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Re-creating the *doppelganger* in Peter Ackroyd's *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*

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ABSTRACT

Peter Ackroyd in his 2008 novel *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* establishes a free-play intertextual world through adopting Mary Shelley's canonical novel *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) as his palimpsest where he reworks the tradition of the *doppelganger* (evil twin) whose depiction has its roots in the Gothic. In Ackroyd's version, the *doppelganger* changes into the inventive incarnation of the repressed desires of his pivotal character, Victor Frankenstein, and the novelist is able to offer his "genuine" narrative of a postmodernist serial murderer gothic—this time given in the form of a casebook that psychologically disturbed Victor keeps. In *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, Ackroyd manages to give way to a new *weltanschauung* satisfying the intellectual needs of the twenty-first century by problematizing the relationship between the real and the hallucinatory, and also between the author and the text to question the role of the author as the creator.

Keywords: *Ackroyd, the doppelganger, Gothic-postmodernism, intertextuality*

Peter Ackroyd'un *Victor Frankenstein'in Vaka Defteri* Adlı Romanında *doppelganger*

ÖZET

İngiliz çağdaş romancılarından Peter Ackroyd, *Victor Frankenstein'in Vaka Defteri* (2008) adlı eserinde, Mary Shelley'nin 1818'de yazdığı ve artık kanon olarak kabul edilen İngilizce adıyla *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* romanını yeniden kaleme alarak gotik eserlerde karşımıza çıkan kötücül ikiz karakterler (*doppelganger*) yaratma geleneğine yeni bir yorum getirmiştir. Bu kötücül ikiz, Ackroyd'un eserinde roman kahramanı olan Victor Frankenstein'ın bastırılmış dürtülerinin bir dışa vurumu olarak kendisini gösterir. Psikolojik sorunları olan kahramanının yaşadıklarının anlatıldığı bir vaka defteri olarak sunulan bu eserinde romancı, post-modern döneme ait gotik cinayet romanı örneği sunmaktadır. Bu yönüyle, Ackroyd'un romanı gerçek ile kurmaca arasındaki ilişkiyi sorunsallaştırması bakımından günümüz okurunun beklentilerini karşılayan ve bilinen bir öykünün yeniden yorumlanması da olsa "özgün" kabul edebileceğimiz bir eserdir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Ackroyd, doppelganger, Gotik-postmodernizm, metinlerarasılık*

Peter Ackroyd is known to have offered new stories to his readers by creating intertextual webs with the works of earlier writers. To do this, he often borrows from the poets, the novelists, and the playwrights of English literature, and creates, through

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amalgamating themes and narrative voices of previous writers, a new system or a new genre in which the distinct voices or the unique languages of the authors become a new challenge for Ackroyd, expanding his imagination and carrying him to the limits of storytelling. Ackroyd in his 2008 novel *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* rewrites Mary Shelley's nineteenth century novel *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, using Shelley's canonical gothic novel as his palimpsest[1] to compose his authentic serial murderer gothic, and establishing an intertextual dialogue with Shelley's text given to the reader directly through his title at the threshold[2] of the novel. As Mary Shelley provides her material for the novel from the dark, capitalist nineteenth century world shaped through social and individual emoluments, Ackroyd's way of providing material for his novel is more related to the intellectual climate of the twenty-first century. *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* can be deemed as a reconsideration of the *doppelganger* in the Gothic and an intertextual response to the tradition of creating duals through conflicting characters as "double-goers" whose depiction in Ackroyd's text has its roots particularly in such novels as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), or Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). The word "doppelganger," literally meaning "double-goer" or "walker," comes from the German word "Doppelgänger" which was first used by Hoffmann to mean double or dualism.[3] Ackroyd follows the *doppelganger* tradition of the Gothic in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, and he imitates particularly Mary Shelley's paradigmatic story for this. It is claimed by the present study that Ackroyd adapts Shelley's well-known modern Prometheus story into his novel to change it into, as Rafferty justly suggests, a "postmodern Prometheus story"[4] where the boundary between fact and fiction is blurred, and the real and the hallucinatory are mingled with each other to explore human psyche as presented in the form of monstrous other, and where the writer can also question the role of the author as the creator of his "original" text.

