

Book: The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein
Host: David Novak- brought wine
Home: Leon Cabinet at the increasingly popular Diplomat

Louise called our meeting to order promptly at 7:50 and offered thanks to hosts

Treasurer: not in attendance but nothing new to report anyhow.

Minutes: James moves to approve minutes Dianne seconds-

Membership report- Karen and Joe Peter officially members, Lee Haas on track to join

Program committee- meeting February 22. Please send book recommendations with a blurb.

James- Reported on his research of the amplification system. He let us know that we can spend from 60\$ to 6000\$. As he pointed out, we are not using these as rock musicians, nor will the Novel Club be acting as DJs anytime soon. We want something to amplify voices. James recommends Pile brand- Cambridge systems. 800 watts and costs 159\$. We will sample next month in March. As Catherine pointed out, this will function better than ear trumpets or megaphones.. James will bring the purchase to our next meeting.

After these announcements, Jay Siegel delivered the biography of Peter Ackroyd. He opened up by telling us about when Ackroyd, in an interview, was asked at one point what he did outside of writing. His response? "I drink!" Jay doubted he would have had time for this, as he is a prolific writer. He has written 4 volumes poetry 18 novels, television scripts, and 38 books non fiction- history and biographies. He had a creative career, and wanted to be a poet. He claims to not have read fiction, as it was too messy, however he did manage to become the chief book reviewer at NYT, so he must have read something. By 2018 our illustrious author had finished 5th volume of narrative history a serious level of scholarship. He used clever titles for his work; London-the biography; Thames-Sacred River. He had a mystical view of London, and the city is evoked as a mysterious place and a metaphor. Ackroyd chooses William Blake as most powerful thinker and philosopher. Ackroyd is a meticulous researcher, who combines intellectualism with flare.

For more details, please read the bio on the website.

Marie Lathers came next with the critique. She chose this to review because has read plenty of Ackroyd. She Ackroyd's novels play with history, especially focused on London. Fictional characters interact with history, and he creates imagined connections between characters of real history.

Our book tonight was not well reviewed by the experts. The Guardian's review, for instance was scathing. The review said Ackroyd has been writing the same book for too long, and this is the worst. The reviewer said that this novel lacks any inkling of terror of Shelly's novel, and rips off Jekyll and Hyde but without thrill. NYT was a bit kinder, saying the book was intelligent but that he does offer nothing new.

Marie found the book to be multi layered. Ackroyd treats historical figures in an interesting way. Ackroyd intertwines real figures but mixes stories. Marie posed the question: Why recreate this story? Does science or poetry make it better? Is the imagination at the root of all ideas? Is this entertainment, or is more going on?

Marie pointed out that we see monsters everywhere. Even Byron is there as a domineering poet obsessed with himself. At the end of novel, the monster cannot be destroyed, which came as a surprise. Were Victor and the monster the same? There are cases for both. The beginning of Victor's madness begins with animating of a corpse. Marie wrapped up by with the simple statement about our novel of the evening. "It is fun and makes us rethink Frankenstein".

Discussion followed, with questions supplied by Marie

First up: What was the role of London and the Thames novel in the novel? Larry said he captured it. His description as historian was right on. James agreed, as one can, as a foreigner, be confused at Oxford. He felt the writing was well done. Bob disagreed. He found it interesting at first, but soon put it down. It did, however, bring back fond memories of reading Sherlock Holmes, and he vividly recalled reading from Holmes story about murder victim---from Cleveland Ohio. Point being, Sherlock Homes is a fun read, while this isn't. Louise brought us somewhat back to the original question when she asked if there is a contrast with London and Geneva Switzerland? She felt that Yes- Victor goes from pure forested place to urban diseased place. Tom weighed in, agreeing that yes there is: Switzerland is pure, London isn't. Peter found a connection to Genesis, creation as Geneva/London contrasts religions. Speaking of cities, Art was taken by German street reference, as it's the men's capital of London. My mom pointed out contrast between descriptions of soaring mountains in Switzerland and lowest of the low of river. Mountains are romantic and sublime. He was in control in London, where he created monster. She pointed out that the issue of river is significant- invisible underwater. Peter pointed out that biblically, water is chaos

2 Next question was about the ending. Are you satisfied with ending? Did Ackroyd take the easy way out? Nick-loved it. It's fun, loved reading it, found it to be an exciting yarn with a great ending, but failed as a serious work. Louise had heard of surprise ending, and kept trying to guess what it was. She connected to characters, worried about them. Marie pointed out that this is a spoof, the real depth is in Shelly's book. She asked did we care about the characters? Jay saw them as idealists, scientists and poets. Larry added that we are now involved with genetics and usually it's for the better. Science is more developed now and we don't know what will happen. Marie found that there doesn't see motivation for him being mad, that it was not explored. Lloyd finds both Shelly and Byron to be self-centered. Peter, bringing us back to our question- the notion is that we can take science and create life and that is equal to god so that's mad. Marie found the monster as the interesting, and frankly would rather date the monster. We did not take a poll to learn who would have liked to date the monster, so that is up to each individual to ponder.

3. Our next question: Was there a message? Toby started us off: if there's religion in the book, it could be considered a moral dilemma. At the end they walked together in peace. Jim said

that clearly a book makes the point that people behave as a function of how they are treated. That message was not there for the book tonight. He felt this ending got mixed with the ending Jeckyl and Hyde. Lee Haas added that the monster presents message. He feels left out. She found the end disappointing, that the author seemed to get tired of writing. Louise saw him as searching for a moral that did not achieve. David noticed that the overall message was peppered with references to 19th century- a lecture, galvanator. He contextualized words but never did anything with them. This led us towards a discussion of the prose itself, and there was a bit of a pile on of harsh criticism towards the author. Louise found the prose stiff and old. Marie said he wrote quickly. Larry said that might be true, but as an author, provokes us to think about things. Catherine said the prose was journalistic, and she didn't like the character as he had no warmth or charm. Rob saw him trying to do things with poets but thought he didn't go anywhere with it. Why did he bring in all these poets but not do anything? Jay noted that title is "a medical case book". This is an explanation of a twisted medical case. Marie felt the ending fell flat. Nobody came to the author's defense to praise his prose.

4. Final question was about the Perfectibility of mankind. Was the book optimistic ? Victor fails: does this mean that optimism is dead? Where is Freud? Peter started us off by saying it fails as a casebook. Catherine saw it as more of a memoir. Louise thought Victor should have killed Frankenstein. Conversation became brisk at this point. Marie: "Killing Frankenstein would mean killing himself!" (demonstrates). Jay-they represent 2 views of romanticism. Brought spirit of romantic movement to life. 2 aspects of same story that are the same and different. Underlying theme of Romanticism is optimism. Catherine-recreates scientific inquiry where they don't know the answer. This is optimism. James- Mary Shelly living it. She feels optimism. Ackroyd knows the outcome. Do we know where we are going? They didn't. Who is romantic? Discussion about optimism ensued. General consensus seemed to be that people do not feel open and optimistic today. Eventually discussion returned back to the book. In sum, most found the ending cheap, but overall the group liked it and felt it had plenty to say about society.

Adjourn 9:15 PM