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qua
non**

**Bilingual Arts Magazine
Changing Art(icles)**

A *Cine Qua Non* é uma revista de artes do Centro de Estudos Anglisticos da Universidade de Lisboa (CEAUL) construída por movimentos escritos que cruzam reflexões, críticas ou ensaios, movimentos que relacionam a música às artes plásticas, a dança ao teatro, o cinema à literatura. Sem aspirações temáticas, esta publicação tem como objectivo oferecer aos seus leitores uma abordagem editorial única que junta artistas, investigadores e docentes que se manifestam em textos de natureza diferenciada sobre as mais diversas formas e expressões artísticas. A *Cine Qua Non* é, desde o seu primeiro número impresso, uma revista totalmente bilingue (português/inglês) e apresenta-se em dois formatos: uma versão online e uma versão impressa.

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Isabel Fernandes

The Elephant Man (1980) de David Lynch: de ‘freak’ e caso clínico a alegoria



The Elephant Man (1980) by David Lynch: from ‘freak’ and clinical case to allegory

Joseph Merrick (1862-1890). Photograph first published in
The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity by Ashley Montagu,
1971.



O filme de David Lynch, *The Elephant Man* (segundo na filmografia do autor), não é mera adaptação de obra literária ao cinema. Antes tem por base um caso clínico verídico – de neurofibromatose múltipla,¹ em grau superlativo e altamente deformante, gerador de relatos de natureza vária, alguns dos quais não escaparam à atenção do realizador, e que constituem um tecido palimpséstico interessantíssimo. Desde o panfleto alegadamente autobiográfico que servia de publicidade à exibição do chamado “homem elefante” como atracção de feira² até aos vários artigos científicos publicados em revistas médicas,³ passando pelo depoimento do empresário que primeiro o exibiu⁴ ou às reminiscências do médico que o descobriu,⁵ aos anúncios de jornal⁶ ou às peças de teatro que na Broadway antecederam o filme de Lynch,⁷ confronta-nos um intertexto intrincado e muitas vezes contraditório.

Ao ver o filme, pouco depois da estreia, tornou-se-me óbvia a dimensão alegórica, patente desde a sequência onírica inicial, de resto retomada posteriormente, que incorpora elementos de cunho surreal e confere à película



David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (the second film in his career as director), is not a straightforward literary adaptation to the screen. It is based on an authentic clinical case of highly deforming multiple neurofibromatosis,¹ which generated a very interesting palimpsestic fabric of reports of various kinds, some of which attracted the director's attention. These reports include: the allegedly autobiographical pamphlet which served as a form of advertising for the “elephant man” as a freak attraction,² the many scientific papers published in medical journals, the statement of the manager who first put him up on show,³ the journal entries of the doctor who discovered him,⁴ newspaper ads⁵ to Broadway plays prior to Lynch's film,⁶ all of which confront the contemporary reader with an intricate and often contradictory intertextual web.

Having watched the film shortly after its premiere, its allegorical dimension was inescapable to me and present right from the very first dreamlike sequence (later to be taken up again) in which the use of surreal elements gave the film an unexpected opening frame. This device obliquely alluded to the socio-historical Victorian context and evoked the means whereby Charles

um enquadramento inesperado. Este artifício envia as alusões ao contexto histórico-social vitoriano e evoca os termos da diagnose civilizacional empreendida por Charles Dickens em *Hard Times*. O uso desta moldura permitiu a Lynch libertar o filme duma descodificação meramente documental⁸ e instaurar um regime de leitura que, mais tarde, um crítico viria a formular nos seguintes termos: “Lynch was clearly interested most in the symbolic aspects of the story: he sees Merrick [the protagonist] as a twisted, tragic metaphor of the wrenching dislocations of the industrial society that juggernauted with iron limbs into Victorian England.”⁹

Nessa sequência inaugural de pesadelo, em que, numa síntese cinemática brilhante, parcialmente protagonizada por elefantes, se evoca um acontecimento de extrema violência (e violação) primeva, faz-se obliquamente a diagnose da era Vitoriana e das sequelas da industrialização e da mecanização nos seres humanos e no meio ambiente. Daí que seja legítima a imediata associação entre essas imagens e sons iniciais a um célebre passo do texto dickensiano correspondente à descrição da cidade industrial imaginária de Coketown:



Dickens offered his criticism and diagnosis of a degenerate civilization in *Hard Times*. The use of such devices allowed Lynch to free the film from a strictly documentary interpretation⁷ and to propose a reading, which a critic would later characterize in the following way: “Lynch was clearly interested most in the symbolic aspects of the story: he sees Merrick [the protagonist] as a twisted, tragic metaphor of the wrenching dislocations of the industrial society that juggernauted with iron limbs into Victorian England.”⁸

In that initial nightmarish sequence - a brilliant cinematic synthesis, featuring elephants as one of its components, an occurrence of immense primeval violence (and violation) is evoked, and by this means the Victorian Era, the aftermath of industrialization, and the mechanization of human beings and of the environment are all obliquely conjured up. Hence the immediate association of the film’s initial images and sounds to a famous passage from Dickens corresponding to the description of the fictional industrial town of Coketown:

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but, as matters stood it was a town of *unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage*. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which *interminable serpents* of smoke *trailed themselves for ever and ever and never got uncoiled*. It had a black canal in it, and *a river that run purple with ill-smelling dye*, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, *like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness*. (Ênfases minhas)¹⁰