In Ackroyd's version of the Frankenstein story, his pivotal character Victor, like the main character of Mary Shelley's text, is an aspiring scientist who intends to discover the secrets of life and conducts experiments on dead bodies to regenerate life, but the outcome is a monstrous creature again. To enlarge the intertextual network of the novel and to complicate the frameworks further, Ackroyd's text not only adopts from Shelley's *Frankenstein*, but along with the plot and the characters of her work, it also benefits from the writer's real life story, incorporating into the fictitious world of the novel some historical events that took place in Shelley's life, and historical personages such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Keats,

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[1] Gerard Genette, *Palimpsests* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997). Gerard Genette, in his *Palimpsests*, focuses on hypertextual relations between texts as his palimpsest analogy suggests that new texts can be written over pre-existent texts which should be accepted as their hypotexts.

[2] Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). In *Paratexts*, Genette distinguishes "deviant arrangements" as another type of titling that we can see mostly in titles of parodic works where "the titular pastiche is unavoidably called for by the textual pastiche" (p. 72). The title of the hypertext, for instance, is "an explicit contract which, at the very least, alerts the reader to the probable existence of a relationship" between the two texts (p. 8).

[3] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 1981), p. 108.

[4] Terrence Rafferty, "Raising the Dead", New York Times, 1 November 2009, Book Review, p. 17.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley herself and her father William Godwin, Lord Byron, and John William Polidori, who wrote the progenitor novella *The Vampyre*. By fictionalizing these historical figures who had a connection with the writer Mary Shelley, Ackroyd achieves to blend fact and fiction, and he also suggests that the ideas of such important romantic poets constitute the conceptual background of his novel. In his review of the novel on the Amazon book site, the novelist expresses himself thus: "I had always been interested in the Romantic movement of English poetry, in the early nineteenth century, and the story of Victor Frankenstein allowed me to explore all the possible meanings of 'romantic' in that context. […] It also allowed me to introduce the 'real' characters of Byron and others into the plot".[5] The lines borrowed from the Romantic poets in Ackroyd's work, especially from Coleridge, emphasize the importance of the imagination and creativity. When Victor together with his close friend Bysshe Shelley attends a conference given by Coleridge named "The Course of English Poetry," the first sparks in his mind are born by his contemporary's thoughts on the imagination. Coleridge's words uttered in this speech affect Victor deeply, and the poet's ideas support the philosophical basis of Victor's desire to give life:

> *Under the impress of the imagination nature is instinct with passion and with change. It is altered—it is moved—by human perception. Everything has a life of its own, and we are all one life. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception and as a representation in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation. What can be imagined, can be formed into the image of truth. The vision could be created.*[6]

After attending the conference and being influenced by Coleridge's words on nature and the creative power of the imagination, Victor is inspired to give life to a dead body, and comes to believe that he can be a creator like a poet who has the imaginative capacity to create worlds through words. He feels he is ready to start his role—as a scientist—to create, like the other creators of imaginary worlds of poetry around him who Victor is jealous of. Polidori, who is a physician at Lord Byron's service, suspects that Victor's envy is the reason behind. He says: "Perhaps you [Victor] wished to rival Bysshe. Or Byron. You had longings for sublimity and power".[7] For this purpose, Victor starts to conduct experiments in his laboratory on dead bodies by using the facilities of modern science to see their reactions towards the galvanic force of electricity and the voltaic current given by the engines "with their great strips of zinc and brass separated by pasteboard soaked in salt water".[8] He claims he was selected for the duty of generating life in his laboratory, uttering: "I would consider myself to be a benefactor of the human race. More than that. I would be considered a hero. To bring life to dead or dormant matter—to invest mere clay with the fire of life—this would be an admirable and wonderful triumph".[9]

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[5] Peter Ackroyd, "Peter Ackroyd on *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*."
http://www.amazon.com/Casebook-Victor-Frankenstein-Novel [accessed 2 November 2014].
[6] Peter Ackroyd, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* (London: Vintage, 2008), pp. 101-102.
[7] Ackroyd, *ibid*., p. 407.
[8] Ackroyd, *ibid*., p. 151.
[9] Ackroyd, *ibid*., p. 12.

