers-by. His words ring out: the *mind's* the measure of the man. But perhaps Howell and Ford say it best, with the last paragraph of their book:

The closing and most valid image of Joseph which might be summoned up is that of a squat figure, extraordinary an outline, limping without hurrying in the starlight across bedstead square and into the gardens of the London Hospital. The freedom to walk there unobserved and take the cool night air into his lungs, together with the sense of the spring flowers, became one with the hard-won freedom and dignity of his spirit under the stars: and so the limits to the span of his existence, the various recent injuries which his life sustained, even the hideousness of his flesh, were transformed eventually into matters of small importance.<sup>129</sup>

At the end of it all, Joseph Merrick was, above all, a human simply trying to prove his humanity. The archive has kept Merrick alive, but one must wonder if it was at the cost of his humanity, his soul.

## CHAPTER V

## AT THE CROSSROADS: HISTORY, TIME, AND RESTORATIVE POSSIBILITY

*The past is never dead, it's not even past. – William Faulkner*



*Figure 8 - Crossroads of Two Streets*

In Chesapeake, Virginia, there are two roads that, followed long enough, intersect at a crossroads (See Figure 9 above). The first is a road called Duke of Gloucester Drive. The road that it eventually meets along the way is named King Richard Way. And there, where



the two street signs intersect, is a tangible, subtle representation of the archive's presence in the ordinary life that surrounds us. Richard III's life summed up in his two titles, found on two street signs in a quiet neighbourhood. And there, the archive has broken away from the stacks, from books and papers, and has made its way out into the larger world. Whether the naming of these streets was an intentional nod towards Shakespeare and Richard or not, the fact remains that traces of history, traces of what's in the archive—and what haunts it—make its way into our everyday, lived experiences.

Richard III, King of England from 1483 to 1485; Caliban, a fictional character, an indigenous man on an unnamed Island; Joseph Merrick, Englishman and sideshow freak; these figures seem to have little in common, and they each existed in drastically different contexts and time periods. Taken separately, they seem to have no connection or relation to each other. Yet, these three figures have been the crux of this project, my study of the disabled body in the archive, and they have more in common than many would assume.

Each of these figures has connections to historical events and the theatre, and each figure has, in some way, a body or mind that marks them as other, or outside of the fold of society. Disability as a bodily reality connects each figure, and history has worked to contain and examine these bodies in similar ways. All have found themselves incorporated into the archive through documents, paintings, photos, theatrical performances, and other entertainment media. Most telling are the instances where these bodies—in the case of Richard III and Joseph Merrick—have been put into the archive in a literal sense: with Richard and Merrick's skeletons both having been examined and placed on display. Because of the archive, the understanding and construction of the disabled body has continued to follow a particular trend, and has not broken from that trend, even into the present day.

Though books and the theatre are still a common form of entertainment today, with the rise of the internet, as well as movies and television, the archive has expanded rapidly, as

has the entertainment industry. And these three figures—Richard, Caliban, and Merrick—have become entangled in this expansion, and have been brought into new light. Richard is reincarnated again and again into every new play or film production, and his body is presented to the public in various ways. Briefly mentioned before, Ian McKellan’s Richard III is a stand in for a fascist dictator, such as Hitler. He walks with a halting, hunching gait, and McKellan offers facial expressions that contort into wickedness. Other renditions of Richard show the disability, but try to ensure that he doesn’t appear *too* disabled: McKellan’s version can walk, move fairly easily, and could be a fit soldier. The Hollow Crown’s Benedict Cumberbatch sits atop a horse and rides into battle. Yet, there is a certain power Richard loses in these renditions, that he gains back in versions where his disability is placed at the fore. A favorite version that I like to draw from is Antony Sher’s performance of Richard III. Sher made it clear in a recent documentary about Richard III, that he wanted him to be obviously disabled, but that he needed to still be powerful. The result was that Sher donned a pair of forearm crutches and would propel himself at amazing speed across the stage. This Richard was fast and agile—his body a marker of his evil, perhaps, but also a marker of his wit, his cleverness, his power. Other renditions, too many to list at this juncture, have begun to cast actual disabled actors in the role of Richard, using their own wheelchairs or crutches or other devices to signify Richard’s disability. This is the way to use the archive for restorative possibility—finding ways to use what is at hand to put forward new ideas, new ways to tell an old story. Further, finding ways to let disabled people be at the helm of this storytelling (similar to Césaire writing a telling of *The Tempest* that centers on the black body and experience). Yet, this power and restoration is somewhat lacking, even still, when it comes to Caliban and, especially, Joseph Merrick.