Mas se, em *Hard Times*, estamos no domínio da pura ficção, pese embora o gume de realidade que a fábula moral de Dickens acintosamente crava no tecido social vitoriano, o que nos confronta no filme de Lynch? Atente-se nas escolhas feitas. Optou pelo preto e branco, evocativo do cinema mudo,



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But if in *Hard Times* we find ourselves in the domain of pure fiction, despite the sting of reality that Dickens’s moral fable maliciously pierces into the Victorian social tissue, what is it that confronts us in Lynch’s? Let us consider his choices. He opted for black and white, evocative of the silent film, often reminiscent of German expressionist cinema with its emphasis on the image and on the contrast between light and dark, the dichotomy of

reminiscente, em vários momentos, da herança do cinema expressionista alemão, com a sua ênfase na imagem e nos contrastes de luz e trevas, na dicotomia bem e mal e no efeito de terror. Também em Lynch temos a utilização expressiva das sombras como fonte de tensão que, a par da banda sonora, é geradora duma atmosfera intimidatória com forte impacto no espectador. A presença destes elementos na película confere-lhe, aparentemente, uma dimensão maniqueísta, própria dum universo que exclui a dúvida e a hesitação existencial. Um universo mais consentâneo com a fina espessura do conto de fadas, da alegoria ou a da fábula moral ou, no caso do cinema, com o *film noir*.

A par desse trabalho notável ao nível da imagem e da luz, um outro aspecto que constitui uma opção conspícua do realizador (também um dos responsáveis pela banda sonora) são as alusões a ruídos ritmados, repetitivos, em crescendo ameaçador, sugerindo e juxtapondo, de forma quase indistinta, um tropel de animais selvagens de grande porte (elefantes, neste caso), um batuque, os batimentos do coração ou do relógio, os ruídos mecânicos e sincopados



good and evil and the effect of terror. In Lynch we also find the expressive use of shadow as a source of tension, which together with the soundtrack creates an awe-inspiring atmosphere with a powerful impact on the audience. The combination of these elements results in the film's apparent manicheistic dimension, which is characteristic of a universe where doubt and existential hesitation have no place. Here we find a world mostly resembling the light fabric of a fairy tale, of the allegory, or of the moral fable, or in the case of cinema, of *film noir*.

Along with this notable interplay of image and light contrasts, another of the conspicuous choices of the director (who was also responsible for the soundtrack) is the allusion to rhythmic, repetitive sounds in a threatening crescendo suggesting and juxtaposing, in an almost indistinct way, the trampling of large wild animals, elephants in this case, a drumming, the beating of the heart or the ticking of the clock, mechanical sounds and the syncopation of industrial gear or the threat of furtive predatory footsteps.¹⁰ The suggestion of an equivalence among these various sorts of sounds/noises, obtained by juxtaposition or fade out, very often leads to suspense and inspires fear, thus push-

das engrenagens industriais ou a ameaça de passos furtivos predatórios.¹¹ A sugestão da sua equivalência sonora, por justaposição ou *fade out*, muitas vezes geradora de suspense e instigadora de temor, empurra o espectador para uma associação quase subliminar entre a realidade social predatória criada pela industrialização e decorrente mecanização, o caos primordial da selva e os respectivos efeitos violentos no ser humano. A presença de máquinas e mecanismos vários, tão ao gosto do realizador, manifesta-se de forma mais ou menos discreta ao longo de toda a película, culminando na apresentação de operários em esforço num tear mecânico, que ocorre na segunda e última sequência onírica do filme, em que estas imagens são de novo significativamente acompanhadas pelo barulho do tropel de elefantes que se (com)funde com os barulhos industriais. A sugestão duma analogia entre a acção agressiva dessas máquinas que subordinam e violentam o próprio homem e o seu corpo e as agressões primevas de bestas descontroladas torna-se inescapável.

Tais associações justificam-se à luz do desencantamento e pessimismo



ing the spectator to an almost subliminal association between the social predatory reality caused by industrialization with the attendant mechanization, and the primordial chaos of the jungle and their correspondent violent effects on the human being. The presence of machines and various mechanisms, so much to the liking of the director, is manifested in a more or less discrete way throughout the film, and is brought to a climax in a scene showing a group of workers struggling with a mechanical engine, a sequence that significantly takes place during the second and final dream-like sequence of the film, when these images are once again significantly accompanied by the trampling of elephants fused with industrial sounds. The suggestion of an analogy between the aggressive action of these machines that subordinate and violate the human body (and man himself) and the primeval aggression of uncontrolled jungle beasts becomes inescapable again.

Such associations are justified in the light of a Victorian disenchantment and pessimism concerning the effects of scientific and technological progress, as well as the consequences of the conquest and uncontrolled exploitation of colonial domains.¹¹ Indirectly suggested is the admission of

vitorianos finisseculares face às consequências do progresso científico e tecnológico e até perante as conquistas e exploração desenfreada dos territórios coloniais.¹² De resto, o que aqui também indirectamente se recria é a admissão da decadência da nação e do império britânicos que começara a fazer-se sentir conspicuamente nas duas últimas décadas do séc. 19, como se a crença salvífica no progresso, caracterizadora de décadas anteriores, tivesse cedido à descoberta gradual de uma afinidade e contaminação relativamente à selvajaria encontrada nos territórios colonizados. Num conhecido romance de 1887, lê-se: “Civilisation is only savagery silver-gilt. A vainglory is it, and, like a northern light, comes but to fade and leave the sky more dark.”¹³ É isso mesmo que Lynch parece forçar o espectador a interiorizar: essa continuidade ou contiguidade entre selvajaria e civilização, de resto também sabiamente denunciada no célebre texto de Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.¹⁴ No já citado passo de Dickens, igualmente comparecem imagens que remetem para a selva e seus habitantes e laboram no mesmo tipo de analogias.



