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## DUPLICITOUS DETECTION IN PETER ACKROYD'S DAN LENO AND THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM

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### Abstract

This paper analyses Peter Ackroyd's novel Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem in view of Linda Hutcheon's definition of postmodernism as a "commitment to doubleness, or duplicity". Unlike other postmodern parodies of crime fiction that have been termed the "anti-detective novel", Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem does not fully deconstruct the genre on which it is founded. Instead, Ackroyd's novel manages to function on two apparently contradictory levels: as an enjoyable crime novel that satisfies readers' expectations of that genre and simultaneously as a postmodern parody of the crime novel that subverts its conventions. Both of these functions of the novel, how they interact and how they work to both undermine and bolster one another will be analysed.

**Keywords:** *Duplicity, Postmodern, Parody, Crime fiction, Ackroyd.*

### PETER ACKROYD'UN CİNAYET SANATI'NDA İKİLİLİK SANATI

### Özet

Bu makale Peter Ackroyd'un Cinayet Sanatı romanını teorisyen Linda Hutcheon'un postmodernizm tanımlaması ışığında incelemektedir. Hutcheon postmodernizmin en belirleyici özelliğinin "çifteliğe veya ikili olmaya olan bağlılık" olduğunu savunur. "Anti-detektif roman" diye tarif edilen detektif romanının parodisini yapan başka eserlerin aksine, Ackroyd'un romanı detektif romanını tamamen aşağı etmektense iki görünürde çelişkili işlevi bir arada yürütüyor. Bir yandan okuyucuların bu türden beklentilerini karşılayan keyifli bir detektif romanı işlevi görürken, aynı anda bu türün kurallarını ve metotlarını yıkan bir postmodern parodisi işlevi görüyor. Her iki işlevin birlikte nasıl bir etkileşim içinde bulunduğu ve birbirlerini nasıl bir yandan beslerken bir yandan da zayıflattığı incelenecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Çiftelik, İkिलilik, Postmodern, Parodi, Detektif romanı, Ackroyd*

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In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon identifies the “commitment to doubleness, or duplicity” as the distinctive character of postmodernism. “The effect is to highlight, or ‘highlight,’ and to subvert, or ‘subvert,’ and the mode is therefore a ‘knowing’ and an ironic—or even ‘ironic’—one” she explains, and concludes that, “postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge” (1-2). Peter Ackroyd’s *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, a crime novel set in Victorian England, manifests this duplicity in such a way as to make the work function on two apparently contradictory levels. Both the Victorian realistic novel and the detective novel have long been a favourite source of postmodern pastiche because of their many conventions and distinguishing features. Postmodern novelists use these conventions and features playfully, wilfully drawing attention to them and disrupting them so as to thwart the readers’ expectations, as well as subvert the accepted notions and narratives that they are founded upon. When taken to the extreme, this results in novels like Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, or Auster’s *New York Trilogy*, pastiches of the Victorian novel and detective novel respectively, that work to deconstruct the genres on which they are founded. Indeed, works like Auster’s *New York Trilogy* deconstruct the conventions of detective fiction to such a degree that they have been termed “the anti-detective novel” (Scaggs 141). Ackroyd steers a different, more “duplicitous” course in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, by concurrently satisfying and thwarting, maintaining and subverting, accepting and making metacommentary on the generic conventions of crime fiction, so that the work is simultaneously a compelling work of crime fiction and a postmodern parody of the genre.

The Victorian Age saw a surge in the sensationalisation of crime as well as its aestheticisation and use as a source of entertainment – a culture that has persisted into the present age – due in large part to the increase in newspapers and periodicals, the expansion of the reading public and the commercialisation of print media. Ackroyd satirically portrays this phenomenon while also making use of it himself in his depiction of the gruesome yet fascinating series of murders in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, which involve such sensational details as the mutilation and “aesthetic” reorganisation of the corpses, the murderer’s perception of her acts as stage performances and of her victims as “sigh[ing]” with pleasure” (62, 86), and Gothic scenes such as a prison warden wearing the dress of an executed criminal and apparently deriving sexual pleasure from the act. There is also a sustained metacommentary about this phenomenon throughout the novel, which makes us take notice of and question the excitement, fascination and enjoyment that we experience in the face of representations of such violence and brutality. On the very first pages of the novel, the extradiegetic narrator informs us that “only a few years before the woman [Elizabeth Cree] could have been hanged beside the walls of Newgate Prison, to the delight of the vast crowd assembled there” and that “[i]t had been the custom, during the days of public execution, for the dress of the dead to be torn apart and sold in pieces to the assembled crowd as mementoes or magical talismans” (1-2). Throughout *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, the readers observe how Londoners are thrilled and entertained by the gruesome serial murders while simultaneously being thrilled and entertained themselves by their representation in the novel.