Caliban’s representation is a mixture of getting it right and getting it *white*. Though tongue and cheek, many of the actors that play Caliban are white, and his disability is

represented either very much, or not at all. Even worse still, there are some renditions of the play that cast Caliban as a monster, and cut his speaking roles out entirely. In my own experience, I attended a local performance of Shakespeare, put on by Norfolk's Virginia Stage Company, and Caliban was a literal ogre, and was a man in a costume—with no speaking role, whatsoever. He was reduced to providing comedic entertainment (the show was billed 'family friendly') and nothing more. Even if the directors made cuts for the sake of a mixed audience (read: children in attendance) or simply to cut the play down (as is common for directing Shakespeare) it says something to cut out *all* of Caliban's roles, and to reduce him, once more, to a monstrosity. However, there are other representations of Caliban that perhaps offer the restorative possibility hoped for, some that can be found in surprising sources.

The 2010 film production of *The Tempest* shakes things up in the play in more ways than one. Prospero is gender-bent to become Prospera, among other changes, but the key here is to notice Caliban's casting. In this production of the play, Caliban is portrayed by Djimon Hounsou, a Beninese-American actor, thus making Caliban a black character. As shown in Figure 10 and Figure 11 below, his skin looks to have the appearance of scales, and his hands seem to have claws—so there is still a subtle nod to his monstrous origins there. But, this Caliban also holds some of the stereotypical understandings of an indigenous figure (the loin cloth, the face paint, being the most obvious). While these things are stereotypical, it still gives Caliban all of his identity, in one form. This Caliban is a more complex figure, and the casting appears to try and offer all of Caliban's body and experience to the audience. A second version of Caliban offers an even more powerful role, even if in a startling and unexpected way.



*Figure 9 - Caliban, The Tempest film, 2010*



*Figure 10 - The Tempest, 2010*

In the popular show *Penny Dreadful*, the character Victor Frankenstein (yes, *that* Frankenstein) is confronted early on with his first-born creation, his very first monster. His first monster is introduced to the audience by brutally killing Frankenstein's second monster, and declaring that Frankenstein's "first born" has returned. The monster, as yet unnamed at this juncture, goes on to tell his own story—which takes up two entire episodes. During the telling of his life once he escaped from Frankenstein (who he wastes no time in declaring a horrible creator, abusive and twisted) the monster describes how he was taken in by a local actor and given a home with the local (and very popular) theater company. Despite his appearance, he is allowed to operate the backstage equipment, and he feels at home amongst other freaks and wild types (as show business is full of). It is this actor and second caretaker, however, that finally gives the monster a name: he calls him *Caliban*. And, from then onward, this is no longer Frankenstein's monster, but Caliban. And the rest of his plot (at least in Season 1) comprises of him enacting revenge against Frankenstein. Caliban stalks Frankenstein and demands he make him a bride, and Frankenstein is suddenly left fearful of his life, and all of the power he once held is now at the mercy of his creation.

Though this is a dramatic subversion and mixing of stories, this still in many ways offers a new power and life to the character and essence of Caliban. It must be noted that this character is white (though more of a ghostly, undead white), but his *otherness* and his power is palpable and obvious in every scene (See Figures 12 and 13 below). Caliban gets to not only tell his own story but take control of his life—and the life of his cruel creator. Much like Césaire's Caliban, this Caliban is not going to go quietly, and he will make it clear that he is not a monster, but the survivor of untold abuse and manipulation. Caliban isn't a villain, in these instances, but a hero in his own right.