the decay of the nation and of the British Empire which had begun to be conspicuously felt in the final decades of the 19th century, as if the belief in progress, characteristic of earlier decades, had given way to the gradual discovery of an affinity with, and a contamination from, the wilderness found in colonial territories. In a famous novel written in 1887, one reads: “Civilisation is only savagery silver-gilt. A vainglory is it, and, like a northern light, comes but to fade and leave the sky more dark.”¹² This is precisely what Lynch seems to be forcing the spectator to accept: this continuity or proximity between wilderness and civilization, also wisely denounced in Conrad’s celebrated text, *Heart of Darkness*.¹³ In the previously quoted passage from Dickens, we also find images suggestive of the jungle and its inhabitants that thrive on the same type of analogies.

Let us now ponder some other choices made by the director. When considering the use he makes of historical documents and sources at his disposal, we find significant changes. In order for the reader to better understand these changes, let us give a brief overview of the most salient facts concerning the life of Joseph Carey Merrick¹⁴ (the true name of the man

Atente-se ainda noutras opções do cineasta. Ao considerar-se a utilização que faz dos documentos e factos ao seu dispor, encontram-se desvios significativos. Sumariemos o caso histórico relativo a Joseph Carey Merrick¹⁵ (assim se chamava o protagonista de *The Elephant Man*) para melhor os entendermos. Nascido em 1862, numa área urbana degradada de Leicester, cidade industrial em rápida expansão, terá sido uma criança normal até aos cinco anos,¹⁶ apesar de a mãe ser aleijada. Esta, aos cinco meses de gravidez, sofreria uma queda, provocada por um desfile de elefantes nas ruas de Leicester, por ocasião duma feira. O estabelecimento duma supersticiosa relação de causa-efeito entre tal incidente e a posterior manifestação da deformidade física no filho, no panfleto autobiográfico já referido, faz apelo à imaginação do público.¹⁷ Com a morte precoce da mãe e o segundo casamento do pai, a vida do jovem, então com dez anos, torna-se gradualmente mais dura, devido à imparável progressão da doença que o transforma num fardo insustentável para a família, entretanto substancialmente alargada. Confrontado com a impossibilidade de garantir uma subsistência autónoma, o rapaz vê-se



who inspired the creation of the protagonist of *The Elephant Man*). He was born in 1862, in a degraded suburban area of Leicester, an industrial town then rapidly expanding. He must have been a normal child up until the age of five, despite the fact that his mother was herself handicapped. She had an accidental fall when she was five months pregnant and watched an elephant parade on the streets of Leicester, among the crowd, during the May annual fair. In the autobiographical pamphlet the superstitious relationship of cause and effect established between this occurrence and the child’s physical deformity must have appealed greatly to the audience’s imagination at the time.¹⁵ With the premature death of his mother followed by his father’s second marriage, the young man’s life, then aged ten, becomes increasingly more difficult due to the unstoppable progression of the illness that turned him into an unbearable burden on his family, by then substantially bigger. Unable to provide for his own living, the boy is forced into one of the sadly famous workhouses to later hand himself over out of his own free will into the hands of a circus manager, Tom Norman, specialized in travelling freak shows, which were very popular in those days. This was how the career of



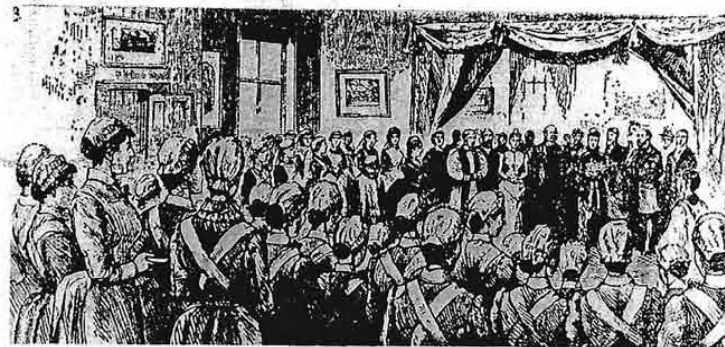
22. The earliest known illustrations of Joseph Merrick: engravings from the *Transactions of the Pathological Society of London*, 1885



23-24 Engravings of Merrick's head published in the *British Medical Journal*, December 1886, but probably contemporaneous with plate 22



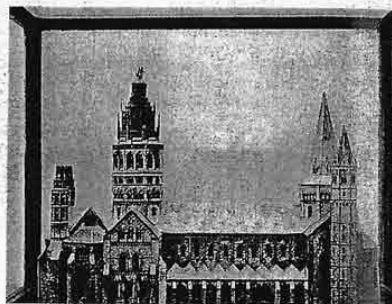
25. The front of the London Hospital as it was in 1876. The new Grocers' Wing is to the left of the main facade
(from *The Illustrated London News*)