The sensationalisation and aestheticisation of crime is also evident in the theatrical world portrayed in the novel, where real murders and executions are used as material in the music halls, and it is fitting that the serial killer turns out to be one of the famous performers of the music hall. Indeed, Elizabeth Cree appears to perceive the Limehouse golem as just another one of her roles, a performance for the violence-consuming crowds.

However, at the heart of the metacommentary on the aestheticisation of crime is Thomas De Quincey’s notorious essay “On Murder as One of the Fine Arts”. De Quincey conceptualises murder as a form of art and the murderer as an artist and a Romantic hero. As Lehman explains,

De Quincey wrote about murder [...] as though it were a new species of aesthetic entertainment and he were its Aristotle. As far as he could see “the final purpose of murder, considered as a fine art, is precisely the same as that of tragedy in Aristotle’s account of it; viz, ‘to cleanse the heart by means of pity and terror’”. (46)

De Quincey is a pervasive influence throughout *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. His essays are read by nearly all of the main characters, and the murderer is especially interested in “On Murder Considered as One of

the Fine Arts". In fact, in the novel, the fictional George Gissing writes an essay titled "Romanticism and Crime" in which he discusses the aestheticisation of crime by the Romantic movement in relation to De Quincey's essay:

Thomas De Quincey has, for example, created a narrative out of the Marr murders in which the killer himself emerges as a wonderful Romantic hero. John Williams is seen to be an outcast who enjoys a secret power, a pariah whose exclusion from social conventions and civilisation itself actually invests him with fresh strength... At the centre of the Romantic movement was the belief that the fruits of isolated self-expression were of the greatest importance and were capable of discovering the highest truths... In De Quincey's account John Williams becomes an urban Wordsworth, a poet of sublime impulse who rearranges (one might say, executes) the natural world in order to reflect his own preoccupations. (37)

Lehman claims that "[t]he aesthetic rationale for the detective story was put forth, in advance of the fact, in [these] remarkable essays by Thomas De Quincey" (46). Unlike the sensation novels or the popular theatre, however, this genre aestheticises murder not by sensationalising it or focusing on the blood, gore and thrill of the act, but by applying rules and conventions similar to those of an art form to it. In crime fiction, murder is portrayed as the conscious and planned work of one intelligent, talented, superior individual (the criminal) uncovered by another intelligent, talented, superior individual (the detective). In other words, in crime fiction, murder is the work of one artist that is analysed and brought to light by another artist, or art critic perhaps.

Furthermore, the reader is also expected to play an active role in the solving of the mystery, alongside the detective. As Dove explains, the genre "has a unique structure in which [...] the reader is directly involved, and which cannot be adequately described without taking the reader into consideration" (1). Indeed, Wright defines crime fiction as "complicated and extended puzzle cast in fictional form" (35). In order to function as a puzzle, the genre must follow certain rules known to both writer and reader. As Dove explains, "[a] writer writes (and a reader reads) with an understanding of what is acceptable within the limits of the literary form, of what inventions and experiments are permissible, and what traditions must be observed" (4). Accordingly, the genre makes use of certain established conventions that experienced readers will recognise and use for the solving of the puzzle. For instance, an early confession by a suspect is almost always a certain sign of innocence (5). Similarly, there is the convention of the "death-warrant", according to which a witness who turns up with important evidence concerning the crime is almost always killed before s/he can reveal the evidence (82). Perhaps the most important convention of the genre is the notion of "fair play". As Van Dine (pseudonym for critic Willard Huntington Wright) explains in his famous "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories", "the reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery and no wilful tricks or deceptions may be placed on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself" (189). The readers must be given the opportunity to analyse the evidence and solve the mystery themselves.

