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modern illustrations. The result is a somewhat undernourishing pamphlet which, so far as I could judge, tells us nothing new about Mr Merrick except that he had bad teeth.

Graham and Oehlschlaeger embark on an altogether more exciting project, not a study of the Elephant Man but of “articulations” of him. They are interested in how myths about the Elephant Man have been manufactured, and in why it is that we should be tempted to invent Joseph Merrick had he not actually lived. Indeed, they show that the Elephant Man has been invented and reinvented over the past century—by doctors, showmen, journalists and readers, and more recently (and memorably) by the playwright Bernard Pomerance and the film-maker David Lynch. These constructions are carefully described and analysed and the result is to present a narrative of affecting, terrible enchantment. We are presented, in fact, with a series of intertwining stories which collectively form a myth. In descending order of specificity, these stories tell of the pitiable freak rescued by the arm of benevolence (the surgeon Frederick Treves), a patient and pious creature forced to survive in a hostile world, the unsullied mind trapped in a hideous, corrupted body, and of how society—all of us—confront the Other (who may, of course, lie hidden within ourselves).

Both Robert Wadlow and Joseph Merrick were described as “real gentlemen”, as kind and intelligent, and both sought (in vain) to lead unfreakish lives. Neither lived into maturity and neither seems to have formed any intimate relationships. The outstanding difference is that while Wadlow mounted a campaign to protect himself from the intrusive attentions of medicine and the media, Merrick knew that his only hope of survival was to commit himself to the care of the London Hospital, where he lived after his rescue by Treves.

It is difficult to imagine poets and playwrights being drawn to Wadlow as they have to Merrick, for Wadlow refused to submit to the authority of those that told him what he was (a monster) and what he could not be (normal); so far from relishing the help extended to him by the medical profession, he fought it doggedly. Merrick was on the whole a more passive and accommodating patient: he offers the opportunity of a warming counterposition between the hideous, hopeless case and the miracles of modern medicine. Tales about the Elephant Man are able to transmute horror into kindness.

While medical historians will find much to enjoy in *Articulating the Elephant Man*, many will regret the paucity in the book of medical or intellectual context. A complete study of Joseph Merrick—man and myth—is inconceivable without some understanding of Victorian teratology and theories of degeneration, of the development of the medical profession (which, after all, sequestered the Elephant Man) and, not least, of the theory of maternal impressions. In folk belief, freaks were thought to be born of mothers whose foetuses were “impressed” by a powerful image which the weak, feminine brain was incapable of containing. The hostility accorded to Merrick’s mother by many (including Treves), which puzzles Graham and Oehlschlaeger may well be part and parcel of the blame meted out to women who gave birth to defective babies.

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GLORIA SYBIL GROSS, *This invisible riot of the mind: Samuel Johnson's psychological theory*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992, pp. x, 198, £22.00, \$25.95 (0-8122-3146-5).

Few men of letters have attracted medical historians’ attention more than Samuel Johnson. As recently as 1991 there appeared a first-rate overview of health and medical themes in Johnson: John Wiltshire’s *Samuel Johnson in the medical world: the doctor and the patient* (Cambridge University Press). Equally impressive, and covering quite different ground, is Gloria Gross’s study of Johnson and the human psyche. In this well-organized and powerfully written monograph, two different but related inquiries are deftly combined. On the one hand, Professor Gross (who is a literature specialist) is concerned, from a biographical viewpoint, to probe Johnson’s own psychological make-up and its interpretation. On the other hand, she seeks to analyse Johnson’s vision of the human mind in general, and his readings of the

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personality of specific individuals—historical, like Swift, Milton, Pope and Savage, and fictional, like the characters (“Dick Linger”, “Sober”, “Cupidus” and so forth) who populate the *Rambler* and *Idler* essays. Unsurprisingly, Johnson’s reading of human psychology at large is shown to reflect his own propensities—indeed, it served as an attempt to resolve the crises afflicting his own intra-psychic life, notably the deep and lasting melancholy that he feared might lead to madness itself. (Gross, it should be added, does not press the rather extreme notion that Johnson came near to true insanity.)

This invisible riot of the mind argues, surely correctly, that Johnson was an exceptionally acute psychologist and self-analyst—which is not to deny that he could frequently be wilfully blind—he had, Gross notes, a strong grasp of the human tendency to take refuge in self-delusion. Without dogmatically setting Johnson on the couch, Gross highlights the violently contradictory urges and needs inflaming the passions of one who had struggled so desperately to rise in life (“Slow rises worth by poverty depress’d”) only finally to find that success itself was insipid and failed to dispel depression. Because of a profound sense of inadequacy and deep guilt feelings, Johnson was one who could rarely *enjoy* prosperity, remaining almost pathologically pugnacious. Envy, rage, anxiety and the desire to dominate loom large in Johnson’s self-perceptions and in his account of human motivation. He judged mankind to be driven by irresistible subterranean forces, insatiable cravings for gratification. To stave off misery and vacuity, the human imagination lost itself in fantasy worlds, dangerous because they ran riot, out of control, tyrannizing the reason.

Johnson espoused something like a Freudian sense of the unconscious, Gross suggests: a perception of mankind as gripped by dark, primitive irrational impulses. This hypothesis is advanced judiciously. Gross is not suggesting that Johnson was some kind of “precursor” of Freud or that Freudian depth psychiatry will completely explicate the author of *Rasselas*. Rather it is her contention that the key to Johnson’s genius—the reason why we remain fascinated by his life and still devour *The lives of the poets* or *The vanity of human wishes*—lies in his extraordinarily vivid grasp of, and capacity to empathize with, elemental human feelings and experiences. She is right. Recent scholarship has, quite properly, set Johnson in his religious and ethical contexts. Gross’s reading of Johnson as a psychologist restores a neglected aspect of the writer and reminds us, *pace* Foucault, that the Enlightenment was a remarkable era for the development of a secular understanding of the human psyche.

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KATHLEEN WELLMAN, *La Mettrie: medicine, philosophy, and Enlightenment*, Durham, N. C., and London, Duke University Press, 1992, pp. xiv, 342, £29.92 (0–8223–1204–2).

La Mettrie’s writings provoked contemporaries to characterize him as a materialist, an atheist, a shallow philosopher, a corruptor of morals and a despicable voluptuary. This characterization seems to have been shared by the *philosophes*, who disowned him, and the churchmen of Europe, who denounced him. The mud stuck. La Mettrie retained this reputation in the nineteenth century and, claims Kathleen Wellman in this reappraisal, current accounts have all begun by assuming the handicapping to be just. In her reassessment of La Mettrie, Wellman sustains an important case for giving a great deal of weight to the medical dimension of his work. She begins with a discussion of the controversy between physicians and surgeons in early eighteenth-century Paris and argues, convincingly, that in order to understand La Mettrie’s polemic this debate must be seen as a significant backdrop (context would be too strong a word, as so little is known about La Mettrie’s life). She then describes the medical education she imagines La Mettrie would have received from Boerhaave. The bulk of the text is then taken up with an analysis, chronologically arranged, of La Mettrie’s works. The strength of this book is undoubtedly the demonstration of La Mettrie’s substantial use of medical ideas to frame his tirades. Too often the path to materialism and evolutionism has been mapped out as a philosophical course. Although historians will, rightly, dispute Wellman’s detailed explication of Boerhaave’s texts, especially when she includes such claims as “he