

2 Celebrities or Prisoners?

Were freak shows the only means of escape for the performers?

1 P.T. Barnum's Circus

- A. Read P.T. Barnum's profile and say what he became famous for.
- B. Show Barnum had a poor sense of ethics when it came to business. Give two examples.
- C. Online, watch the trailer of *The Greatest Showman* based upon Barnum's life. What else have you learnt about him?
- D. Go further. How is reality distorted in the film? Can you say Barnum is a hero?

The Greatest Showman is arguably one of the biggest blockbusters of the year, and part of the fascination is that it's based on the true story of one of the first showmen – P.T.

- 5 Barnum, who lived from 1810 to 1891. [...]
- Barnum purchased the American Museum in New York, and looked for curiosities (whether real or fake) to draw in the public. Barnum was living in the age where anything that
- 10 went against normative society was regarded with a mixture of curiosity and fear. Between 1842 and 1868, Barnum drew in 82 million visitors, ranging from Charles Dickens to Edward VII. The price was 25 cents, and
- 15 visitors could see "living curiosities", including an African-American man named William Henry Johnson who was publicised as "... a creature, found in the wilds of Africa... a kind of man-monkey".
- 20 Barnum's most profitable attraction was Charles Stratton, a 25 -inch¹- tall man who took the name of General Tom Thumb. [...] Barnum fashioned himself as the "Prince of Humbugs"², and was described by his friends
- 25 as both egotistical and thoughtful [...] [He] lived an exhilarating life that is, literally, the stuff of films, but it is always worthwhile to take a look behind the legend and realise that Barnum's exploitative nature, although a
- 30 product of his time, was largely based in the othering of those who didn't fit into the white patriarchal discourse. He was a showman, and his greatest trick was turning those who differed into spectacles for the public.

1 2.5 cm • 2 tromperie

Clarice Bland, *The Man Behind the Magic - The Story of P.T. Barnum*, 2018



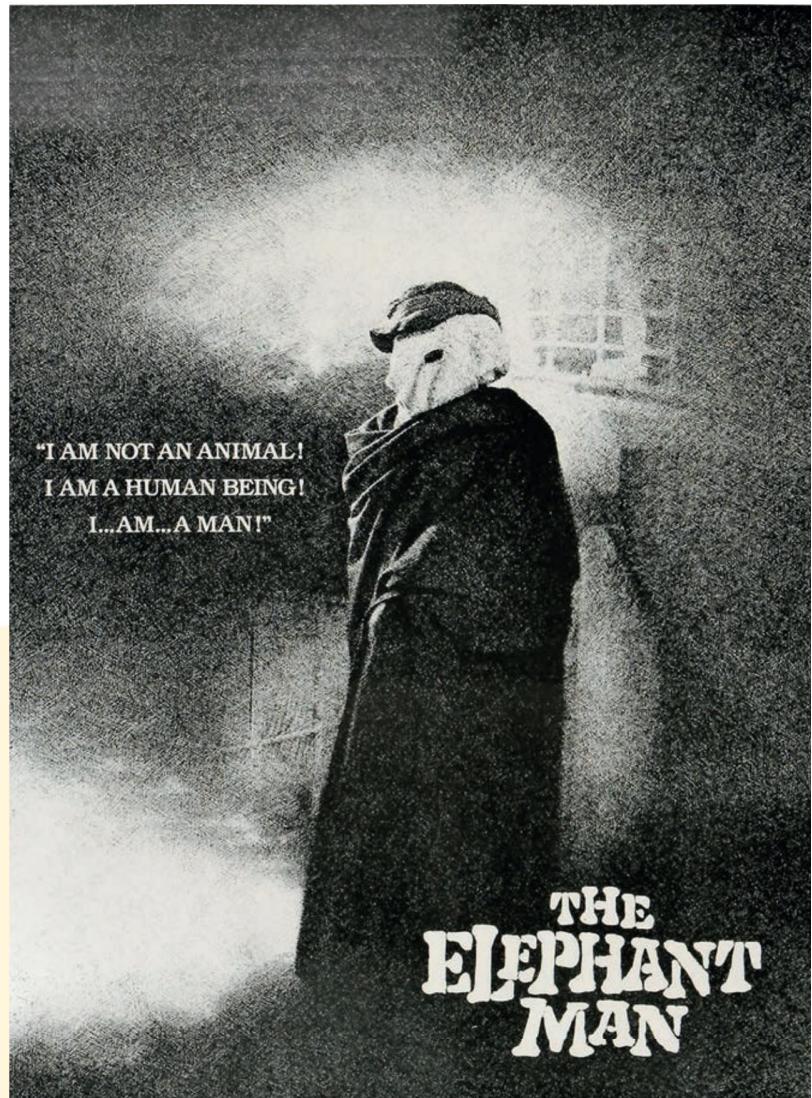
2 The Elephant Man

- A. Read the short biography about Joseph Merrick. Explain why he was considered a "freak". Focus on his physical appearance, health, and his relationship to the world.
- B. Listen to **MP3 n°116** and pick out information about Merrick's life and work.
- C. Use your findings to complete the following sentence in your own words:
"In order to escape the workhouse system, Merrick talked the owner of a music hall into... + V-ing"
- D. **Go further.** Explain the link between Merrick's favourite quote (l. 13-14) and his cry from the heart in the poster?



BIOGRAPHY - Born in 1862, Joseph Merrick began growing disfiguring tumours before the age of 2 and his condition rapidly worsened, rendering one of his arms completely immobile. [...] He also experienced physical and psychological pain. To avoid the stares¹ and attention of others, he covered himself in a cape and veil whenever he ventured outside. Distressed by the reaction of others to his body, Merrick often quoted a poem by the hymn writer Isaac Watts: 'Tis true, my form is something odd², But blaming³ me is blaming God.'

