ÇANKAYA UNIVERSITY

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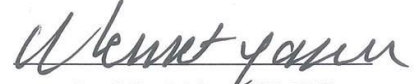**CHALLENGING HISTORY IN PETER ACKROYD'S *CHATTERTON***

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Title of the Thesis: **Challening History In Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton***

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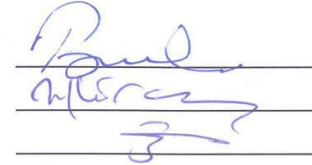
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ABSTRACT

CHALLENGING HISTORY IN PETER ACKROYD'S *CHATTERTON*

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Historiographic metafiction provides an exemplary site for an investigation of postmodernist problematization of history and fiction. Historiographic metafictional texts refer to both historical referents and their own artifice, that self-consciously challenge the boundary between historical and fictional writing, The historiographic metafiction performs or transgresses the boundaries between the opposing terms of those dichotomies in order to question the validity of such oppositions and the hierarchies they conceal. Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* is an example of literary postmodernism in which the oppositions between history and fiction, the problematic relationship between reality and artifice are carried out within an intertextual arena. In the novel, Ackroyd creates a fictional alternative to the famous poet Thomas Chatterton's life focusing on the gaps in his biography, and filling these gaps with imaginary events that contradict the official history of the poet. While writing the poet's personal history, he also highlights the process of historiography with the purpose of making his reader aware of the fictionality of history through real and fictional writer characters. In this respect, this thesis aims to explore the relationship between history and fiction in Ackroyd's *Chatterton* by focusing on historiography, metafiction, parody, and intertextuality and imitation respectively.

Key Words: Ackroyd**,** *Chatterton* Historiographic Metafiction, Parody, İntertextuality

ÖZ

PETER ACKROYD'UN ROMANI *CHATTERTON*'DA TARİH SORGULAMASI

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Master's Thesis

Tarihsel üstkurmaca, postmodernizmin tarih ve kurgu arasındaki sorunsalını incelemek için önemli bir alan teşkil eder. Tarihsel üstkurmaca metinleri tarihsel göndergelere ve kendi sanatlarına atıfta bulunarak tarih ve kurgu yazımı arasındaki sınırlara itiraz eder. Tarihsel üstkurmaca bu karşıt ikililikleri uygulayarak veya onların sınırlarını ihlal ederek, bu karşıtlıkların geçerliliklerini ve gizledikleri düzeni sorgular. Peter Ackroyd'un *Chatterton* adlı romanı tarih ve kurgu arasındaki karşıtlığın, gerçeklik ile sanat arasındaki problemli ilişkinin metinlerarası bir arenada işlendiği postmodern edebiyatın örneklerinden biridir. Ackroyd, romanda alternatif bir kurgu yaratarak, ünlü şair Thomas Chatterton'un biyografisindeki boşluklara odaklanır, bu boşlukları yazarın resmi biyografisi ile çelişen hayali olaylarla doldurur. Yazar bir taraftan şairin kişisel tarihini anlatırken, öte taraftan, okurların gerçek ve kurgusal karakterler aracılığıyla tarihin kurgusallığının farkına varmaları amacıyla tarih yazımının sürecini ortaya koyar. Bu bağlamda, bu tez tarih yazımı, üstkurgu, parodi ve metinlerarasılık konularına odaklanarak, Ackroyd'un *Chatterton* adlı romanında tarih ve kurgu arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ackroyd, *Chatterton*, Tarihsel Üstkurmaca, Parodi, Metinlerarasılık.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Peter Ackroyd is one of the most important postmodern writers who addresses the issues of narrative representation and reconstruction of the past and the problematic relation between history and fiction. Born in London in 1949, Ackroyd first published poems in his book *Ouch* in 1971. His other poetry books are *London Lickpenny* (1973), *Country Life* (1978), and *The Diversion of Purley and Other Poems* (1987). Yet Ackroyd is more renowned for his fictional and biographical works: *The Great Fire of London* (1982), *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1983), *Hawksmoor* (1985), *Chatterton* (1987), *First Light* (1989), *English Music* (1992), *The House of Doctor Dee* (1993), *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994), *Milton in America* (1996), *The Plato Papers: A Novel* (1999), *The Clerkenwell Tales* (2003), *The Lambs of London* (2004), *The Fall of Troy* (2006), *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein: A Novel* (2008), *The Canterbury Tales: A Retelling* (2009), *The Death of King Arthur. The Immortal Legend – A Retelling* (2010) and *Three Brothers* (2013). Highly conscious of ontological questions of postmodernism, Ackroyd displays a deep awareness of the postmodern understanding of history and explores the answers of such questions as whether it is possible to seize the past, how history is interpreted and constructed and to what extent historians can represent the past in these books. In addition, he chooses London as the setting of his historiographic novels and describes its inhabitants from the medieval to the present century. Jeromy Gibson and Julian Wolfreys in their book on the author's novels claim:

> In almost all of Ackroyd's writing, London is always there, although difficult to approach. Its appearences and performances are multiple, differing from one another. Yet all occur and recur frequently, often in the same place. London is variously and provisionally camp, theatrical, gaudy, mystical, radical,threatening, melancholy and comic, but ultimately unknownable, for it rewrites

itself and erases itself even in those moments of apprehension when its identity seems understood finally. (Gibson and Wolfreys, 2000: 172)

Ackroyd reflects his sceptical attitude towards history, plays with the conventions of traditional history, breaks its boundaries and creates a fragmented and unreliable account of the past which is in direct contrast with the linearity and wholeness of traditional history.

