



## MAPPING LONDON IN PETER ACKROYD'S *DAN LENO AND THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM*: PROMENADES INTO A MURDERER'S MIND

PETER ACKROYD'UN *DAN LENO AND THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM* İNDE LONDRA HARİTACILIĞI: BİR KATİLİN ZİHNİNDE GEZİNTİLER

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### Abstract

This article explores the concept of violence in Peter Ackroyd's novel titled *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. The relationship between the protagonist and the city is considered to be the source of violence in the novel. As this work points out, it is the physical and psychological forces prevailing in the socio-economic conditions of nineteenth century Victorian London which gave birth to, fed, and continually encouraged the ruthless serial killer for the next massacre. Yet the reader can decipher the true identity of this human monster only at the end of the novel. It is actually Elizabeth Cree, who has overcome all the difficulties in her life, realised her childhood dreams and become a successful music hall actress, and is now performing her art of murder to be appreciated by Londoners in the city, which is depicted as a macrocosmic theatre stage. Since the murderess disregards her victims' ethnic, class, gender and age diversities, the reader hardly understands what motivates her to kill, and cannot establish a logical cause-effect relationship behind the murders. The use of postmodern narrative techniques in the novel's plot structure enables the author not only to challenge the norms of traditional detective fiction and reconstruct the genre but also to make the reader reconsider the concept of crime and criminal psychology which are based on prejudices and presumptions. Consequently, this article deals with such questions as: Did London in the Victorian Era offer its inhabitants equal socio-economic, artistic opportunities? Or did the city act like a monster gnashing and spitting out its poor, weak, needy inhabitants, especially women? Is it possible to associate London's peculiar history and identity with those of the serial killer? And, what happens when the city, whose name is derived from a word meaning "fierce," becomes the mindscape of a lower-class character who has been brought up with pure hatred?

### Öz

Bu makale Peter Ackroyd'un *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* başlıklı romanındaki şiddet olgusunu incelemektedir. Makale romandaki şiddetin kaynağı olan şehir imgesi ile baş karakter arasındaki ilişkiyi ele alır. Makaleye göre okuyucunun gerçek kimliğini ancak romanın sonunda anlayabildiği acımasız seri katili yaratan, besleyen ve bir sonraki katliam için sürekli cesaretlendirerek adeta bir canavara dönüştüren on dokuzuncu yüzyıl Viktorya Dönemi Londra'sının sosyo-ekonomik koşullarında hüküm süren fiziksel ve psikolojik güçlerdir. Yaşadığı tüm zorlukları aşarak çocukluk hayallerini gerçekleştiren ve genç yaşta başarılı bir müzikhol oyuncusu olan Elizabeth Cree kanlı sanatını makrokozmetik bir tiyatro sahnesi olarak betimlenen Londra'da izleyicilerin beğenisine sunmaktadır. Katilin kurbanları arasında etnik köken, sınıf, cinsiyet ve yaş ayrımı yapmaması, okuyucunun katilin motivasyonunu anlamlandırarak mantıklı bir sebep-sonuç ilişkisi kurmasına engel olur. Postmodern anlatım teknikleri kullanılarak oluşturulan olay örgüsü yazarın hem dedektif romanı geleneğine meydan okuyarak türü yeniden kurgulamasını hem de okuyucunun önyargı ve varsayıma dayanan suç kavramı ve suçlu psikolojisi ile ilgili yerleşik algılarını yeniden sorgulamasını sağlar. Sonuç olarak makale bir Viktorya Dönemi metropolü olan Londra sakinlerine eşit sosyo-ekonomik, sanatsal fırsatlar sağlayabiliyor mu? Yoksa şehir yoksul, zayıf, yoksun sakinlerini, özellikle kadınları, bir canavar gibi çiğnemedi yutup posalarını tükürüyor mu? Londra'nın özgün tarihçesi ve kimliğini seri katilin yaşam öyküsü ve kimliği ile örtüştürmek olası mıdır? Etimolojik açıdan isminin kökeni "şiddet" kelimesine dayanan bir şehir olan Londra, alt sınıftan, nefret duyguları ile büyütülmüş bir karakterin zihinsel haritasına dönüştüğünde ne olur? gibi sorulara cevap aramaktadır.