These same formulas and conventions are what make crime fiction so suitable to postmodern pastiche and parody, where they can be used playfully or subversively to thwart the readers' expectations by breaking the rules. In *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, Ackroyd simultaneously makes use of and undermines many of these conventions. The reader is given a sufficient number of clues to successfully solve the mystery, but is also lied to blatantly by the seemingly omniscient, authoritative narrator. Therefore, only readers who are aware of the postmodern distrust of narrators and concepts such as Barthes' death of the author and who consequently view even the external, authorial narrative voice as suspect, can finally solve the puzzle. In a manner as duplicitous as Hutcheon describes in her quote above, Ackroyd uses the postmodern parody of the genre as a clue to the solving of the mystery, which ensures the genre's reinforcement and continuation.

There are a number of narrators and a variety of narrative techniques in the novel. Firstly, we encounter an extradiegetic narrator who is relatively overt, making occasional judgements about his characters, such as comments about George Gissing's novels. This narrator narrates the story from a twentieth century perspective, as we understand from his knowledge of twentieth century events and inventions, and appears to be giving an account of historical events, thus employing one of the well-known conventions of the realistic novel. He

supports this historical account with other narrative mediums, such as court proceedings and newspaper reports, as well as extracts from the alleged murderer John Cree's diary. Each of these sources is marked and dated in a scholarly and seemingly reliable way, with such explanations as:

All extracts from the trial of Elizabeth Cree, for the murder of her husband, are taken from the full reports in the *Illustrated Police News Law Courts and Weekly Record* from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, 1881. (9)

and

These extracts are taken from the diary of Mr John Cree of New Cross Villas, South London, now preserved in the Manuscript Department of the British Museum, with the call-mark Add. Ms. 1624/566. (24)

Due to such explanations attached to these narrative sources, it appears as if they have been brought together by the extradiegetic narrator who, like a historian, has collected various sources of information to establish a scholarly and reliable account of these nineteenth century murders.

The second major narrator of the novel is the intradiegetic narrator, Elizabeth Cree, who tells her story in her own words, often following upon and extending the extradiegetic narrator's accounts. For example, Chapter Three is a court transcript at the end of which Elizabeth informs the prosecutor that she was once called "Lambeth Marsh Lizzie"; Chapter Four turns to Elizabeth's narrative of her days as Lambeth Marsh Lizzie, beginning "I was my mother's only child, and always an unloved one" and ending with her going to the Strand and seeing a poster of Dan Leno; in Chapter Five, the extradiegetic narrator takes over and continues the story as "Elizabeth walked through the streets until it became quite dark" (10, 11, 17). Elizabeth is definitely an unreliable narrator, and it is obvious throughout her narration that she is leaving things out and covering up her actions. For instance, after describing a particularly abusive act by her mother, she informs us that her mother "began to sicken after that. I bought some purging pills and palliative mixtures from the dispensary in Orchard Street, but nothing seemed to give her any benefit" (13). Even with her omissions and deflections, it becomes evident to an experienced reader of crime fiction that she is a murderess, though one who kills anyone who becomes an obstacle to her through inconspicuous means such as poisoning, as opposed to the apparently random, unmotivated, gruesome and staged murders of the Limehouse golem who, as we learn from the diary presented to us by the extradiegetic narrator, is her husband, John Cree. Husband and wife appear to be two murderers unaware of each other's crimes.

Of course, as we eventually learn through Elizabeth's confession to the priest before her execution, she is the actual Limehouse golem, but has forged her husband's diary so that people will eventually think that it was him and that she was a victim of this monstrous man:

I am the London phantom. [...] I kept a diary in his name, which will one day damn him before the world. [...] When the diary is found, I will be exonerated even for his death. The world will believe I destroyed a monster. (272-3)

Therefore, the diary that appears to confess to the murders and that has been presented to the reader as an apparently reliable historical source turns out to be as unreliable as Elizabeth. Moreover, the extradiegetic narrator, who seemed knowledgeable and reliable also turns out to be unreliable since he either took the diary at face value or purposefully deceived the readers. For example, following the diary entry of "John Cree" about the cab ride with Marx, the extradiegetic narrator begins the next chapter with the statement: "John Cree was wrong in assuming that the German scholar lived in Scofield Street" (63). In fact, Elizabeth was the one who wrote the diary, and she was the one who assumed that Marx lived on Scofield Street. If we attempt to explain this by taking the extradiegetic narrator to be a historian merely interpreting sources to come to a conclusion rather than an omniscient narrator, we are left with the question of how he is then able to narrate Elizabeth's confession to the priest about forging the diary. Therefore, there is either more than one extradiegetic narrator and we are not sure who is narrating when, or there is one narrator who blatantly lies to the reader. In either case, Ackroyd breaks