This attitude of Victor pushes him into assuming the role of God. He thinks that he would be the one with the divine power of bestowing life, as long as he achieves to animate a dead body. While in Shelley's novel Victor Frankenstein initiates his experiments first on animals, in Ackroyd's novel Victor seeks dead people's bodies to invigorate and bring life; yet, after realizing several experiments on the damaged corpses of old people, he starts to chase after an undamaged corpse of a young man, the handsomest and the youngest body he can get for his experiments, for Victor believes that such a corpse can yield a perfect living body in the world, "a being of infinite benevolence. One in whom the forces of nature would have worked together to awaken a new spiritual being".[10] He trusts in the perfectibility of mankind, and he is almost sure that he will be the god-like creator of that kind of a superb being if he is successful in his goal. He thinks the electric fluid will be more sufficient when applied on a fresh body which will react quicker. When he finds the perfect corpse of Jack Keat, the person who he used to work together in the dissection room of St. Thomas's Hospital, Victor thinks that Keat's young body, "dead only an hour ago, served up nice and fresh,"[11] will lead to the creation of the invulnerable human being he dreams of:

> *His was the most beautiful corpse I had ever seen. It seemed that the flush had not left the cheeks, and that the mouth was curved in the semblance of a smile. There was no expression of sadness or of horror upon the face but, rather, one of sublime resignation. The body itself was muscular and firmly knit; the phthisis had removed any trace of superfluous fat, and the chest, abdomen and thighs were perfectly formed. The legs were fine and muscular, the arms most elegantly proportioned. The hair was full and thick, curling at the back and sides.*[12]

Victor achieves to revitalize the dead body of Jack Keat, but all he could accomplish is to create a grotesque being with the ugly body of a monster, which does not bring him success and happiness, but remorse and horror. After the creature quickly stands up by breaking the bracelets and links, his very first impulse is to masturbate, which makes Victor feel more stunned as he declares: "I noticed that his penis had become erect, with a small bead of seminal fluid at its tip; then, *mirabile dictu*, tears began to roll down his face".[13] Initially, Victor's purpose behind the experiments seems to be benign and innocent, but the product of these experiments is a creature which has gone through all the stages of decomposition and then is restored to life:

> *His skin seemed to quiver, with a motion like that of waves. But then he grew still. Now his appearance resembled nothing so much as wickerwork. His eyes had opened, but where before they had been of a blue-green hue they were now grey. The body itself had not been deformed in anyway: it was a compact and as muscular as before, but it was of a different texture. It looked as if it had been baked.*[14]

The creature runs away from Victor's workshop, only after destroying the electrical machine that Victor uses in his laboratory for the experiments to create life and leaving him in horror. The loneliness that the creature feels inside makes him

[10] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 253.
[11] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 178.
[12] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 179.
[13] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 181.
[14] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

murder people around Victor, taking his revenge in return by making him lonely without a company like himself. The creature accuses his creator for his loneliness with these words which echo those given in Shelley's novel: "You are the guilty agent of my misfortune. I did not seek for life, nor did I make myself".[15] In Ackroyd's novel, a number of people are supposed to be killed by the monster Victor created, as "the creature embodies an increasingly irresistible urge to kill, which acts as a counter to Frankenstein's obsessive desire to create life".[16] Bysshe's first wife Harriet Westbrook is believed to be killed by the creature, but Harriet's brother, Daniel Westbrook is found guilty for the murder because Harriet's necklace has been found in his pocket. Daniel is also condemned to death by hanging. It becomes notable later in the novel that Victor goes there to watch his execution. Victor's servant Fred, Mary's servant Martha, and Jack Keat's sister are all thought to be murdered by the creature. Polidori tries to learn the secret behind the series of murders in the novel, which costs him his life, and he becomes the final victim of the creature's violence.

Including the elements of crime narratives in Ackroyd's adaptation of the story turns *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* into a serial murderer gothic. This can be seen as "a narrative strategy which is becoming increasingly popular in contemporary crime fiction,"[17] as Chalupsky further argues:

> *The reader can trace the motives behind the murderer's acts, observe her elaborate preparations, follow the perverse logic which determines and explains the selection of her victims and understand the social and economic circumstances which have resulted in the birth of this unscrupulous human monster.*[18]

However, the first-person narration of *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* and the presence of an unreliable narrator, together with our previous knowledge about Shelley's text, lead us to believe that the creature that Victor gives life in his laboratory commits the murders in the novel. The reader, relying on the original story, takes it for granted that the creature is a distinct entity. This is secured by the writer when he intentionally follows the original story too closely, employing the tone and the language suited to the historical period, and hence not distancing the reader from the original text by the use of irony (except in the final sentence of the novel). It is Ackroyd's strategy for playfulness here in this novel to both lead and mislead the reader through the intertextual parallels with the palimpsestic Frankenstein story: "The construction of the narrative voice is a key constituent in the game Ackroyd plays with his readers—he deliberately presents a character not only seemingly identical with the original in order to benumb their alertness and make them believe what the narrator says".[19] The reader tries to find the truths behind a series of murders taking place one after the other although he seems to be sure about the