*Figure 11 - Caliban, Penny Dreadful*



*Figure 12 - Caliban, Penny Dreadful*

Joseph Merrick is the final figure treated in film and onstage. Merrick is portrayed in the play by Pomerance, but later, David Lynch made a famous movie in 1980 (with John Hurt playing in the titular role). The movie shows a tenderness to Merrick, but he is centered as a figure of pity (See Figure 14 below for a look at Hurt's role as Merrick).



***Figure 13 - John Hurt as Joseph Merrick***

Further, Pomerance in his playnotes makes it clear that actors playing Merrick should contort their bodies to make it appear they are deformed like he is; for the rest of Merrick's image, *pictures of Merrick's body* will flash on screen, and the audience can use their imagination to connect the dots. Pomerance even says that no person with back issues should play Merrick (even if perhaps this person would understand some of Merrick's situation better). Yet, it then becomes an abled actor and an abled storyteller usurping and taking on Merrick's role and story for him. This means that Merrick is, via the stage and film, on display, as he was for all of his life. And, the audience gets to gawk and pity this "creature"—all three of them—once again.

The final piece comes back to *The Shape of Water* and a telling line from the antagonist of the film. The line comes from Richard Strickland, who is the head of security for the project of studying the amphibious man, and who is working for the United States military. When Strickland's boss, General Hoyt, comes into the lab and sees the creature, they have this exchange:

STRICKLAND: Ain't that something? Ugly as sin. The natives in the Amazon worshipped it...

GENERAL HOYT: Well- It sure doesn't look like much of a God right now, does it?

STRICKLAND They were primitives, sir. Tossed offerings into the water; flowers, fruits, crap like that... Tried to stop the oil drill with bows and arrows. That didn't end too well.<sup>20</sup>

This brief exchange encompasses the core of the way the archive has been used by forces of power to create and understand the world and the way it works. Strickland, a non-disabled, straight white male, the epitome of a privileged individual, controls the way "the creature" is treated, controls the narrative—or at least so he thinks. In a later scene this comes up again, as he is talking to Elisa (the mute, central protagonist) and her friend Zelda (who, as this scene is read, it must be remembered is a black woman):

STRICKLAND: That thing we keep in there, is an affront. Do you know what an affront is, Zelda?

ZELDA Something offensive, Sir.

STRICKLAND That's right- That's right. And I should know. (beat) I dragged that filthy thing- out of the river muck in South America and all the way here- (beat) And along the way we didn't get to like each other much. ... You may think that thing looks human- Stands on two legs. But we're created in the Lord's image. And you

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<sup>20</sup> When I first heard this line, my mind and heart immediately went to the Standing Rock activists and all of their dedication and work.



don't think that's what the Lord looks like, do you?

ZELDA I wouldn't know, Sir. What the Lord looks like.

STRICKLAND Well, human, Zelda. He looks like a human. Just like me... Or even you. A little more like me, I guess...

Another telling piece of dialogue that shows a man of power centering himself in a common narrative—one of the most common narratives, perhaps—and directly aligning himself with a supreme power: being made in God's image. Throughout the movie, it is clear that Strickland and his ilk believe they have the power over not just the creature, but Elisa, Zelda, and anyone else that works for them or gets in their way. The movie proves otherwise but offers a glimpse into the power dynamics that have (and still) exist in society, nonetheless. The movie also, however, reiterates the importance of film in constructing an archive and a history, and this applies to Richard, Caliban, and Joseph Merrick as well.

In many ways, it seems there is nothing to be done. This is where the restorative possibility of the archive comes back into focus. In her discussion of the relationship between a researcher and the archive, "Subjectivity and Methodology in the Arch'I've," Elizabeth Vincelette focuses most on what those that use the archive can both gain and give back to the archive, and therefore historical understanding and construction itself. Vincelette writes, "Archival materials can break historical silences when researchers give them voices, and the silent object speaks through the experiences of those who interact with it."<sup>130</sup> She goes on to express that despite the gatekeeping that archives often fall prey to, "guardianship need not mean preventing access, but protecting documents for preservation and posterity," and that many, if not most, "archivists and librarians today promote access to collections as a form of stewardship."<sup>131</sup> This is the core of my approach to the restorative possibility of the archive.

