

## Appendix

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### Appendix n. 1: *Discovering New Trends in Contemporary Literature* (Essay)

Peter Ackroyd (London, 1949) is a contemporary prolific British author who is highly valued for his never-dying interest in London’s surroundings of the past and present. The powerful description of his hometown, London, thus greatly finds its place in every profound work of his successful literary career. Inspired not only by the legends, the vivid personal stories still alive on the streets of the city, but also by its historical and cultural heritage, its artistic figures and monuments, its well-known events once connected with the banks of the River Thames, he has been able to write down such marvellous masterpieces as *The Great Fire of London* (1982), *Hawksmoor* (1985), *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1995), *London: The Biography* (2001), *Thames: Sacred River* (2007), *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* (2009). As Ackroyd once said:

I truly believe that there are certain people to whom or through whom the territory, the place, the past speaks . . . Just as it seems possible to me that a street or dwelling can materially affect the character and behaviour of the people who dwell in them, is it not also possible that within this city (London) and within its culture are patterns of sensibility or patterns of response which have persisted from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and perhaps even beyond? (“Peter Ackroyd”, Wikipedia.org)

During one of the innumerable interviews when being asked what it is exactly that fascinates him about London, Ackroyd answered without hardly any hesitation: “its power, its majesty, its shadows” (“Peter Ackroyd”, Wikipedia.org).

It is the shadows of the London’s narrow back lanes that have been hiding the most thrilling mysteries for many centuries. The voices which so urgently tempt a curious passer-by to careful listening might belong to contemporary residents of the place, or to people who lived in them several years ago:

The Smithfield tavern was not difficult to find. I left Jermyn Street at dusk, and the carriage set me down at Snow Hill soon afterwards; I walked up to St Bartholomew’s just as its clock was

striking seven, and on my left hand I could see a low public house with the sign of *The Fortune of War*. It showed the deck of a naval frigate, with an officer dying in the arms of his comrades. I could hear it, too, with the noise of song, laughter and raised voices echoing against the stone wall of the hospital. (Ackroyd, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, 137)

This mixture of the two parallel worlds, even if inexplicably joined, has been a popular scheme of creative writing since the 1990s.

Among the contemporary authors who found their inspiration in the respectable voices of the past is not exceptional to come upon the name of Peter Ackroyd. He himself claims that it is more than common to borrow the main plot of one of the numerous novels written in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century and simply dress it into a new, more acceptable coat. Such an intentional approach to the new concept of literary form is more than visible on the pages of *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*; the only difference is that the author sets his hero in London:

Despite the winter chill I stood upon my wooden quay, wrapped in my greatcoat. I had taken to smoking a pipe, in the manner of the Londoners, and I waited expectantly for any sight or sound of the resurrectionists. Of course I had no hope that their work would be so summarily executed – the young man had walked before me only the evening before –but I was so eager to begin my operation that I could think of nothing else. (Ackroyd, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, 173)

During the era of Romanticism, innumerable, especially fanatic scientists were more than enthusiastic about the rediscovered powers of natural sources. Experimenting with the power of electrical energy, they believed in their ability to give a life to corpses of dead animals first and consequently human beings, thus discovering something completely exceptional. This remarkable vision of newly gained life inspired curious Mary Shelley (1797-1851) to express her fears of the insecure development in the grand gothic masterpiece *Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus* (1819). Since then there have been several unsuccessful attempts to imitate Shelley's marvelous piece of work with the exception of Peter Ackroyd who dusted off the yellowish pages of the haunting story and added new layers of meaning to its content. Peter Ackroyd says about his literary process:

I re-read the original Mary Shelley version and I had to acquaint myself with some of the intellectual and political controversies of the time — not only the burgeoning interest in electricity, but also the social and political unrest of the period, as I felt that was all part of the same pattern and the same theme I concentrated upon the society and culture of England in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. (Fairweather, [Aestheticmagazine.com](http://Aestheticmagazine.com))

On the basis of careful comparison of the two works, there might be spotted certain similarities and differences. First of all, disturbing scientific questions have always been likely to evoke public curiosity. As people in the past were anxious about the possible uses of electricity, so in the same way people nowadays turn their attention to the basic principles of cloning. The inclination of each author is to warn their readers against the following consequences and make each unsuccessful creator accept the necessary responsibility for their failure. We can come upon this contention of theirs in one of the many conversations between Frankenstein and the monster [a medical student] in Ackroyd's version:

"I have been considering my plight. I do not know the precise means by which you restored me to life, but I have speculated. I have spent days and nights in meditation. I am aware of the galvanic force of the electrical fluid. That must have been your method, in some form or another. Surely you can alter the fluid accordingly and reverse the process of animation? Surely you can counteract the force?"

It astonished me that the creature had arrived at conclusions similar to my own; it was as if there was a connection between us that surpassed the ordinary powers of sympathy. It surprised and delighted me, too, that he seemed now to embrace the prospect of this own destruction. (Ackroyd, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, 373)

Secondly, the most striking difference is in the location of the story. Whereas Mary Shelley's Frankenstein reveals his story on the board of the liner, travelling widely, Ackroyd's Frankenstein leads his readers through the memories of the life tightly bound to the banks of the Thames River. In another interview Peter Ackroyd explains his purpose:

Physical locations were very important to me, particularly the Thames and the estuary settings. I had just finished writing, *Thames: Sacred River*, which is all about the life of the river and its history. I have always been entranced, or excited by the estuary of the Thames and its mournfulness, and the Thames itself and the life of the Thames as it rides through the city. I was very keen to attach the story of Frankenstein also to the story of the Thames and its landscape. The riverscape of the Thames in the East End and by Limehouse and by Bermondsey has always fascinated me as an area and intrigued me, so it seemed natural to set this somewhat mournful tale in an appropriately mournful landscape. (Fairweather, [Aestheticamagazine.com](http://Aestheticamagazine.com))

Peter Ackroyd is rightly considered one of the leading representatives of the genre called 'urban space'. Even if it is not so demonstratively shown on the book of my choice, there are other highly valued literary concepts written with his hand which ostentatiously prove it. His strong believes and deep passion for London are displayed in numerous biographies, fake autobiographies of the city's writers, novels, poetry, documentaries and

critics and have been accepted with high worldwide reputation, many precious awards, prizes and nominations.

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