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[15] Ackroyd, *ibid*., p. 227.
[16] David Charnick, "Peter Ackroyd's Imaginary Projections: A Context for the Creature of *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*", *Modern Language Review*, 108 (2013), 52-67 (p. 66).
[17] Petr Chalupsky, "Crime Narratives in Peter Ackroyd's Historiographic Metafictions", *European Journal of English Studies*, 14 (2010), 121-131 (p. 125).
[18] Chalupsky, *ibid*., p. 125.
[19] Petr Chalupsky, "*Frankenstein* as an historical, urban Gothic-psycho-thriller –Peter Ackroyd's rendering of Mary Shelley's classic in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*", in *Ars Aeterna*: *Who is Afraid to be Afraid?* (Nitra: Constantine the Philosopher University, 2011), pp. 19-34 (p. 26).

identity of the criminal till the end of the novel. Therefore, unlike Ackroyd's earlier novels that contain the elements of crime narratives, his *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* can be said to sacrifice the "whodunit" aspect of thrillers for "an ending of bathetic absurdity".[20]

While reading Ackroyd's version of the story, the reader assumes that there is really a creature; however, at the end of the novel, which is the key part of the narrative distinguishing it from that of Mary Shelley's, it turns out that there is no creature as a distinct entity. Ackroyd's novel ends with this perplexing final remark of the frame narrator who indicates that the whole story we keep reading is taken from the diary of a patient with these words: "*Given to me by the patient, Victor Frankenstein, on Wednesday November 15, 1822. Signed by Fredrick Newman, Superintendent of the Hoxton Mental Asylum for Incurables*".[21] Victor knows that "there is no substance … without shadow,"[22] and his shadow is the monster he created in his mind. There is an "adamantine bond" between Victor, the scientist, and his alter ego, the creature.[23] The creature says: "I am wedded to you so closely that we might be the same person".[24] Polidori discovers that the creature is Victor Frankenstein's own invention. Ackroyd depicts Polidori as a very annoying character who is always spying on Victor, and he is the only person who is able to find out the truth about the creature and also to figure out that all the murders have been committed by Victor himself.[25] Through the presence of such a character in the novel, "Ackroyd thus employs the conventional crime fiction device of a detective trying to understand the criminal".[26] In a moment when Victor feels his "exhilaration and sense of achievement were such that [he] might have cried them aloud in the streets,"[27] he decides to share his secret with Polidori, and he tells the whole story about the creature he is supposed to have bestowed life, also making Polidori suspect him of the murders. Polidori wants to observe the destruction of this unusual thing secretly, but he cannot see the creature sitting next to Victor, although Victor assures him that there is the creature beside him:

> *"Now you see my handiwork," I said.*
> *He came in, holding up a lamp, and stood before us.*
> *"Behold the creature. This is what I have made." […]*
> *"There is no one here," he said.*
> *"Have you lost your wits? See here. Beside me. Here he sits."*
> *"There is nothing beside you, except an empty chair. […] You have lived your imagination, Victor. You have dreamed all this. Invented it." […]*

[20] Philip Womack, "Book Review: *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*", *New Humanist*, 8 September 2008, p. 48.
[21] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 408.
[22] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 257.
[23] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 253.
[24] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 252.
[25] Chalupsky, "*Frankenstein* as an historical, urban Gothic-psycho-thriller –Peter Ackroyd's rendering of Mary Shelley's classic in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*", p. 28.
[26] Chalupsky, "Crime Narratives in Peter Ackroyd's Historiographic Metafictions", p. 127.
[27] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 399.