Though there are inherently political and hierarchical measures embedded within the archive and its function, the archive is also made up of stories and experiences, and with each

new researcher and storyteller, with each new artist, filmmaker, writer, and, yes, reader, the archive takes on new meaning and changes over time. The restorative possibility of the archive begins and ends with power—the power of people, the power of those that question, learn, live, experience, and ultimately try to formulate all of existence into something tangible. While people and power can corrupt, people can also give voice to the voiceless, and the archive can be a part of that, just as it was a part of the silencing to begin with. The archive's restorative possibility rests at the feet of researchers, scholars and archivists. The archive and its future depends on the rise of new generations of voices that where they were once silenced, now refuse to be silenced and instead choose to make their own history and tell their own stories, putting justice and dignity back where it belongs: in the archive.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 1.
- <sup>2</sup> Linton, 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Linton, 3.
- <sup>4</sup> Linton, 3.
- <sup>5</sup> Linton, 5.
- <sup>6</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 2.
- <sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1.
- <sup>8</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 1.
- <sup>9</sup> Derrida, 2.
- <sup>10</sup> Derrida, 2.
- <sup>11</sup> Derrida, 2.
- <sup>12</sup> Derrida, 2.
- <sup>13</sup> Steedman, 1.
- <sup>14</sup> Steedman, 1.
- <sup>15</sup> Steedman, 1.
- <sup>16</sup> British Library, "Bright's Treatise of Melancholy, 1586."
- <sup>17</sup> Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 3.
- <sup>18</sup> Siebers, 3.
- <sup>19</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot. *Silencing the Past: The Power and Production of History*. Beacon Press. 1995.
- <sup>20</sup> John Rous, *History of the Kings of England*. British Library.
- <sup>21</sup> British Library, *History*.
- <sup>22</sup> British Library, *History*.
- <sup>23</sup> British Library, *History*.
- <sup>24</sup> British Library, *History*.
- <sup>25</sup> British Library, *History*.
- <sup>26</sup> John Rous, *The Rous Roll*.
- <sup>27</sup> Rous
- <sup>28</sup> Rous
- <sup>29</sup> Denys Hays, "The Life of Polydore Vergil of Urbino." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 12 (1949), pp. 132-151.
- <sup>30</sup> Polydore Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*. Camden Society. 1844. P. 221
- <sup>31</sup> Vergil, 221.

<sup>32</sup> Vergil, 226.

<sup>33</sup> Vergil, 226.

<sup>34</sup> St. Thomas More, *The History of King Richard III and selections from the English and Latin Poems*. Edited by Richard Sylvester, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.

<sup>35</sup> More, 7.

<sup>36</sup> More, 7.

<sup>37</sup> More, 8.

<sup>38</sup> More, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Grafton, *Chronicle, or The History of England*. First published 1569. Reprinted 1809.

<sup>40</sup> Grafton, 219

<sup>41</sup> Grafton, no page number. This was a small marginal comment printed on the side.

<sup>42</sup> V.iii.3680-3708.

<sup>43</sup> First in Vergil, 225, but later reproduced in Grafton.

<sup>44</sup> Paraphrased from a lecture given by Dr. Imtiaz Habib, November 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Michelle Burnham, *Captivity and Sentiment* (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1997), 94.

<sup>46</sup> Burnham, 94.

<sup>47</sup> Burnham, 94.

<sup>48</sup> British Library, "Beowulf."

<sup>49</sup> Ruth Johnston Staver, *A Companion to Beowulf*. Greenwood Publishing: Connecticut. 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, "Beowulf," *Norton Anthology of English Literature*

<sup>51</sup> Greenblatt

<sup>52</sup> Staver, 50.

<sup>53</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *Beowulf*.

<sup>54</sup> Dennis N. Sparacino, *Caliban: Shakespeare's Sources*. 1973, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Sparacino, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Sparacino, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Sparacino, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, "Before Othello: Elizabethan Representations of Sub-Saharan Africans." *The William and Mary Quarterly*. 54:1, 1997, pp 19-44.