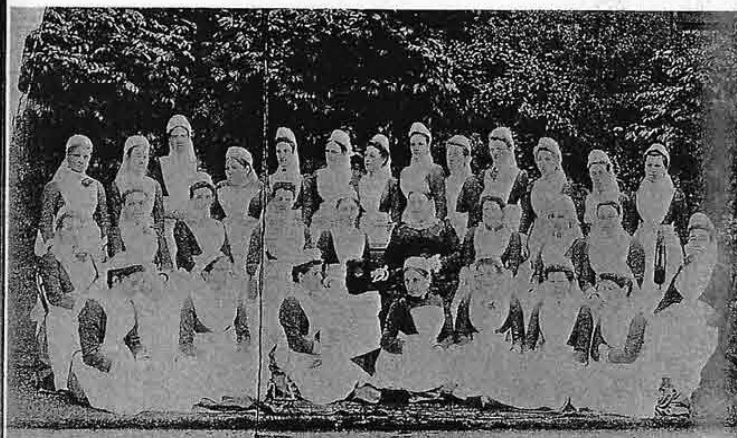
26. The Princess of Wales declares the new Nurses Home open on 21st May 1887
(from *The Illustrated London News*)



27. Merrick's specially built armchair
(*photograph by Dr. C E Taylor*)



28. The cardboard model
of a church constructed by Merrick
for Mrs Kendal
(*Royal London Hospital*)



29. Miss Eva Luckes, the redoubtable matron of the London Hospital,
with her team of nursing sisters in 1892
(*Royal London Hospital*)



30-33. A set of four photographs of Joseph Merrick, showing his condition at the time
of his admission to the London Hospital in 1886



forçado a ingressar numa das tristemente famosas *workhouses* para depois se entregar, de livre vontade, nas mãos dum empresário circense, Tom Norman, especializado na exibição itinerante de aberrações ou *freaks*, então muito em voga. Inicia-se, assim, a carreira do famoso *Elephant Man*. É nesta fase que o Dr. Frederick Treves, jovem médico e professor de Anatomia, tem oportunidade de o ver, dado que o local de exibição se situava numa rua fronteira à do Royal London Hospital. Intrigado e atraído pelos aspectos clínicos, o médico providencia a ida do “homem elefante” àquele hospital, onde o observa e o exhibe perante os seus pares, tendo depois descrito o caso num artigo científico, publicado no mesmo ano.¹⁸ Imediatamente depois, a polícia proíbe a continuação do espectáculo de Norman, considerado demasiado chocante para o público, e o “homem elefante” muda de empresário, sendo levado para o continente europeu, onde, porém, sofre nova perseguição policial. Abandonado e espoliado pelo segundo empresário e sem meios que lhe permitam sobreviver, consegue, contudo, regressar a Inglaterra, e acaba nas mãos da polícia, chamada à estação ferroviária de Liverpool Street



the famous *Elephant Man* began. It was during this period that Dr. Frederick Treves, a young doctor and professor of anatomy, saw him, as the show was then held on a street close to the Royal London Hospital. Intrigued and attracted by the clinical aspects of the case, the doctor arranged for the “elephant man” to visit the hospital where he would be observed and shown to some of his fellow doctors. Treves later wrote about the case in a scientific article published that same year.¹⁶ Soon after this the police closed down Norman’s show considering it too shocking for the public, and the “elephant man” changed to another manager and travelled to Europe where the show was once again persecuted by the police. Exploited and abandoned by the second manager and lacking the means to survive, he managed, nonetheless to return to England, only to find himself in the hands of the police, which had been called to Liverpool Street train station to prevent the public lynching of poor Merrick, whose deformities had attracted a far from kind crowd... He was then placed in the care of Dr. Treves who convinced the hospital administrator to admit him and to send a letter to the *The Times* appealing to public charity towards his protégé.¹⁷ The movement of solidarity

a fim de evitar o quase linchamento público do pobre Merrick, cujas deformidades tinham atraído uma multidão pouco caritativa... É então confiado ao Dr. Treves que convence o administrador do hospital a aceitá-lo e a enviar para o jornal *The Times* uma carta aberta, apelando à caridade para com o seu protegido.¹⁹ A onda solidária gerada por esta iniciativa garante a permanência de Merrick no hospital *sine die*. Tem ainda uma outra consequência: atrai a atenção das elites sociais vitorianas que adoptam o “homem elefante” como sua coqueluche. Merrick viria a morrer no seu quarto de hospital, em Abril de 1890, quatro anos após a admissão.²⁰

Que faz Lynch com este material? Começa por mudar o nome do “homem elefante” para John, seguindo, neste ponto, o lapso cometido pelo próprio Treves na reminiscência que escreve e publica quase quatro décadas após os acontecimentos que narra, *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* (1923), e que constitui, conjuntamente com uma outra peça posterior, do antropólogo e admirador de Treves, Ashley Montagu,²¹ a principal fonte de informação para o filme.²² Mas, sobretudo, altera a cronologia: só depois



created by this initiative guaranteed Merrick’s stay at the hospital *sine die*. This had the additional consequence of attracting the attention of the Victorian elite who adopted the “elephant man” as their “coqueluche”. Merrick died in his hospital room in April 1890, four years after being admitted.¹⁸