> *I sprang at him. I lunged forward and destroyed him. No, not I. the creature tore him to pieces with his bare hands.*[28]

Victor Frankenstein's burning desire to own a god-like creating power, which leads to his unnatural experiments with corpses, is in direct opposition with the fascination that committing homicide produces. The frustrating realization of Victor that he cannot create life from scratch forces him to turn to the other side of the divine power: God has the power to give life, and also to take it back. At this point the story that Polidori tells in the novel becomes a highly suggestive one. It is "the story of one Monro, a clerk in holy orders" who decides to play the role of god by choosing somebody "at random" and then "stifle it," believing that by doing this "he would, as he put it to himself, become a god. There was no force in the universe higher than himself".[29] Victor Frankenstein, of the Hoxton Mental Asylum for Incurables, whose diary we read all through the novel, obsessively assumes that he will be able to play the role of God *by killing* people. He is no longer the scientist, the life giver, but he is now the destroyer of others' lives. Writing over Shelley's work, Ackroyd formulates his own text in the form of a murderer's casebook kept by psychologically disturbed Victor who turns out to be a serial killer.

The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein can be considered a model of the Gothic of the postmodern era, which is defined by Maria Beville as "Gothic-postmodernism," a new genre—"a distinct generic mutation in literature"—which incorporates gothic elements into literary postmodernist texts like that of Ackroyd's: "The two literary ideologies, the Gothic and the postmodernist, have come to be intertwined into a controversial mode of writing that could be referred to as a *literary monster*".[30] The conventions of Gothic-postmodernism, Maria Beville claims, include

> *the blurring of the borders that exist between the real and the fictional, which results in narrative self-consciousness and an interplay between the supernatural and the metafictional; a concern with the sublime effects of terror and the unrepresentable aspects of reality and subjectivity; specific Gothic thematic devices of haunting, the doppelgänger, and the dualistic philosophy of good and evil; an atmosphere of mystery and suspense and a counter-narrative function.*[31]

The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein, as a pastiche of a progenitor gothic text, consists of a postmodern version of the hypotextual Frankenstein story where, in an innovative way, "the frightening monstrous relates back to the sublime faculties of terror associated with the unrepresentable".[32] The novel as the reworking of the Gothic, then, concerns itself with the return of the repressed and the fascination with the monster as the imaginary projection of abject otherness, hence questioning our unconscious fears and seeking to purge them. The creature Victor manages to give life in his workshop is, as David Charnick argues, "an imaginative projection which takes

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[28] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, pp. 406-407.
[29] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 385.
[30] Maria Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* (New York: Rodopi, 2009), p. 16.
[31] Beville, *ibid.*, p. 15.
[32] Beville, *ibid.*, p. 201.

on a life of its own,"[33] which, in Ackroyd's narrative, points to "the power of projection which brings to life a fictional character from someone else's narrative,"[34] unbounding the border between the real and the hallucinatory to explore alter ego as presented in the form of monstrous other. Charnick suggests that Ackroyd adopts "the device of imaginary projection" not only in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* but also in his previous novels: "the use of projection to create a distinct alter ego for the protagonist is not a feature of *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* alone, but is device which Ackroyd has been developing throughout a period of some twenty-six years as part of his ongoing challenge to conventional perceptions of narrative presentation".[35] Shelley's monster emerges in Ackroyd's novel as the return of the repressed, and it is transformed into an uncanny experience causing fear with its frightening familiarity as the alter ego, the returning other of Victor, reflecting the dark, irrational side of human nature as Shelley's monster does.

The gothic atmosphere of mystery and suspense created through the depiction of the awe-inspiring spaces in Geneva and the dark and gloomy streets of London—as it is so in Ackroyd's earlier novels—enhances the sublime and the horror emerging from the return of the repressed in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*. While Geneva is the primary setting of Shelley's novel, Ackroyd prefers to use London as the setting of *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*. In his review on the Amazon book site, the novelist states: "I wanted to set the story in London, as a way of re-imagining and re-creating the nineteenth-century city. I also wanted to see if I could recreate the language and texture of the period so that the reader would feel connected in an intimate way with a culture and civilization that have now disappeared".[36] The novel depicts London as "a continuous spectacle of the streets, an incessant manifestation of its positive as well as negative energies".[37] The relationship between London and the monstrous creation is fashioned through making them resemble each other, dark and dreadful, familiar and unfamiliar at the same time:

> *I knew that the malevolent presence was that of London. […] I was seized with a great fear that this land had just emerged from the sea, and that the incoming water was about to overwhelm me.*[38]
> *I walked back through streets, familiar and unfamiliar, with a general apprehension that [the creature] did indeed "somewhere behind me tread"; there were moments when my own shadow alarmed me, and I looked back with dread on several occasions.*[39]
> *Then I found myself walking down a street in London. It was a street of black stone, with no doors or windows or openings of any kind. But as I walked upon it, the stone began to*