This article traces the parallels between the mindscape of a serial killer and the cityscape which perpetually inspires, encourages, and triggers Elizabeth Cree's monstrous impulse to kill in Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1995). In fact, it is the city, namely Victorian London in the 1880s, which begets and grooms the ruthless killer whose true identity is revealed only at the very end of the novel. In a sense, Ackroyd's London becomes the macrocosmic stage on which the protagonist, music hall actress Elizabeth Cree, commits her last serial murders within thirteen days. All the killings occur in Limehouse, a neighbourhood in East End of London; the victims are two prostitutes (Jane Quig and Alice Stanton), an old Jewish scholar named Solomon Weil, and the entire Gerrard family. The unidentified killer is given the name "golem," "a medieval Jewish word for an artificial being," after the discovery of some of the mutilated body parts of Solomon Weil on the pages of "Hartlib's *Knowledge of Sacred Things* across the entry for 'golem'" (*Golem* 92).

The novel opens and ends with the hanging scene of Elizabeth Cree who is condemned to death for poisoning her husband, John Cree. Elizabeth's perfect acting skills and her remarkably wise and respectful testimony on the trial make the reader think that she is an innocent woman unjustly accused of murdering her husband. Due to the author's polyphonic narrative—including Elizabeth's own record of her life story, the omniscient narrator's account of her life, episodes from her trial, and her husband's diary—and, most of all, due to the false supposition shared by several characters that the murderer must be a young man, the reader often fails to connect the appalling scenes of butchery to Elizabeth Cree.

Author Deyan Sudjic, in his work, *The Language of Cities*, offers a definition of the "city" that will be helpful in analysing the parallels between the cityscape and the mindscape of a murderess: "A city is made by its people, within the bounds of possibilities that it can offer them: it has a distinctive identity that makes it much more than an agglomeration of buildings. Climate, topography and architecture are part of what creates that distinctiveness, as are its origins" (1). Sudjic's definition of the city evokes a number of thought-provoking questions around Ackroyd's portrayal of London in the novel: to what extent did the London of the times fail to offer equal socio-economic and artistic opportunities to its inhabitants of diverse genders and of diverse ethnicities? Or, did the city act like a monster gnashing and spitting out its poor, weak, needy inhabitants, especially women? What kind of socio-economic, physical, and psychological forces and conditions prevailing in

Ackroyd's nineteenth-century London could make up a fictional serial killer operating in a realistically drawn urban setting? Is it possible to associate London's distinctive origins and identity with those of the protagonist-murderess? A final question might be the one Lehan asks in *The City in Literature*: "What happens when the city becomes a state of mind?" (7). Evidently, the answer to all the above-mentioned questions, including the one Lehan asks, lies in the personality of Elizabeth Cree.

To begin with, Ackroyd associates Elizabeth's nickname, "Lambeth Marsh Lizzie," with the origin of the name "London." Although none of the variants proposed for the etymology of "London" has been confirmed as definitive, Ackroyd seems to favour the one that evokes an image of violence and fierceness, as is seen in his monumental work, *London: The Biography*:

The name is assumed to be of Celtic origin, [...]. Its actual meaning, however, is disputed. It might be derived from *Llyndon*, the town or stronghold (*don*) by the lake or stream (*Llyn*); but this owes more to medieval Welsh than ancient Celtic. Its provenance might be *Laindon*, "long hill," or the Gaelic *lunnd*, "marsh." One of the more intriguing speculations, given the reputation for violence which Londoners were later to acquire, is that the name is derived from the Celtic adjective *londos* meaning "fierce." (10).