1 regards fixes • 2 étrange • 3 accuser



The Elephant Man, screenplay by David Lynch, 1980

YOUR TURN! 3 Act out!

Pairwork. Act out the conversation between two performers of P.T. Barnum's show:

- Pupil A thinks this job represents the only opportunity for them and their only family.
- Pupil B thinks it is a degrading job based on mockery and human exploitation.

"Here we are treated like..."

"We are more respected here than..."

HELP!

Nouns

- opportunity
- human oddity
- honest work

Verbs & expressions

- be ashamed of: avoir honte de

- be exhibited / be displayed like animals
- belong = be part of sth
- perform acts
- only means of living

3 The End of Freak Shows

Are today's freak shows different from those of the Victorian era?

1 The extinction of freak shows

- A. Read the article and sum up Henry Mayhew's opinion on freak shows.
- B. Pick three reasons which led to the gradual extinction of freak shows.
- C. Explain why the performers of the "Sideshows by the Seashore" can no longer be seen as freaks.

Today, freak shows in the style of the Victorian era are extinct in the developed world. [...]

Many people, namely Henry Mayhew, a British historian and journalist, never liked the idea of the side show, freak show, or other similar types of entertainment. Instead of seeing these kinds of shows as enlightening, exciting, or amusing, Mayhew and his colleagues began to argue as early as 1861 that freak shows were nothing more than an extreme show of human cruelty, moral debauchery, and cruel human degradation.

About 40 years after the appearance of Mayhew's article against the freak show, the general public began to follow his way of thinking. [...] As people fought for equal rights, the disabled were not entirely forgotten and freak shows became the symbol of exploitation. Additionally, travel became more common and the desire to view foreign objects or exotic people began to lose its appeal. [...] Advances in medicine meant that many of the 'freaks' exhibited were actually



Coney Island Circus Sideshows

diagnosed with scientific diseases, disorders, or conditions,
meaning that they were no longer a mystery.
In the modern day, there are still a few side shows throughout the world, one of the biggest being Coney Island's "Sideshows by the Seashore". These shows, however, are filled with performers rather than kidnapped people or freaks who
were abandoned on the circus doorstep. These people work willingly in the side show and are subject to the same laws and work regulations as any other business. In short, they are entertainers much like Cinderella at Disney World.

Ashlee Tremaine, [REDACTED], 2014

2 The lasting impact of freak shows on our world

- A. Listen to the song named 'This is me' online. What is the main topic?
- B. Listen again and pick out three of the woman's feelings. Justify your answer with quotes from the song.
- C. What is the message of this song?
- D. Go further. Explain why the stories of freak shows can echo some of the contemporary problems of our world.



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YOUR PROJECT

The Biography of a "Freak"
Write an excerpt of the biography of a freak show performer for the literary contest Canvas Literary Journal.

LANGUAGE LAB



- Unit's vocabulary
- Audio words
- MP3
- Interactive Test

★ 1. Make sentences as shown in the example.

The manager / the dwarf / to show his muscles (get)

→ The manager got the dwarf to show his muscles

- A. The boss / the fat lady / sing (have)
- B. The audience / the manager / refund their money (make)
- C. The Elephant Man / people / accept him (make)
- D. These shows / people / to act like savages (get)

★ 2. Fill in the sentences with the right feelings.

shame • pride • loneliness • wonder • embarrassment

- A. Some performers of the P.T. Barnum freak show felt a reassuring sense of ... being in the spotlight.
- B. His ... was obvious the first time he put a step on the stage. The stares destabilised him.
- C. Joseph Merrick covered his face out of
- D. A great deal of people rushed to freak shows to stare in ... at the human oddities.
- E. Most performers thought that the shows were both a real job opportunity and a shelter from the ... of their lives.

★★ 3. Make sentences in the passive voice.

- A. On this tour, the manager treats the freaks like animals.
- B. The man in charge exhibits the twins every night.
- C. People regard the Elephant Man as a monstrosity.
- D. The audience considers the freaks as objects of derision.

★★ 4. Fill in the sentences with these expressions.

the show must go on • round of applause • standing ovation • in the spotlight

- A. "No matter what happens on stage, Got it?"
- B. When the diva stopped singing, she received a big ... from the audience.
- C. The ... lasted for more than 2 minutes!
- D. All her life she's been craving to be ... and now she's finally on stage!

★★★ 5. Make comparative sentences.

- A. This show > this exhibition (cruel)
- B. The Elephant Man > P.T. Barnum (famous)
- C. Freak shows > TV series (old)
- D. This man > this lion (strong)

★★★ 6. Translate into English.

Joseph Merrick se sentait rejeté par les gens de son époque. Il fut obligé d'accepter un travail dégradant pour gagner sa vie.

7. Interactive test! What is your score?

OPEN YOUR EARS!



PHONOLOGY

L'accentuation des mots en -ity, -ion/-ian et -ic

- Écoutez ces mots. Que remarquez-vous ? **MP3 n°117**
- public • exotic • scientific • Victorian • attraction • desolation • popularity • dignity • celebrity



Déduisez les règles.

- Les mots se terminant en -ic et -ity sont accentués sur la ... syllabe.
- Les mots se terminant en -ion et -ian sont accentués sur la ... syllabe.

AUDIO MYSTERY

Listen and solve the problem. **MP3 n°118**



Picture challenge

★ 3 sentences

★★ 4 to 6 sentences

★★★ 7 sentences and +

How many sentences can you make using what you have learnt? Collect stars!