What does Lynch do with all this information? He begins by changing the “elephant man’s” name to John, following the mistake made by Treves himself in the journal he writes and publishes almost four decades after the events he reports, *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* (1923), and which makes up, along with another later piece by the anthropologist and admirer of Treves, Ashley Montagu,¹⁹ the main source of information for the film.²⁰ But above all, he alters the chronology and some events: in the film, only after Joseph’s admittance to the hospital and after having established a stable relationship with the doctor and medical staff, is he “kidnapped” and taken to the continent by his only manager, the villain Bytes, who, according to the film, is helped by yet another vicious character created by Lynch known as the Night Watchman. This kidnapping (entirely made up by the director) and the demonization of Bytes adopts and exaggerates

do ingresso definitivo de Joseph no hospital e de este já ter com o médico e restante pessoal hospitalar uma relação estável, se dá o rapto para o continente, perpetrado no filme pelo único empresário de Merrick, o vilão Bytes, e viabilizado por uma outra figura negativa criada por Lynch, o Porteiro da Noite. Este rapto (totalmente inventado pelo realizador) e a diabolização de Bytes adopta e hiperboliza as reservas e o ponto de vista negativo de Treves sobre Tom Norman, conquanto injustos possam ter sido,²³ mas, simultaneamente, aproxima a personagem criada por Lynch de vilões dickensianos como Faggin, na obra *Oliver Twist*, explorador do trabalho infantil, agressor, agente de lenocínio, instigador de criminalidade, avarento e ganancioso. Encontramos tais facetas na personagem criada para o filme, que partilha ainda com Faggin uma convivalidade acintosa com o fogo, de óbvias conotações infernais. Tais mudanças conferem maior dramatismo e aumentam o impacto emocional da acção, ao mesmo tempo que acentuam a vulnerabilidade de Merrick, mera vítima passiva e indefesa à mercê de forças malignas, à imagem do protagonista de Dickens. Além disso, extrema posições, entre o eixo do



Treves's longstanding prejudice against Tom Norman and his negative perception of him, notwithstanding how unjust they might have been.²¹ It also brings the character into line with Dickens's villains like the miserly and greedy Faggin, in *Oliver Twist*, known for being an exploiter of children, inflicting violence on them, a panderer and an instigator of crime. We find somewhat similar characteristics in the manager character, who also shares with Faggin a significantly close relationship with fire, with obvious hellish connotations. Such changes no doubt generate greater drama and increase the emotional impact of the action, while simultaneously emphasizing Merrick's vulnerability as a mere victim, passively and defenselessly at the mercy of evil forces just like Dickens's main character. Besides, it creates a black and white contrast between the axis of good (constituted by Merrick, Treves, the hospital administrator and the nurses) and the axis of evil (Bytes, the Night Watchman and the *voyeuristic* clients he illicitly allows into the hospital in the dead of night) – all of this in tune with Dickens's melodrama. We even have the doubling of evil male characters which equally occurs in the Victorian novelist's work: Oliver is the victim of the brutality of a younger

bem (constituído por Merrick, Treves, o administrador e as enfermeiras) e o eixo do mal (Bytes, o Porteiro da Noite e os clientes *voyeurs* que este angaria e clandestinamente introduz no hospital, pela calada da noite) – tudo também em linha com o melodrama dickensiano. De resto, a duplicação de figuras masculinas malévolas, ocorre igualmente no romancista vitoriano: Oliver é vítima da brutalidade de um homem mais novo e mais estúpido do que Faggin, de nome Sikes, tal como o Porteiro da Noite brutaliza Merrick, a par da violenta sujeição de Bytes.

Mas, talvez o mais significativo tenha sido o facto de Lynch se ter apropriado duma outra inexactidão do relato de Treves: a rejeição de Joseph por parte da mãe, ou, pelo menos, o desaparecimento desta, pouco depois do nascimento. Sacrifica o rigor histórico e aproxima-se deliberadamente do estereótipo do órfão indefeso, à mercê de instituições públicas desumanas e de indivíduos sem escrúpulos, num contexto social dominado por interesses materiais, e orientado pelo cinismo na aplicação duma lógica utilitarista avessa ao amor ao próximo, à imaginação e à atenção ao caso singular, que



and more stupid man than Faggin, by the name of Sikes, just as the Night Watchman brutalizes Merrick, together with the violent subjection of Bytes.

But perhaps most meaningful of all was the fact that Lynch took hold of another imprecision in Treves's account: the rejection of Joseph by his mother, or at least, her disappearance shortly after his birth. It renounces historical accuracy and deliberately brings the protagonist closer to the stereotype of the helpless orphan at the mercy of inhuman public institutions and individuals of no scruples in a social context dominated by material interests and pervaded by the cynicism of a utilitarian logic irreconcilable with the love of the other, averse to imagination, unable to pay attention to the unique human predicaments which Dickens so wonderfully criticizes in *Hard Times*. In short, Lynch is trying to recover a familiar Victorian genre: “[T]he tale of the deserving orphan (or outcast) making his or her way in a hostile London milieu.”²²

These options, besides bringing closer the universes of the works of both Lynch and Dickens, allow the director to approach various themes with great economy and remarkable efficiency. The most important of such themes is

Dickens tão bem satiriza em *Hard Times*. Em suma, Lynch está apostado em recuperar um gênero Vitoriano familiar: “a história do órfão, merecedor de recompensa, e que procura encontrar o seu caminho numa Londres hostil.”²⁴

Estas opções, além de aproximarem as obras de Lynch e de Dickens, permitem ao realizador abordar com extrema economia mas admirável eficácia, vários temas, o mais importante dos quais é, sem dúvida, o da violência, exercida a vários níveis e de vários modos, numa sociedade materialista e hipócrita, que sacrifica impiedosamente os mais fracos. E, a este nível, gera-se no filme uma complexidade que contraria a simplificação das dicotomias a preto e branco até agora enfatizadas e que não correspondem de todo ao teor do universo criado por Lynch.