[33] Charnick, "Peter Ackroyd's Imaginary Projections: A Context for the Creature of *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*", p. 54.
[34] Charnick, *ibid*., p. 55.
[35] Charnick, *ibid*., p. 67.
[36] Peter Ackroyd, "Peter Ackroyd on *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*."
http://www.amazon.com/Casebook-Victor-Frankenstein-Novel [accessed 2 November 2014].
[37] Chalupsky, "*Frankenstein* as an historical, urban Gothic-psycho-thriller –Peter Ackroyd's rendering of Mary Shelley's classic in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*", p. 29.
[38] Ackroyd, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, p. 322.
[39] Ackroyd, *ibid*., p. 191.

> *shriek—in agony, in fear, in consternation, I knew not what. I turned the corner and there before me was another street of stone; as soon as I ventured upon it, it gave out a loud cry of pain, which came from the walls as well as the ground.*[40]

The Gothic is a way of showing that human nature is the sum of a mixture of good and evil forces, denoting the fragmentation of the self and the duality that cannot be understood by human reasoning. The term doppelganger became a part of gothic tradition in the nineteenth century, for "the double signifies a desire to be re-united with a lost center of personality and it recurs as an obsessive motif throughout Romantic and post-Romantic art"[41]. A *doppelganger* can be a ghost or a physical appearance, designating the darker side of this duality; hence "evil twin" is another synonym for the term *doppelganger.*[42] In Mary Shelley's story, the creature emerges as a distinct entity; however, it turns into the inventive incarnation of the repressed desires of Ackroyd's pivotal character in the Gothic-postmodernist work of the novelist. Ackroyd reworks the *doppelganger* tradition, and he re-creates the imaginative double of Shelley's main character to handle the split personality disorder: "This Frankenstein speaks to 'the mysterious fears of our nature' in a way that's clearly influenced by modern psychology: some monsters, we now know, are made in the laboratory of the unconscious".[43] Ackroyd's novel takes the form of a casebook which reveals the split personality of a psycho-killer.

Ackroyd's fiction has come to occupy a critically significant place in late-twentieth century English literature. His novels have drawn the attention of a growing number of critics and scholars whose studies place his works within the postmodern cannon, and after the "historical turn" in English literature, particularly within "historiographic metafiction"—the genre named by Linda Hutcheon to denote postmodernist historical novels "which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages".[44] Susana Onega in her seminal book *Metafiction and Myth in the Novels of Peter Ackroyd* defines Ackroyd's fiction as the one that problematizes "the boundaries between fiction and reality" through metafictional self-reflexivity to show that historical knowledge is ideologically constructed.[45] Likewise, Jeremy Gibson and Julian Wolfreys' study titled *Peter Ackroyd: The Ludic and Labyrinthine Text* focuses largely on Ackroyd's play with the formal conventions of fiction, and the linguistic play which creates the ludic but subversive worlds of his metafictional texts. Gibson and Wolfreys assert that

> *Ackroyd plays constantly: within a given text, across his own texts, and between the texts which his name signs and those to which he alludes, from which he cites or otherwise borrows, often wittily, with knowing gestures of pastiche and parody, as much from a sense of fun or jest as out of a sense of respect and inheritance.*[46]

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[40] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, pp. 322-323.
[41] Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, p. 108.
[42] Jackson, *ibid.*, p. 108.
[43] Rafferty, "Raising the Dead", p. 17.
[44] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 5.
[45] Susana Onega, *Metafiction and Myth in the Novels of Peter Ackroyd* (Columbia: Camden House, 1999), p. 31.
[46] Jeremy Gibson and Julian Wolfreys, *Peter Ackroyd: The Lucid and Labyrinthine Text* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 9.

