

Maggie and Pierre all too human

Maggie and Pierre
Directed by John Thompson
SUB Theatre, until December 14
By Marc Garvey

Without a doubt, Wednesday evening's opening of *Maggie and Pierre* at SUB Theatre was the best theatre to grace an Edmonton stage so far this season.

Linda Griffiths is an immensely talented and hard-working actress who

managed to play all three of the characters in this 'one-woman show', turning in a strong, flawless performance.

Griffiths proved to be up to the demands of the play's quick character sketches, switching roles, complete with dialects and characteristic mannerisms with an easy grace.

Director Paul Thompson and Griffiths co-wrote *Maggie and Pierre*, basing their rendition of the history of Canada's



"I think what annoys them is the fact that I am a man who is having fun being Prime Minister."



"Dancing with you reminds me of dancing with my father."

first family on exhaustive research and plain hard work in staging it for the theatre.

From first meeting, through courtship, marriage, and separation (and 15 years of national history) the play attempts to come to terms with the national fascination with the lives of the Trudeaus.

The play's perceptions of social dilemma possess a humorously satirical tone, but it also makes an effort to understand and sympathize with the hopes and failures of the characters in the play.

In the end, the Trudeau mystique is a reflection of an overwhelming curiosity we possess about ourselves. We share many of the contradictions and paradoxes

that surface in the composite of *Maggie and Pierre*.

Griffiths' triple role as *Maggie*, *Pierre*, and a journalist named *Henry* is a brilliant coupling of a Vaudvillian sense of timing; her delivery of one-liners meshes with the sensitive portrayal of the poignant and dramatically powerful moments in the play.

SUB Theatre also successfully lends itself to the presentation of live theatre, something the facility hasn't seen since hosting a series of Edward Albee plays two years ago.

It has indeed pulled off a major coup with its two-week run of *Maggie and Pierre*.

Maggie and Pierre, with Linda Griffiths in SUB theatre, should not be missed.

Lynch's Elephant Man paradoxical

by Victor Stanton

Is it man's nature to exploit his fellow man, even in ways which on the surface seem admirably humanitarian?

Film-maker David Lynch seems to have made that question that theme of his movie *The Elephant Man*, and what is most disturbing about this remarkable picture is that Lynch seems to have answered the question with an unflinching "Yes!"

Lynch, who collaborated on the script as well as directed the movie, drew his story from the real-life experiences of John Merrick, an Englishman who lived during the latter part of the 19th century.

Merrick was victim of a rare, physically deforming disease, since diagnosed as neurofibromatosis. His appearance has been described in the following manner: "From Merrick's head sprouted huge cauliflower-like growths, one of them resembling an elephant's trunk; one hand twisted into a large fin, and mounds of loose flesh cascaded down from his body and gave off a stomach-turning odor."

Merrick's existence as a side-show freak and his later introduction into the cream of London society have been fairly well documented, and served as the basis for the recent award-winning play also

entitled *The Elephant Man*. (The film carries a disclaimer that it is not based on that play.)

Lynch's approach to telling the John Merrick story is somewhat surreal, especially in the opening and closing sequences which would seem to reflect the before-and-after-life consciousness of Merrick himself.

Even within the main narrative body of the picture, individual scenes seem to have been composed, both visually and aurally, more with the intention of establishing an all-enveloping mood than for simple exposition of who, what and where.

Filmed in black and white - by Freddie Francis whose black and white photography in 1960's *Sons and Lovers* earned him an Academy Award - *The Elephant Man* is incredibly effective in evoking a sense of social deformity that is far more horrifying than Merrick's physical appearance.

Indeed, a feature of this movie for which Lynch is to be especially commended is the manner in which Merrick is visually introduced to the audience. Initially shown in shadows and in silhouette, or shrouded in costume-like clothing, his deformities are revealed in such a gradual way that there is no sudden shock or feeling of revulsion when

Merrick is fully seen.

Contrast this with the same technique employed in many horror films - and in particular the original *Jaws* comes to mind - to produce the exact opposite effect, and Lynch's achievement as a cinematic artist can be recognized as truly astounding.

The artistry of this film does not, however, lie solely in its direction, but also in the performances of the predominately English cast.

No adjective seems too extreme to describe John Hurt's achievement in the title role, made up as he is beyond recognition and yet succeeding magnificently in projecting so distinct a personality primarily through his eyes and vocal delivery. (Merely to simulate the difficulty Merrick must have had in speaking intelligibly must have been a torturous process for the actor.)

As Frederick Treves, Merrick's doctor and biographer, Anthony Hopkins once again demonstrates his finely honed talent for endowing a character with emotional and motivational depth in a portrayal bereft of any extravagance that would suggest he's merely acting.

And Sir John Gielgud is a forceful screen presence as Carr Gomm, the head of the London hospital which was Merrick's home for his last few years.

Not inappropriately, many of the minor characters have a quality to them that is reminiscent of the works of 19th-century British novelist and social reformer Charles Dickens. In a sense, they verge on being caricatures, more representatives of types within their society than actual individuals.

In the picture, Treves is forced to question if his motives in helping Merrick are any less exploitative than those of a carnival showman or a hotel night porter who subject Merrick to humiliating display for their financial profit. Lynch himself must surely have been aware that, even though studiously avoiding pandering to the lowest voyeuristic tastes of today's movie-going audiences, he too was exploiting Merrick.

Even if *The Elephant Man* succeeds - and I believe it does - in depicting the triumph of Merrick's inner humanity over his outer deformity, it does not leave one with the impression that mankind in general is ever triumphant over its bestial instincts.

In this respect, watching this movie can be a very depressing experience. At the same time, it stands as one of the most memorable films of all time.

In that seeming paradox lies its masterful artistry.