the most important rule of detective fiction, fair-play. When Agatha Christie made the criminal of her novel, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, the intradiegetic narrator, “she stirred up the noisiest debate in detective novel history” and was accused of not playing fair (Lehman 47). “Many readers felt that there either was or should have been a rule prohibiting the culprit from serving as the book’s narrator” (ibid). The experienced reader of crime fiction who knew about Christie’s novel would know not to trust the narration of Elizabeth, or even of John Cree. However, Ackroyd takes Christie’s subversion of the narrative technique of the genre one step further by problematizing the extradiegetic narrator as well as the intradiegetic ones and only an experienced reader of the postmodern novel would know to question the account of the extradiegetic narrator. For those who do, however, this subversion of fair-play itself becomes the greatest clue to the solving of the mystery, so that, once again, Ackroyd both subverts and maintains, simultaneously serving both the crime novel and the postmodern novel.

The most obvious indication as to the unreliability of the extradiegetic narrator is his deliberate fictionalisation of historical events and persons. This use of historical settings, figures and events in a way that mingles fact and fiction and makes it difficult to separate history from story is a favourite device of postmodernism, termed as historiographic metafiction by Hutcheon (1989: 3). The aim is not only to add colour to fictional narratives through the addition of fictionalised historical figures, but to comment upon the unreliability of historical facts and to show that history itself is in fact a narrative, a story accepted as true. This approach to history becomes quite interesting within the context of the crime novel because, in a sense, the work of the detective, who uses his/her reason to put various pieces of evidence together to reach the truth of a past occurrence, is similar to that of the historian. In her article “Detective Fiction and Historical Narrative”, O’Gorman writes,

One model of detective fiction which invites comparison with historical writing evokes a series of rather comforting parallels between detective and historian. The detective seeks a solution to a mystery or mysteries. The solution is arrived at through the scrutiny of material evidence and the careful questioning of witnesses: in short, through a process of retracing, recovering the past. The detective is bound by an obligation beyond that to any human individual: an obligation to Truth. Above all, this model of detective fiction as history presupposes the existence of one prior, correct version of the past, at which it is possible to arrive by a careful process of recovery, and to which it is imperative to owe allegiance. (20)

The assumption that there is one correct version of the past that can be discovered through careful investigation and rational analysis – an assumption that is crucial for the crime novel to function properly – is undermined by the self-conscious fictionalisation of history that the extradiegetic narrator engages in. Therefore, his inclusion of historical figures like Marx, Gissing and Leno as characters in his narrative, and his blurring of fact and fiction in their depiction – like attributing an essay of Ackroyd’s own creation to Gissing (35), making Marx interested in the Jewish Cabbala and work on a long epic poem about the Limehouse district, entitled *The Secret Sorrows of London* (45, 64), changing Dan Leno’s year of birth (from 1860 to 1850) and having him save Charlie Chaplin’s life (22, 200), and making all three characters suspects in a fictional series of murders (that he pretends are historical) – all cast suspicion on his reliability as a narrator and therefore on everything that he tells us about the murder mystery. Yet, instead of preventing the puzzle aspect of crime fiction from functioning properly, this very unreliability itself functions as the biggest piece of the puzzle enabling readers to solve the mystery.

The historical characters in *Dan Leno* also fulfil another necessary function for crime fiction. Characters in this genre are generally recognisable types, such as the clear thinking and organised secretary, the hysterical French maid, the calm and controlled English housekeeper, the elderly repressed spinster, the rich uncle without an heir and so on. These stereotypes enable the writer to spend a minimum amount of time and space on characterisation and the readers to easily recognise the characters so that they can focus on the solving of the mystery. Instead of using such stereotypical characters, Ackroyd uses characters that are recognisable because they are famous historical figures. All three major suspects in the case, Gissing, Marx and Leno, are characters that we already know. It is true that we know them more through their work than their personal lives, but that is also how Ackroyd depicts them – as the characters we would expect to be behind those works. Of course, Marx would remark that “murder is a bourgeois preoccupation” and that “murder is part of history, you see. It is not