Being an illegitimate child, "Lambeth Marsh Lizzie" is brought up in Lambeth by her mother, who is regarded as "a reformed whore," as was the custom of the times, "for having a child without husband" (*Golem* 12). Until the mother's death, Elizabeth and her mother could hardly make a living in their miserable lodging by sewing cloths for the fishermen in Lambeth Marsh. Elizabeth's traumatic childhood is marked by hard work, poverty, and lovelessness. Interestingly, unlike Ackroyd's other characters, none of Elizabeth's physical traits are mentioned, except for her hands. The continual emphasis on the improper size of the hands draws attention not only to an incredibly destitute, toilsome, and detested childhood, but also to the upcoming days of violent murders for the hands would be those of the bloodthirsty Golem of Limehouse. As suggested by Elizabeth's own account, the impacts of child labour on her hands, and her hateful relationship with her unnamed mother factor into the development of her insane violence:

[Sewing the sailing cloths] was exceedingly violent work, and even my leather gloves could not keep the cloth and the needle from chafing my hands. Look at them now, so worn and so raw. When I put them

against my face, I can feel the ridges upon them like cart-tracks. Big hands my mother used to say. No female should have big hands. And none, I thought, should have so big a mouth. (12).

Obviously, due to long hours of hard work for a young child, Elizabeth's hands have grown to an enormous size. After the burial of the bitter mother in the "paupers' graveyard," Elizabeth remembers with a smile on her face, the names her mother used to call her: "... *I was one of her sins. I was the sign of the devil, the bitch from hell, the curse upon her*" (50). The names the mother attributes to her only daughter display that she lacks even the slightest touch of motherly affection towards "little Lizzie."

In his foreword to *London: The Biography*, Ackroyd mentions the historical representations of London images envisaged in various human forms ranging from "the mystical body," "the body of a young man," "the Cockney body," and, finally, to an amorphous gigantic body. Among them, a seventeenth-century image of the city as a living organism marked by boundless greed and desire for growth appears to be the basis of Ackroyd's notion of London: "*It is fleshy and voracious, grown fat upon its appetite for people and for food, for goods and for drink; it consumes and it excretes, maintained within a continual state of greed and desire*" (1-2). According to the author, the city's uncurbed greed for consumption is the very reason for its customary portrayal as a disproportionate monstrous form: "... *a swollen and dropsical giant which kills more than breeds. Its head is too large, and out of proportion to the other members; its face and hands have also grown monstrous, irregular and 'out of all shape'*" (2). What matters in all this metaphorical imagery is that Ackroyd views the city as a living organism, whether it be a young man or an amorphous giant with disproportionate hands; significantly, he applies these two metaphors to the golem of Limehouse and thereby to Elizabeth Cree as well, thus establishing an organic link between the city and the murderous mind.

Prior to talking about the distinctive features of nineteenth-century Limehouse, the novel's fascinating setting, it will be helpful to dwell on a twelfth-century monk's London impressions. According to Richard of Devizes, "*London was a place of evil and wrong-doing filled with the worst elements of every race as well as native pimps and braggarts*" (*London: The Biography* 52). He also states that Londoners' appetite for theatre was not limited to miracle and mystery plays even as early as those times. The monk's cynical description of the city's population in the period reads as follows: "[*It comprises*] *in part 'pretty boys, effeminates,*

*pederasts,' [...] joined by 'quacks, belly-dancers, sorceresses, extortioners, night wanderers, magicians, mimes' in a panoply of urban life. [...] It is the permanent condition of London" (52). However, contrary to Richard of Devizes, Ackroyd thinks that this "permanent condition of London" would be "celebrated rather than condemned in other centuries" (52).*

The name "Limehouse" came from the lime kilns which were used by potters for manufacturing goods for shipping companies and ships in the East End docks. What is noteworthy is that although Limehouse is one of the poorest neighbourhoods of the city, it has a cosmopolitan atmosphere sheltering people from various ethnicities and of different cultural backgrounds. Wandering in the streets of Limehouse at foggy nights in the guise of a young gentleman, the murderess finds her victims sometimes at random—like the two prostitutes—and sometimes she chooses and chases her preys before butchering them in their lodgings—like Solomon Weil and the Gerrards. All homicides occur in dark, densely foggy, macabre nights of Limehouse, enabling the murderess to slaughter her victims without being seen by any living soul. The name "golem" is given to the murderess after her brutal killing of Solomon Weil, who is a Jewish inhabitant of Limehouse. Since the murderess thinks that her first murder did not trigger sufficient public outrage—after all, the victim is an ordinary prostitute whose death would be forgotten in a couple of days—the disguised Elizabeth decides to kill Karl Marx, one of the historical figures in the novel. The murderess sees her homicides as products of fine artistry and wishes them to satisfy Londoners' lust for blood. In her mind, her "works of art" should shock, yet be greatly admired by violent Londoners:

And then I recalled the scholar. It was an easy thing to kill a whore, [...] and there could be no real or lasting glory in it. In any case, so strong is the public lust for blood that the whole city would be waiting in anticipation for the killing of another flash girl. That would be the beauty of the Jew: It would throw all into confusion, and lend such splendour and excitement to my progress that each new death would be eagerly awaited. I would become the model of the age. (64).

The quotation suggests the murderess-artist's ultimate desire to receive the audiences' applause and deep admiration for her criminal performance—not just for the one she has already staged in Limehouse, but for the future ones she is planning to commit as well.



Yet, the one who resides in the misidentified address is not Marx but Solomon Weil, the unfortunate friend and colleague of Marx. The weekly visits Marx pays to Solomon Weil so as to converse on matters of belief, theology, history, and theatre, and his routine of strolling in Limehouse streets make the renowned philosopher a suspect in the eyes of the two London detectives. When Chief Inspector Kildare and Detective Bryden inform Marx about the details of Weil's brutal death, the philosopher's grief turns into rage because he thinks that the actual target of the violent act is not just a human being but the whole Jewish community. Marx furiously states that the ones to blame are irresponsible authorities who disregard the fact that the crime is committed against a particular ethnic group. When he hears the name given to the killer, his anger deepens:

‘So now they call this murderer a golem, do they? [...] So they absolve themselves of their responsibilities, and declare that the Jew is killed by a Jewish monster! Make no mistake about it, gentlemen. It is the Jew who has been killed, not Solomon Weil. It is the Jew who has been violated, and now they wash their hands clean!’ (92).

The two detectives try to appease the philosopher, explaining that Jane Quig, who has been similarly mutilated, was not a Hebrew. The conclusion Marx draws is that the real force, which creates these deaths, is the foul, demonic London which turns a human being, metaphorically speaking, into a mythical monster figure: *“But do you see how this murderer strikes at the very symbol of the city? The Jew and the whore are the scapegoats in the desert of London, and they must be ritually butchered to appease some terrible god. [...] ‘The dramatists treat the streets as theatre, but it is a theatre of oppression and cruelty’”* (93-94). Obviously, to Marx, this “terrible god” is London, the creator of golem. Solomon Weil's violent death, shortly after that of Jane Quig, gives way to “a frenzied interest among ordinary Londoners,” confirming in a sense London's status “as the largest and darkest city of the world” (88). Hence, the search for the golem, which is considered an emblem of the city, “becomes a search for the secret of London itself” (88).

Marx's misinterpretation of the crime as an ethnic attack draws attention to the ironic contrast between Ackroyd's golem and the golem in Jewish folklore. Originally, the mythical golem is created out of red clay by a rabbi to protect the Jewish race. This creature takes on life when the rabbi writes the Hebrew word “aemet,” meaning “truth,” on its forehead. When the rabbi removes the initial aleph, the meaning changes into “met,” i.e., “death,” which causes the golem to turn into inanimate matter once again. In the novel, Ackroyd rewrites the myth and

transforms the golem into a destroyer rather than a protector. The creator of Ackroyd's golem is not a rabbi but the city, and unlike its Hebrew counterpart, it is a killer of people of every race, class, age, and gender. Also, the author's use of colour symbolism is worth considering in that in *The Biography* Ackroyd states that "red" is London's colour, signifying fire and devastation. In this respect, the city's symbolic colour might be associated with "red clay," the colour of golem's generative material, and with blood.