However, Tamás Bényei, in the 2006 publication of *British Fiction Today*, believes that "Ackroyd diverges significantly from the canonical version of historiographic metafiction," although his novels include a playful mixture of fact and fiction.[47] He criticizes Ackroyd's work for lacking the political dimension that other paradigmatic examples of the genre possess. He argues that "to categorize Ackroyd as a postmodern writer is problematic, not only because he himself refutes such a categorization, but primarily because in his fiction there is a powerful centripetal counterforce to the dizzying, centrifugal (inter)textuality and non-identity of postmodern pastiche".[48] *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* does not seem to be immune to similar debates as the author's gothic-postmodernist work. In an interview, Ackroyd says: "I used a different line from each poet and structured a play out of that. So I presume that interest in lifting or adopting various styles, various traces, and various languages is part of my imaginative trend".[49] His imaginative trend of exploiting other writers' styles and languages—the trend he also adopts in the composition of his *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*—is criticized; i.e. it is believed that his *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* "contains the semi-inventions of someone who has been writing the same book for much too long".[50] Similarly, Terrence Rafferty in *The New York Times* speaks with the same criticizing tone:

> *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein is an entertaining and bracingly intelligent yarn, but, try as he will, Ackroyd is hard pressed to spark an idea that isn't already burning, fiercely, in Mary Shelley's still vital novel. This, perhaps, is the postmodern Prometheus: an attempt, aware of its own futility, to reanimate something that never died.*[51]

Being the writer of *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, Ackroyd nonetheless can be seen as a re-creator who assumes the role of Frankenstein, the re-maker. Like his character who enthusiastically believes that he can be the creator of an invulnerable, perfect human being through assuming the role of god, Ackroyd manages to re-animate Mary Shelley's one-hundred and fifty year old story, turning it into "a literary monster"[52] and "a postmodern Prometheus story"[53] which problematizes the boundary between the real and the imaginary. In his *English Fiction Since 1984*: *Narrating a Nation*, Brian Finney's answer to the question "Why the obsession with plagiarism?" in Ackroyd's fiction is that the novelist believes "true genius (especially true English genius) lies not in invention but imitation".[54] This explanation of Ackroyd is enough to account for his adaptation and reinterpretation of the previous canonical literary works in his fiction to create his free-play intertextual worlds. The following sentences below quoted from Ackroyd's *The House of Doctor Dee* have become more and more significant with the publication of the writer's each novel to appreciate the presence of

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[47] Tamás Bényei, "Reconsidering the Novels of Peter Ackroyd", in *British Fiction Today*, ed. by Philip Tew and Rod Mengham (New York: Continuum, 2006), pp. 55-66 (p. 55).
[48] Bényei, *ibid*., pp. 55-56.
[49] Onega, *Metafiction and Myth in the Novels of Peter Ackroyd*, p. 18.
[50] Andrew Motion, "Frankenstein Frigging Monster", *Guardian*, 13 September 2008, Review Supplement, p. 10.
[51] Rafferty, "Raising the Dead", p. 17.
[52] Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity*, p. 16.
[53] Rafferty, "Raising the Dead", p. 17.
[54] Brian Finney, *English Fiction Since 1984: Narrating A Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 23.

intertextual references in his novels: "It has been said that books talk to one another when no one is present to hear them speak, but I know better than that: they are forever engaged in an act of silent communion which if we are fortunate, we can overhear".[55]

The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein problematizes the relationship between the author and the text through the novelist's intertextual playfulness. Ackroyd has made his readers think that his work retells Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Borrowing the details from Mary Shelley's life story concerning the circumstances which led her to compose this horror story, Ackroyd's narrative gathers Bysshe, Byron, Mary, Polidori, and Victor together at the Villa Diodati, where Mary Shelley is said to have written her novel: "It was agreed between us that, over the next two or three days, each of us would prepare a tale of terror which would then be read aloud," narrates Victor.[56] Mary Shelley rejects to tell her story in the novel, uttering: "I will brood upon it Victor. I will nourish it secretly, until it is ready to enter the world".[57] To elaborate more on the finale of Ackroyd's narrative with the help of this self-begetting moment in the novel, the writer's disclaim which comes through the "confession" that the story has been given by "the patient, Victor Frankenstein,"[58] aims to deconstruct his own re-writing of Mary Shelley's novel, and gives way to a new *weltanschauung* satisfying the intellectual needs of the twenty-first century. With his *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, Ackroyd proves once more that "texts, seen as Ackroyd sees them in a poststructuralist light, are not the inventions of unique writers of genius, [but] are rearrangements of other texts".[59]

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[55] Peter Ackroyd, *The House of Doctor Dee* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993), p. 129.

[56] Ackroyd, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, p. 348.

[57] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 354.

[58] Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 408.

[59] Brian Finney, "Peter Ackroyd, Postmodernist Play and *Chatterton*" in *Twentieth Century Literature* 38:2 (Hempstead: Hofstra University, 1992), pp. 240-261 (p. 250).

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