outside history. It is the symptom, not the cause, of a great disease" (59, 93), the naturalist novelist Gissing would be attracted to the prostitute Nell, because "here was a modern outcast, who might have come from the pages of Emile Zola (111), and Dan Leno "was always laughing, he was never still, and he had a way of saying the most ordinary things so that you never forgot them (97). The fictional Marx even makes a self-reflexive comment on this method of characterisation, and on the way we tend to characterise him (as well as other famous historical figures) in the real world as well: "Sometimes I believe that I am made of ink and paper" (92). Literary critic James Wood comments disparagingly that "[n]ecessarily, the people in [Ackroyd's] novels are frozen in historical attitudes. They act not as human beings might but as historical reconstruction would expect them to" (no page). However, this is a useful method of characterisation for a detective novel. As Van Dine asserts, "[a] detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses, no "atmospheric" preoccupations. Such matters have no vital place in a record of crime and deduction. They hold up the action and introduce issues irrelevant to the main purpose, which is to state a problem, analyze it, and bring it to a successful conclusion" (190).

The detective figure of *Dan Leno* is one of the most parodic elements of the novel, completely thwarting the readers' expectations of how a detective should be and how they should go about their investigations. Although a great diversity of detectives have emerged as the protagonists of crime fiction, they generally have the common trait of being "mental supermen" as termed by Lehman (64). They engage in "cerebral, rather than physical, action" (Wagoner 33). They are intellectually superior to other people – usually including the police investigator in charge – and also have superior powers of observation, analysis and imagination. The classical detective, based on Poe's Dupin and Conan Doyle's Holmes (who is also based on the former), is a strong, masculine figure with certain eccentricities. He generally has a companion who is aligned with the mediocre reader in his inability to solve the mystery despite being provided with the same evidence, and in his fascinated observation of the detective's methods. Later writers of detective fiction sometimes altered this convention, introducing amateur sleuths surprisingly different from our expectations of a detective, such as Christie's Miss Marple, a middle-aged spinster living in a small village, whose basic skills are her common sense and her careful observation of human nature, or Chesterton's unassuming Catholic priest Father Brown, who has an understanding of criminals and of human nature due to his close contact with all kinds of people.

The detective figure of *Dan Leno*, Inspector Kildare, is in fact more similar to the dull police-investigators of detective novels, who follow all the wrong tracks and end up with all the wrong conclusions, while the intelligent private or amateur detective successfully solves the puzzle. There is no such intelligent, talented detective in the novel. Instead, the reader seems to have been placed in the role of amateur detective; only the reader is able to find out the truth about the Limehouse Golem and her murders. This is in fact a parody of the importance of the reader's participation in detective fiction. Rather than having the reader solve the mystery alongside the detective, Ackroyd gives the reader the whole role of being the detective, and an experienced reader of detective fiction will willingly take on the challenge based on his/her previous experiences in the genre.

The relationship of the reader to Inspector Kildare is similar to that of the talented detective to the dull police inspectors officially in charge of the case in classical detective stories: the reader looks on in scorn and distrust as the inspector follows circumstantial evidence, asks irrelevant questions during interrogations, enthusiastically jumps to conclusions and seems incapable of collecting evidence or making observations. When he visits Marx in order to interrogate him, Kildare ends up asking nothing worthwhile, and is himself interrogated by Marx, who asks him questions about the murder; after listening "to [Marx] politely", they get up to leave, deciding that he is not the murderer, although they have not found out anything from him (94). Later, when Kildare interrogates Gissing, his suspicions of him based on completely circumstantial evidence (his visiting the murder victim before her death and giving her his address), he enthusiastically jumps to conclusions when he hears the title of Gissing's novel, *Workers in the Dawn*: "The police inspector had glimpsed some fatal connection between Karl Marx and George Gissing and, even in that moment, contemplated the possibilities of an insurrectionary conspiracy" (142-3). The inspector's final interrogation is of Dan Leno, who was a friend of the Gerrard family, but we soon learn that "Kildare had come to him as an observer...he was shrewd enough to realise that Leno was the man who would notice the smallest tone or detail in his encounters with other people" (203). The question that he asks Dan Leno is the cliché question asked by detectives to important witnesses, but seems irrelevant when dealing with a serial

killer who apparently attacks random victims: “Can you recall if Mr Gerrard ever seemed unaccountably nervous, Mr Leno?” (203). Kildare’s only similarity to famous detectives such as Sherlock Holmes is his smoking of a pipe (257) and the male companion with whom he shares a house and discusses his cases (very much like Holmes and Watson); however, this male companion soon turns out to be his homosexual partner (257), a playful allusion to similar conjectures regarding the relationship of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson. Thus, this convention is also subverted.