Refiro-me à violência da industrialização sobre o meio ambiente, patente na sordidez e insalubridade da cidade industrial, vista como um labirinto infernal, caracterizado pelas sombras e pelo fogo, conspicuamente presentes em toda a película. A brutalidade deste contexto torna os seres humanos vítimas insensibilizadas numa instrumentalização acéfala aos desígnios



undoubtedly that of violence, the violence which is exercised at various levels and in many ways, in a materialistic and hypocritical society, which mercilessly sacrifices its weakest elements. And it is precisely at this level that the film presents us with a complexity that contradicts the simplification of black and white dichotomies that we have emphasized up until now and which do not correspond in any way to the substance of Lynch's universe.

I am referring to the violence of industrialization on the environment present in the filth and dirt of the industrial town, perceived as an infernal maze, made up of shadows and fire conspicuously present throughout the whole film. The brutality of this context turns human beings into unfeeling victims, mere instruments at the service of the anonymous imperatives of industry and its interests. I am also thinking of the harshness of labour conditions and the mechanical violence exercised upon the bodies and souls of workers (“the hands,” as they are called in *Hard Times*).

But Lynch also denounces another form of violence right from the start; from the very first images, by focusing the spectator's attention on various images of eyes, in a film where photographs also occupy a central role,

anónimos da indústria e seus interesses. Refiro-me, além disso, à decorrente violência mecânica e laboral exercida sobre os corpos e o espírito dos operários (“the hands,” como são chamados em *Hard Times*).

Mas Lynch promove ainda, desde as primeiras imagens, a denúncia duma outra violência, a do olhar, num filme onde ocupam posição de destaque várias fotografias, designadamente, a da própria mãe do protagonista. Na sequência inicial já citada, surgem primeiro e insistentemente imagens de olhos que se vão justapondo: de elefantes, da mãe de Merrick, o “olho” da máscara que este usa e por onde espreita o mundo... Segue-se o olhar do Dr. Treves, quando na feira procura a barraca do “homem elefante.” De resto, o filme explora reiteradamente, o olhar *voyeur* que incide, predominantemente, sobre a figura central, mas que não se restringe ao período em que ela é atração de feira, antes se prolonga no hospital, e aqui é ironicamente replicado no olhar clínico e, mais tarde, nos olhares rapaces, quer dos elementos do *jet set* que o visitam, quer da população levada pelo Porteiro da Noite – todos ironicamente irmanados e nivelados pela mão do realizador. Estas desconcertantes



especially the photograph of the protagonist's mother, he calls attention to the violence of the gaze. In the initial sequence, already alluded to, shots of eyes appear insistently by juxtaposing the elephant's eyes, the eyes of Merrick's mother, the “eye” of the mask he wears and through which he views the world... These are to be followed by Dr. Treves's eyes when he is searching for the “elephant man's” show at the fair. The remainder of the film repeatedly explores the *voyeuristic* look directed at the main character, but not exclusively as a freak attraction while at the fair. It continues at the hospital, and here, ironically enough, it is replicated in the clinical gaze and later in the rapacious looks both of the *jet set* who visit him and of the different people brought in by the Night Watchman – all ironically paired and leveled by the director. These perplexing similarities are denounced by the head nurse as she angrily tells Treves, “He's only being stared at, all over again!” More disturbing still is the similarity between the allegedly disinterested scientific gaze of Treves to which he subjects Merrick by exhibiting his “discovery” to his colleagues (a step ultimately aiming at a rapid progress in his career) and the public exposure which

continuidades são denunciadas pela enfermeira chefe, insurgindo-se junto de Treves: “He’s only being stared at, all over again!” Mais inquietante ainda é a semelhança entre o olhar científico, alegadamente desinteressado, de Treves, exibindo a sua descoberta perante os seus pares, com proveitos evidentes na progressão rápida da sua carreira, e a exposição pública a que o sujeita o padrão de Merrick.²⁵ Esta ambiguidade, patente em várias sequências, é enunciada pelo médico, quando, de má-consciência, confidencia à mulher: “Mr. Bytes and I are very much alike. I turned him into a curiosity. Am I a good or a bad man?” A questão é devolvida ao espectador e este, por implicação, não pode deixar de se interrogar: será que Lynch não está afinal a reflectir também, por ficção interposta, sobre a violência do olhar cinematográfico, transformando em objectos de máxima vulnerabilidade tudo aquilo em que toca?



Merrick’s manager makes him go through.²³ This ambiguity, manifest in various sequences, is explicitly uttered by the doctor when he admits with a guilty conscience: “Mr. Bytes and I are very much alike. I turned him into a curiosity. Am I a good or a bad man?” The question is given back to the viewer who can’t help asking herself: is not Lynch also indirectly reflecting (and making us ponder) on the violence of yet another type of gaze, the cinematic gaze, through Merrick’s fictionalized story - a gaze that transforms everything it touches into objects of extreme vulnerability?