<sup>59</sup> Vaughan

<sup>60</sup> Vaughan

<sup>61</sup> Vaughan

<sup>62</sup> Vaughan

<sup>63</sup> Richard Hakylut, *Principal Navigations*, 1589. Published in 1885 by E. Edinburg and G. Goldsmid. From the Harvard University Collections.

<sup>64</sup> All references to playtexts from Shakespeare are from the Wadsworth Shakespeare, second edition.

<sup>65</sup> Susan Schoon Eberly, "Fairies and the Folklore of Disability: Changelings, Hybrids, and the Solitary Fairy." *Folklore*. 99:1, 1988, pp. 58-77.

<sup>66</sup> Eberly, 59.

<sup>67</sup> Eberly, 60.

<sup>68</sup> Eberly, 60.

<sup>69</sup> Eberly, 60.

<sup>70</sup> All references to *A Tempest* come from Aime Cesaire, *A Tempest*, 1969.

<sup>71</sup> Cesaire, 11.

<sup>72</sup> Cesaire, 11.

<sup>73</sup> Cesaire, 12.

<sup>74</sup> Cesaire, 15.

<sup>75</sup> Cesaire, 15.

<sup>76</sup> Cesaire, 15.

<sup>77</sup> Cesaire, 38.

<sup>78</sup> Montagu, Ashley. *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity*. E.P. Dutton: New York. 1979. Print.

<sup>79</sup> Montagu, 2.

<sup>80</sup> Montagu, 2.

<sup>81</sup> Montagu, 2.

<sup>82</sup> Montagu, 2.

<sup>83</sup> Montagu, 13.

<sup>84</sup> Montagu, 13.

<sup>85</sup> Montague, 13.

<sup>86</sup> Montagu, 14

<sup>87</sup> Montagu, 14.

<sup>88</sup> Montagu, 14

<sup>89</sup> Montagu, 14

<sup>90</sup> Montagu, 15-16.

<sup>91</sup> Montagu, 18.

<sup>92</sup> Montagu, 18

<sup>93</sup> Montagu, 19.

<sup>94</sup> Mongtau, 19.

<sup>95</sup> Montagu, 22.

<sup>96</sup> Montagu, 22.

<sup>97</sup> Motagu, 23.

<sup>98</sup> Montagu, 23-24.

<sup>99</sup> Montagu, 25.

<sup>100</sup> Montagu, 25.

<sup>101</sup> Montagu, 27.

<sup>102</sup> Montagu, 27

- <sup>103</sup> Montagu, 30.
- <sup>104</sup> Montagu, 34.
- <sup>105</sup> Montagu, 36.
- <sup>106</sup> Montagu, 37.
- <sup>107</sup> Montague 37
- <sup>108</sup> Montagu, 38.
- <sup>109</sup> Montagu, 72.
- <sup>110</sup> Howell, Michael. Ford, Pete. *The True History of The Elephant Man*. Penguin Books: England. 1980. Print.
- <sup>111</sup> Howell and Ford, 38.
- <sup>112</sup> Howell and Ford, 39.
- <sup>113</sup> Howell and Ford, 70.
- <sup>114</sup> Howell and Ford, Appendix I, 182.
- <sup>115</sup> Howell and Ford, Appendix I, 182.
- <sup>116</sup> Howell and Ford, 183.
- <sup>117</sup> Howell and Ford, 183.
- <sup>118</sup> Pomerance, Bernard. *The Elephant Man*. Grove Press: New York. 1979. Print.
- <sup>119</sup> Pomerance, 3.
- <sup>120</sup> Pomerance, 3.
- <sup>121</sup> Pomerance, 3-4.
- <sup>122</sup> Pomerance, 11-12.
- <sup>123</sup> Pomerance, 24.
- <sup>124</sup> Pomerance, 25-27.
- <sup>125</sup> Pomerance, 25-27.
- <sup>126</sup> Pomerance, 32.
- <sup>127</sup> Pomerance, 62.
- <sup>128</sup> Pomerance, 71.
- <sup>129</sup> Howard and Ford, 181.
- <sup>130</sup> Elizabeth Vincelette, "Subjectivity and Methodology in the Arch'I've." *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*. 27, 2018.
- <sup>131</sup> Vincelette, 74.

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