Another important convention of crime fiction is that there is always a personal motive for the crime, such as envy, inheritance, revenge, betrayal and the like. This makes it possible for the detective to eventually figure out who the murderer is. “It is a far cry from the random violence of the modern metropolis,” writes Lehman (109). Moreover, nearly all of the major characters in the story are revealed to have had the motive and opportunity of murdering the victim. In *Dan Leno*, despite the seeming randomness of the murder victims – two prostitutes, one Jewish scholar, a whole English family, and a number of other murders that are hinted at throughout and revealed at the end) – the criminal of the novel, Elizabeth Cree, does have personal motives for the crimes. However, the fact that she has a different motive for each murder again subverts the notion of the personal motive in classical detective fiction that eventually leads the detective to the criminal. Moreover, the fact that she murders different types of people with different methods of operation also subverts more recent portrayals of serial killers in contemporary crime fiction, who are shown to have specific preferences for victims as well as recurring, unique methods of operation. Elizabeth murders the prostitutes because a group of prostitutes laughed at her melodramatic role in *Misery Junction*. She kills the Jewish scholar, thinking him to be Marx, because she thinks it will be more challenging and bring more recognition, and that it will be interesting to open his skull and examine his brain. She kills the Gerrard family as a tribute to the Marr murders. Moreover, she kills her mother because she hates her, “Doris, who saw me...Uncle who soiled me...Little Victor, who touched me” (272). Although she has personal motives, they cannot be framed into a rationale or pattern that will eventually reveal her guilt. She is finally hanged and eliminated from society, but only for the murder of her husband who “threatened me” (273). Moreover, she has ensured her eventual immortal role as an innocent wife killing her monstrous husband, the Limehouse Golem: “When his diary is found, I will be exonerated even for his death. The world will believe I destroyed a monster” (273).

This not only frustrates the expectation of the murderer getting caught by the detective through the latter’s careful accumulation and analysis of evidence, but also displays the arbitrariness of evidence itself, even such seemingly “authoritative” evidence as a confessional diary. In crime fiction, evidence is of essential importance; everything has significance: a broken jar, newly-planted flowers, chance encounters, past relationships and so on. The detective brings all the evidence together, sometimes eliminates the red herrings or the irrelevant bits, and comes up with an explanation that accounts for all of the evidence and the motive and opportunity. Ackroyd instead displays the unreliability of “evidence” and the impossibility of construing what people did and why. Karl Marx’s frequent wanderings in the Limehouse area are in fact due to his writing a poem of the area; George Gissing is nearly convicted as the murderer due to the coincidence of his seeing his wife in the Limehouse area (where he had gone to see Charles Babbage’s Analytical Engine on which he was writing an article), chasing after her and meeting the prostitute who is murdered that very night, to whom he gives his address in order to receive information about his wife. He is also saved coincidentally, thanks to the fact that he decided to eat dinner at a chop-house rather than at home. “His whole existence in the world had been suddenly and quickly called into question. If he had not visited the chop-house he might well have been convicted and executed” (148). Dan Leno is also linked to the murders in several strange ways:

Leno had maintained a friendship with [Mr Gerrard] ever since. There were other curious factors, however, which connected Dan Leno to the murders committed by the Limehouse Golem. Jane Quig, the first victim...had told a friend that she was “off to see Leno” in his new pantomime and had boasted – falsely, as it turned out – that she was “acquainted with ‘im’...Alice Stanton...was found to be wearing female riding gear with a small linen attached to the inside collar bearing the name of “Mr Leno.” (201)

However, Leno was fortunately performing during the times of the murders. Unlike the trustworthiness of evidence in detective fiction, in which the explanation for the evidence is so complete and absolute that no other explanation can be plausible, evidence is shown to be arbitrary and ambivalent in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*.

Despite the arbitrariness of evidence and the unreliability of narrators, there *are* clues in the novel that can lead the detective-reader to the solution of the mystery, and there *is* a single truth that emerges at the end of the story, although only the readers discover it and the characters, including the detective, remain ignorant. The difference is that these clues are located, not in the “reality” but the representation of that reality: in the narrative. Once the reader realises that the extradiegetic narrator is unreliable, he/she approaches the intradiegetic narrator’s account of her own life with suspicion, and this is crucial to solving the mystery of the murders. Thus, the extradiegetic narrator’s fictionalised account of the historical events and personages of the country parallels Elizabeth Cree’s fictionalised account of the history of her own life. A further clue to this is given early in the story, when, long before discovering the scope of the fictionality of her narrative, the reader witnesses Elizabeth’s fictionalisation of her early life to her colleagues at the theatre: “I had invented a whole history which made me much more interesting to myself, and I really had no difficulty sustaining it” (107). The extradiegetic narrator might easily form a similar sentence concerning his portrayal of Victorian London.