Translated by Margarida Martins and revised by the author

Notas / Notes

- 1 Sobre isto, veja-se Michael Howell and Peter Ford, (1980) *The True History of the Elephant Man* (London: Allison & Busby, 2006), pp. 137-38, e Tibbles, J. A. R. and M. M. Cohen Jr., “The Proteus Syndrome: The Elephant Man Diagnosed”, *British Medical Journal*, vol. 293, 13 September 1986.
- 2 “Appendix I: The Autobiography of Joseph Carey Merrick,” in Howell and Peter Ford, pp. 173-75.
- 3 Ao primeiro artigo de Frederick Treves, “A Case of Congenital Deformity,” *Transactions of the Pathological Society of London*, vol. XXXVI, 1885, pp. 494-8, vários outros se juntariam, publicados em *Lancet* e *British Medical Journal*.
- 4 ‘This is Tom Norman: Sixty-five Years a Showman and Auctioneer’, unpublished MS in possession of the Norman family; subsequently published as *The Penny Showman: Memoirs of Tom Norman, ‘Silver King’*, with additional writings by his son, George Barnum Norman, privately printed, London, 1985.
- 5 Sir Frederick Treves, *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* (London: Cassell, 1923), rpt. In Howell and Ford, pp. 181-200.
- 6 F. C. Carr Gomm, ‘The Elephant Man’, letter of appeal in *The Times*, 4 Dec. 1886; Gomm, ‘Death of the Elephant Man’, letter to *The Times*, 16 Apr. 1890.
- 7 Bernard Pomerance, *The Elephant Man* (New York: Grove Press, 1979); Thomas Gibbons, *The Exhibition: Scenes from the Life of John Merrick* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, n.d.); William Turner, *The Elephant Man* (Manuscript); Roy Faudree, *The Elephant Man*. Copyright: Roy Faudree, 1975). Para mais informações, veja-se Graham and Oehlschlaeger, *Articulating the Elephant Man: Joseph Merrick and his Interpreters*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992, capítulos 5 e 6.
- 8 É o desconhecimento de certos dados do caso histórico, por um lado e, por outro, a tendência para uma leitura literal que leva alguns críticos a rejeitarem como sendo de mau gosto a sugestão da violação da jovem mulher por elefantes, na sequência inicial do filme, impedindo-se de reconhecer o seu cunho simbólico. Veja-se, por exemplo, a crítica de Roger Ebert ao filme, em 1
- 1 For more on this: Michael Howell and Peter Ford, (1980) *The True History of the Elephant Man* (London: Allison & Busby, 2006), pp. 137-38, and Tibbles, J. A. R. and M. M. Cohen Jr., “The Proteus Syndrome: The Elephant Man Diagnosed”, *British Medical Journal*, vol. 293, 13 September 1986.
- 2 “Appendix I: The Autobiography of Joseph Carey Merrick,” in Howell and Peter Ford, pp. 173-75.
- 3 ‘This is Tom Norman: Sixty-five Years a Showman and Auctioneer’, unpublished MS in possession of the Norman family; subsequently published as *The Penny Showman: Memoirs of Tom Norman, ‘Silver King’*, with additional writings by his son, George Barnum Norman, privately printed, London, 1985.
- 4 Sir Frederick Treves, *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* (London: Cassell, 1923), rpt. In Howell and Ford, pp. 181-200.
- 5 F. C. Carr Gomm, ‘The Elephant Man’, letter of appeal in *The Times*, 4 Dec. 1886; Gomm, ‘Death of the Elephant Man’, letter to *The Times*, 16 Apr. 1890.
- 6 Bernard Pomerance, *The Elephant Man* (New York: Grove Press, 1979); Thomas Gibbons, *The Exhibition: Scenes from the Life of John Merrick* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, n.d.); William Turner, *The Elephant Man* (Manuscript); Roy Faudree, *The Elephant Man*. Copyright: Roy Faudree, 1975). For more on this: Graham and Oehlschlaeger, *Articulating the Elephant Man: Joseph Merrick and his Interpreters*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992, chapters 5 and 6.
- 7 On the one hand, the lack of historical information and details on the case and, on the other, the tendency for a literal reading lead some critics to squarely reject the raping of the young woman by elephants in the opening scenes as being of ill taste, therefore refusing its symbolic dimension. See, for example, Roger Ebert’s critique of the film on 1st January 1980.: <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19800101/REVIEWS/101> (accessed on 15-02-2012)
- 8 Jack Kroll, “Odd Man Out,” *Newsweek*, 6 October 1980, 96: 72.
- 9 Charles Dickens, (1854) *Hard Times* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 65.

de Janeiro de 1980. Acessível em: <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19800101/REVIEWS/101> (acedido em 15-02-2012)

9 Jack Kroll, "Odd Man Out," *Newsweek*, 6 October 1980, 96: 72.

10 Charles Dickens, (1854) *Hard Times* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 65.

11 Sobre a importância dos sons, lê-se em "Lynch and History – *The Elephant Man*", in Kenneth C. Kaleta, *David Lynch* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), pp. 31-68: "Noises convey the film's theme; noises set the film's mood." (p. 62)

12 Joseph Conrad, no seu romance de 1902, *Heart of Darkness* (seriado em folhetins em 1899), haveria de resumir lapidariamente este estado de coisas, ao afirmar: "the conquest of earth (...) is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much." In *Heart of Darkness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 10.

13 H. Rider Haggard, *Allan Quatermain in She, King Solomon's Mines, Allan Quatermain: Three Adventure Novels* (New York: Dover, 1951), p. 420.