It is seen that the mystery Ackroyd constructs around the true identity of his serial killer is based on an intricate web of gender relations formulated by prejudices, wrong assumptions, and Elizabeth Cree's theatre career, which renders her extraordinarily skilled as an impersonator. The author forces the reader to question the chiasmic gender relations followed most visibly in the omniscient narrator's account of the first owner of Solomon Weil's "remarkable library":

[...] many of the books in his collection had once belonged to the Chevalier d'Eon, the famous French transsexual, who had lodged in London in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The Chevalier had been particularly interested in cabbalistic lore, largely because of its emphasis upon an original divine androgyny from which the two sexes sprang. D'Eon bequeathed his collection to an artist and Freemason, William Cosway, who in turn had left it to a mezzotint engraver with whom he had collaborated in certain occult experiments. This engraver then converted to Judaism, and [...] left his entire library to Solomon Weil. (64-65).

The title "Chevalier" given to D'Eon and the emphasis on his being a well-known "French transsexual" make the reader think that in his androgynous self, the Chevalier simultaneously embodies all the masculine traits attributed to man and all the psychological ones assumed to be possessed by woman. Likewise, Elizabeth's disguising of herself as a young man during the killings is an expression of her androgynous self, an externalisation of the fierce masculine power hidden inside the presumably soft, submissive female body. In "Peter Ackroyd's Imaginary Projections," David William Charnick states that "[Elizabeth] takes her most successful character, the Older Brother, beyond the stage; [and] walks the streets at night in her male drag" (63). It should also be noted that the act of cross-dressing is not plotted to confuse the police and thus escape the law. The discovery of Weil's severed genitals on the pages of the entry on the mythical golem signals an obvious chiasmic connection between D'Eon, Elizabeth Cree, and London, Ackroyd's three

androgynies in the novel, and this very connection enables the author to blur the putative gender boundaries concerning the distinct nature of male and female sexes. As Charnick suggests, “... *cross-dressing is at the heart of this narrative dominated by performance. However, while Dan Leno retains his own identity despite the characters he adopts, Elizabeth inhabits her characters, losing her own identity as she projects herself further away from the abused girl from the Lambeth Marshes*” (63). Consequently, the horrific state of mutilated bodies, and the testimony of a witness about the sudden disappearance of an almost transparent, ghost-like young man, combined with the common belief that commitment of such violence requires masculine power, and that female nature, which is supposed to be delicate and meek, has no innate tendency to commit such massacres, mislead the detectives and bring four men under suspicion. The first three suspects are historical figures: these are Karl Marx, whose connection to Solomon Weil’s death is already mentioned; novelist George Gissing, who is notorious as “the husband of a shameless prostitute;” and the legendary comedian Dan Leno, Elizabeth’s benefactor and mentor, without whom she could never realise her only dream of becoming a brilliant music hall actress. The reason for the involvement of Gissing and Leno in the murder of Alice Stanton is that her dead body is found in a female jockey costume which was once worn by Leno on stage; and, the content of her pocket is a bloodstained notepaper on which Gissing’s name and address is written. The fourth suspect, however, is the fictional John Cree—journalist, unsuccessful playwright, and Elizabeth’s husband. According to the omniscient narrator’s account, Alice Stanton has purchased the suspicious *outfit “from the second-hand clothes dealer, whose shop upon the Ratcliffe Highway had already been visited by John Cree”* (125). The details of all the committed murders, as well as John Cree’s visit to Mr. Gerrard’s second-hand shop are recounted in Cree’s diary. It is this diary that makes John Cree the fourth suspect; yet, the diary is a forged one written by Elizabeth to incriminate her husband.

Being a remarkable exponent of postmodern narrative techniques, Ackroyd brings together his historical and fictional suspects in the Reading Room of the British Museum. Ackroyd’s juxtaposition of historical and fictional characters in various instances in the novel confirms Susana Onega’s views concerning the author’s writing that “*the boundaries between fiction and reality are non-existent, that the difference between [...] real and fictional worlds simply does not hold*” (*Metafiction and Myth in the Novels of Peter Ackroyd* 31). The Reading Room accounts of John Cree’s forged diary reveal that Thomas De Quincey’s essay “On



Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts” inspires Elizabeth and accelerates the process of her metamorphosis into the city’s relentless murderess. De Quincey’s essay transforms John Williams, who was in truth “a nondescript ex-seaman” and the killer of the Marr family in the exact location sixty-eight years before the slaughter of the Gerrards, into “*an avenger whose bright yellow hair and chalk-white countenance afforded him the significance of some primeval deity*” (37), as dictated by the high Romanticism of the times. In the essay, De Quincey presents John Williams as the Romantic artist performing his supreme art of killing in his studio; and his studio, where his keen audiences watch this awesome performance, is London. Elizabeth’s critique of De Quincey’s writing style and his description of London as the “massive and monstrous city” in the essay reads as follows:

Few writers had so keen and horrified a sense of place, and within this relatively short essay he evokes a sinister, crepuscular London, a haven for strange powers, a city of footsteps and flaring lights, of houses packed together, of lachrymose alleys and false doors. London becomes a brooding presence behind, or perhaps within, the murders themselves; it is as if John Williams had in fact become an avenging angel of the city. (38).

As stated in the forged diary, the sufferings to which De Quincey was exposed in the maze-like streets of London inspired the author to visualise the city as “the landscape of his imagination.” To the diary writer, De Quincey created a dark interior world within the tangible world in which “*suffering, poverty and loneliness are the most striking elements*” (39). In “Crime Narratives in Peter Ackroyd’s Historiographic Metafiction,” critic Petr Chalupsky claims that “[t]his faked diary itself represents an artistic enterprise, since it explores the murderer’s mind, a narrative strategy which is becoming increasingly popular in contemporary crime fiction and which has been labelled ‘criminal mind style’” (125). As Chalupsky suggests, the diary provides the reader with a trajectory to follow “*the motives behind the murderer’s acts, observe her elaborate preparations, [detect] 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*” (125). In brief, both the diary and the first-person account of Elizabeth’s life story not only contribute to the novel’s playfulness by subverting the conventions of detective genre due to the detectives failed attempts to find out the true identity of the “human monster,” but also allow the reader to draw a detailed map of the workings of a criminal mind that is programmed to

destroy. The omniscient narrator equips the novel with a third perspective in addition to the ones provided by Elizabeth Cree; yet, Ackroyd again subverts the traditional role of the omniscient narrator, offering the reader unconventional one who is obviously not all-knowing, and who fails to demystify the real identity of the serial killer. In Chalupsky's words, *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* comes to the fore as an outstanding expression of Ackroyd's frequent "use of crime narratives in his novels, combining his interest in literature and history with his fascination with the recurrent patterns of crime and violence in London. [...and] the peculiar, enigmatic or otherwise irrational aspects of London life" (121). Ackroyd's novel enables the reader to trace the violence springing from the relationship established between the malevolent city and a perverted criminal mind. The hanging scene of Elizabeth Cree is a proof of London's power to both create and destroy her malign offspring, who is capable of such bloodshed without disclosing her ultimate secret that she is the actual culprit, the golem of Limehouse, responsible for the death of not just her husband, but all the other homicides in the novel.

One last discussion is based on reflections upon the role theatre plays in Elizabeth's transformation into the golem of Limehouse. Considering Elizabeth's success on stage, one cannot help asking the question once again: how could such an extraordinarily gifted comedian like Elizabeth turn into a killing machine? It is seen that finding a reasonable answer to this question is quite difficult in that, despite all the hardships of her painful childhood, Elizabeth manages to enter and rise in the glittering world of theatre. Obviously, she owes her artistic success to Dan Leno's support and belief in her talent, as well as to her combatant nature. In this respect, it is possible to claim that Elizabeth's metamorphosis confuses the reader entirely, for the reader's assumption is that her theatre career, which she starts as a prompter, a play-copier in the Craven Street Theatre, and, which is meant to be the fulfilment of her dreams, would not allow such a horrific transformation. Elizabeth defines her life in theatre as the heavenly period of light that ended the darkness of her childhood. She divides her life into two as before and after theatre. In her first life in Lambeth Marsh "[she] had seen things darkly, but now they were most clear and brilliant" (52). In fact, the only place for which she develops a sense of belonging with all her heart is theatre. As soon as her mother dies, Elizabeth goes to the Craven Street Theatre to watch Dan Leno's mesmerising performance on stage. Elizabeth's depiction of her mood and her surroundings before and after her first theatre experience as an audience is noteworthy. The instant Elizabeth steps foot in the theatre building, all the bitter memories related

to her past life disappear: “*All thoughts of Lambeth Marsh and of my mother disappeared as I took my ticket and went up into the gods. This was where I belonged, with the golden angels all around me*” (52). Before plunging into the familiar darkness of London streets after the performance, an awestruck Elizabeth muses on her unwillingness to leave the theatre, likening the act of leaving to a kind of fall from heavenly grace:

I had not had a bit to eat since my mother’s death, but I felt so revived and refreshed that I could have stayed in the gods for ever. When it all came to an end, [...] I could hardly bring myself to leave: I think I would be sitting there still, staring down at the pit, if the crowd had not pushed and pulled me out into the street. It was like being expelled from some wonderful garden or palace.[...] (53).

Elizabeth’s passionate account of her first contact with theatre shows that she is inseparably tied to the stage. What gives meaning to her life is theatre and without it, Elizabeth believes, she could not even breathe. In that case, Elizabeth’s marriage, which cuts off her bonds with theatre, seems to be a logical cause for her transformation into a serial killer. Yet, Little Victor’s suspicious death, and three others occurring before Elizabeth’s marriage to John Cree and the Limehouse serial killings, refute this idea. Little Victor is another actor who is performing his famous role of “The Midshipmate” in Dan Leno’s company. When Victor’s obsessive interest in Elizabeth turns into sexual harassment, Elizabeth punishes him first by pushing his finger back, and then by giving him “a savage kick” in the presence of all the diners, including John Cree, in the theatre canteen. John Cree kindly assists Elizabeth and asks whether she feels better. Elizabeth replies: “*I have been very ill used,’ [...] ‘But I think I must have some guardian angel who saves me from evil*” (102). The irony in her reply is that Elizabeth does not need any “guardian angel” for protection because she herself is the unleashed devil of London, who would commit a murder within a few hours. Elizabeth’s report of the seemingly accidental death of Little Victor reads as follows:

[...] just a few hours after I had met John Cree, [...], the body of Little Victor Farrell was found in a basement area two streets away: his neck had been broken, no doubt because of some drunken fall. It was believed that he had wandered through the night and somehow tripped down the stairs which led to the basement. ‘The Midshipmate’ was no more. (102).

Thus, Little Victor's death initiates Elizabeth's rise in her artistic career for she starts playing the character of "Little Victor's daughter," receiving great applause from the audience.

Elizabeth Cree performs her last role in her cell in Camberwell Prison the night before her execution in the presence of the priest, the only audience to witness her bloodcurdling confession. Elizabeth tells the priest of her foul deeds as if they were incidents taken from the play she wrote. The title of her play is *The London Phantom*. To the reader's surprise, Elizabeth's confession adds to the list of her victims three names other than the already mentioned ones. It is seen that the appalling list of her victims also includes her own mother, one of her fellow actresses named Doris, and the actor nicknamed "Uncle." Elizabeth's confession bears the sign of neither regret nor any pang of conscience: "*First there was my mother. Then came Doris, who saw me. There was Uncle, who soiled me. Oh, I have forgotten Little Victor, who touched me. The Jew was a Christ killer, you see, as my mother used to say. And the whores of Limehouse were the dirtiest of their kind*" (272). Her confession about John Cree's faked diary uncovers the veil of mist in the reader's mind: "*Well, I made up a diary and laid the guilt upon him. [...] I kept [the] diary in his name, which will one day damn him before the world. [...] Wasn't it a neat piece of business, too? When his diary is found, I will be exonerated even for his death. The world will believe I destroyed a monster*" (272). It is only John Cree who realises on his death bed that his wife is the golem of Limehouse. Until the moment Elizabeth lays bare the truth concerning her guilt, no one, neither the detectives nor the other characters—with the exception of her husband—nor even the readers suspect that she is the golem. Her tricks deceive everyone struggling to hunt down the murderer. Indeed, "the avenging angel" of London goes to death with the proud satisfaction of fulfilling her mission, and she thus vanishes into London's fierce and mysterious history, adding to it the undisclosed secrets of her criminal story.

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