Accordingly, many of the clues emerge in between the lines of Elizabeth’s own narrative: her preparation of cordials for her mother, Aveline’s unborn child and John Cree, all of whom end up dead; her pouring gin into her mother’s mouth after her death “to cover up the smell” (50); the fact that everyone who begins to pose a threat to her miraculously dies, relieving her of their burden – her mother, Victor Farrell, Doris, Uncle, and her husband; her success on the stage of acting out a variety of different characters, both male and female; her large, coarse hands with which she nearly strangles Dan Leno on stage (182); her excursions into the streets of London dressed as a male (153); her successful impersonation of her husband’s voice to Aveline (223); her successful forging of her husband’s play and letters of recommendation in his name for her use of the library (237, 269); her lies and her “uncontrollable” “other personality” that appears when she is on stage (106); and her frequent comparisons of life to the theatre, and living to acting, tied to the frequent analogies made by other characters between the Limehouse murders and acting – such as Kildare’s surmise: “Perhaps he was an actor playing a part” (204).

In addition to the clues dispersed throughout Elizabeth’s narrative, the unreliability of narrators should lead an attentive reader to the conclusion that the diary of John Cree, in which Elizabeth’s husband confesses to being the Limehouse Golem, is also unreliable. This, in turn, eliminates the biggest red herring of the story, while also causing the reader to question the notion of “evidence” itself, thus simultaneously serving both the detective story and its postmodern parody.

In spite of the satisfying closure of the mystery, one of the most important conventions of crime fiction, the restoration of order, is thwarted in the novel. In classical detective fiction the social order is disrupted through a crime; facts and evidence begin to emerge, which are eventually put together by the detective into a meaningful explanation of what happened and who disrupted the social order; the disrupter is then removed from society, and order is restored. This is one of the reasons that crime fiction is perceived as escapist or healing by many readers. A study published in the *Medical Humanities Journal*, which examines crime fiction for its bibliotherapeutic value, states that:

Examining readers’ responses as a starting point identifies some reasons why crime fiction fulfils a need. Readers in an empirical study spoke about the strong narrative as a distraction, the predictability as a comfort and the safe distance from events as a reassurance that left them feeling that reading crime fiction was a refuge from the world. (Brewster 62)

In spite of the suspense and anticipation, the reader of a work of detective fiction is always assured of the fact that the mystery and the problem will be solved, and order will be restored. There is also the assurance of a single, objective truth that can eventually be reached using evidence and reason. According to Rzepka, this is the reason that crime fiction flourished in the period following World War I:



With its reliable evocation of order out of disorder, its respect for the rule of law in defence of life and property, and its faith that a rational intention informs even the most baffling acts of violence, the new genre of detection seemed tailor-made to allay the anxieties that lingered below the superficial complacency of British middle-class life. (153)

In *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, the criminal is eliminated from society, as the convention requires, but order is not restored. The implication is that there is indeed no order to restore, as the society itself is diseased and disorderly, as the fictional Marx comments to Detective Kildare. This disorder is evident in the last chapter, when Elizabeth's life and execution are being performed in the theatre, and the actress playing Elizabeth, Aveline, is in fact executed by mistake. However, the "show must go on", and Dan Leno covers up the tragedy by performing his comedy to the audience; thus, the play continues as does life, both forming illusions of order on an underlying reality of disorder.

In conclusion, in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, postmodern fiction and crime fiction feed off of, while also subverting one another. Postmodern fiction uses the elements of crime fiction as a source of pastiche and parody and an opportunity to make metacommentary on a number of issues, particularly the aestheticisation and sensationalisation of crime and violence. Meanwhile, crime fiction makes use of the elements of postmodern fiction as a means of concealing the facts and confusing the reader, and also as a means of revealing the truth to observant readers experienced in postmodern tropes such as the unreliability of narrators and the fictionality of historical narratives. This "commitment to doubleness" makes Ackroyd's novel ironically and "ironically" one that simultaneously undermines and maintains the genre of crime fiction through the use of postmodernism.

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