14 Tal degenerescência social e racial ecoa as preocupações patentes na obra ensaística de um William Booth, de 1890, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, onde o autor estabelece comparações entre certas tribos africanas como os pigmeus e os moradores dos bairros degradados do East End londrino. See Sally Ledger, "From 'In Darkest England: The Terror of Degeneration in fin-de-siècle Britain' in *Post-colonial Theory and English Literature: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp.216-26.

15 Sigo, no fundamental deste sumário, os dados constantes na obra de Howell and Ford.

16 No panfleto alegadamente autobiográfico de Joseph Merrick, lê-se: "It was not perceived much at birth, but began to develop itself when at the age of five years." In Howell and Ford, 173. Porém, de acordo com Howell e Ford, as manifestações da doença seriam já aparentes aos 21 meses de vida da criança. Cf. Howell and Ford, p. 43.

17 No panfleto, lê-se: "The deformity which I am now exhibiting was caused by my mother being frightened by an elephant". In Howell and Ford, p. 173.

18 "A Case of Congenital Deformity," *Transactions of the Pathological Society of London*, vol. XXXVI, 1885, pp. 494-8.

10 On the importance of sound see: "Lynch and History – *The Elephant Man*", in Kenneth C. Kaleta, *David Lynch* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), pp. 31-68: "Noises convey the film's theme; noises set the film's mood." (p. 62)

11 Joseph Conrad, in his 1902 novella, *Heart of Darkness* (published in parts in 1899), would briefly summarize this state of affairs as: "the conquest of earth (...) is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much." In *Heart of Darkness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 10.

12 H. Rider Haggard, *Allan Quatermain in She, King Solomon's Mines, Allan Quatermain: Three Adventure Novels* (New York: Dover, 1951), p. 420.

13 Such social and racial degeneration echoes the concerns found in William Booth's essays of 1890, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, where the author establishes a comparison between certain African tribes such as the pigmies and the inhabitants of poor neighbourhoods of East End London. See Sally Ledger, "From 'In Darkest England: The Terror of Degeneration in fin-de-siècle Britain' in *Post-colonial Theory and English Literature: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp.216-26.

14 I follow in the most fundamental aspects of this summary the details in Howell and Ford's work.

15 In the pamphlet we read: "The deformity which I am now exhibiting was caused by my mother being frightened by an elephant". In Howell and Ford, p. 173.

16 "A Case of Congenital Deformity," *Transactions of the Pathological Society of London*, vol. XXXVI, 1885, pp. 494-8.

17 Cf. Chapter 8 of Howell and Ford (91-108) for the content of the letter (dated 4 Dec. 1886). Parts of which are quoted in the film by the character of the actress, Mrs. Madge Kendal, during the play Merrick attends. Cf. Howell and Ford, pp. 121-26. 14- I follow in the most fundamental aspects of this summary the details in Howell and Ford's work.

18 The highly deformed skeleton, various parts of the body, the head cover which he wore to go out into the street, the cardboard model of the cathedral which he built and gave to one of the nurses at the hospital are still to be found at the Royal London Hospital. Cf. Howell and Ford for photos of some of these items in the middle section of their book.

19 Ashley Montagu, *The Elephant Man: a Study in Human Dignity* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979, rpt. of 1971 edition). Montagu adopts the name John ins-

19 Cf. Capítulo 8 de Howell and Ford (91-108) para o conteúdo da carta (datada de 4 de Dez. 1886). Partes da mesma são citadas no filme pela personagem da atriz, Mrs. Madge Kendal, durante o espetáculo teatral a que Merrick assiste. Cf. Howell and Ford, pp. 121-26.

20 Dele se conservam até hoje, na zona de exposições do Royal London Hospital, o esqueleto, altamente deformado, os moldes de várias partes do seu corpo, a cobertura da cabeça com que se protegia para sair à rua e ainda o modelo de cartão reproduzindo uma catedral, feito pelo próprio e oferecido a uma das enfermeiras. Cf. Howell and Ford para as fotos de alguns destes itens na secção média do livro.

21 Ashley Montagu, *The Elephant Man: a Study in Human Dignity* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979, rpt. Of 1971 edition). Também Montagu adopta o nome John em vez de Joseph, não corrigindo o erro de Treves. Sobre isto, veja-se Graham and Oehlschlaeger, pp. 65-67.

22 De notar, que as obras de Treves e Montagu são as duas únicas fontes reconhecidas pelo realizador no filme.

23 É na sequência da publicação das "reminiscências" de Treves que Norman sente necessidade de defender a sua reputação, escrevendo o depoimento referido na nota 4.

24 "[T]he tale of the deserving orphan (or outcast) making his or her way in a hostile London milieu." (Graham and Oehlschlaeger, pp. 140-1).

25 De acordo com o depoimento de Tom Norman, Merrick terá confidenciado ter-se sentido mais vexado pelo exame e exposição médicas do que pela sua actividade de exibição habitual nas feiras. Cf. Howell and Ford, pp. 76-7.

thead of Joseph, not correcting Treves's mistake. For more on this, see Graham and Oehlschlaeger, pp. 65-67.

20 Note that the work of Treves and Montagu are the only two recognized sources used by the director for the film.

21 It is the publication of Treves's "reminiscences" that triggers the need on Norman's part to defend his reputation by writing his statement referred to in note 4.

22 Graham and Oehlschlaeger, pp. 140-1.

23 According to Tom Norman's statement, Merrick confessed to having felt more vexed by the medical tests than by his public display at the shows. Cf. Howell and Ford, pp. 76-7.