In *The House of Doctor Dee*, a twentieth-century fictional character, Mathew Palmer, inherits a house from his father, and tricked by its ghastly quality, begins his investigation about the history of the house. The house originally belonged to the scientist Doctor Dee who was an advisor to Tudor monarchs. By blending historical figures with fictional ones, Ackroyd challenges the objectivity of historical writing. He enters his narrative as a character and questions history, saying: "I do not understand how much of this history is known, and how much is my invention. And what is the past, after all? Is it that which is created in the formal act of writing, or does it have some substantial reality? Am I discovering it, or inventing it?" (Ackroyd, 1993: 274-75). Through this quotation, Ackroyd overtly tells the readers that they cannot depend on what had been written because they can only rely on the representation or interpretation of history. As Berkem Gürenci suggests in her book:

What Ackroyd seems to argue is that people are never actually gone, but that they continue to live in the present even though they might have been forgotten for the time being. Interest in the past (a trait shared by Dee, Palmer and Ackroyd) enables the past characters of London, and the past of London itself to continue existing and influencing the present. (Gürenci, 2011: 103)

Ackroyd himself is influenced by London and Londoners and its inhabitants. He rewrites its history and the story of its writers who "do not connect to one another, but are connected by the flow of London through them" (Gibson and Wolfreys, 2000: 194-95).

Another historiographic novel by Ackroyd, *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* also makes use of historical as well as fictional characters. The novel tells the story of Elizabeth Cree and her trial for murdering her husband, John Cree, as well as other murders that took place around the Limehouse. The journal of John Cree is another important narrative in which he admits being the murderer, and unfold his motives for the murders. However, at the end of the novel, it appears that Elizabeth forged the journal to put the blame on her husband that he committed the Limehouse murders because she is the real golem. In the novel, George Gissing, Karl Marx and the music hall artist Dan Leno are historical figures, whose reality is questioned with certain events. For instance, Ackroyd creates a fictional friend to Marx, called Solomon Weil. Weil is killed by the Limehouse Golem thinking that he is Marx. With such fictional instances, Ackroyd plays with his readers and urges them to question the historical data. Moreover, Ackroyd changes the date of Dan Leno's birthday in order to make his birth parallel to Elizabeth Cree's birthday. Thus change in the date appears in the novel, has no importance, but it makes the reader aware that what he/she reads is just fiction. Gürenci claims that "Ackroyd has merely appropriated Leno's life to meet the ends of his own novel. He thus reminds the reader once again that despite his use of real people as characters, what they are reading is not a factual biography, but a fiction" (Gürenci, 2011: 112).

Like the previous two examples, in *Hawksmoor* Ackroyd again blends history with fiction. The detective Nicholas Hawksmoor in the twentieth-century frame is reincarnated from the spirit of the famous architect, Nicholas Hawksmoor, who was commissioned to plan and design six churches in London during the reign of Queen Ann in the early in the eighteenth century, when the British Parliament gave an act to build up fifty churches in the suburbs of London. Changing his surname to Dyer, Ackroyd talks about how Nicholas Dyer was commissioned to build seven churches in London in the eighteenth century. Then, it appears that Nicholas Dyer has got a satanic plan to build seven churches. As in the other novels, Ackroyd plays with his readers, falsifying the historical documents by adding one church to the six churches that architect Hawksmoor was commissioned to build. Dyer's satanic plan is to build vaults, labyrinths and crypts to do the satanic ritual, and he has to victimize a virgin boy for each church. These victims will be replicated in the twentieth century time frame which shows how spirits move from hundred years to settle into the new human being's body. According to this

philosophy, Nicholas will be reborn as a detective. Ackroyd shows history as repeating itself in the contemporary world, though there are changes as suggested with the transformation of Dyer into Hawsmoor, from an architect into a detective.

The focus of this thesis, *Chatterton* is a historiographic metafiction about the biography of the eighteenth-century poet Thomas Chatterton. The poet's mysterious life story "provides Ackroyd with rich source to play freely with the postmodern issues such as plagiarism, authenticity, objective reality and representation, because Chatterton was a forger of pseudo-medieval poetry" (Antakyalıoğlu, 2009: 22). Using a fragmented structure, the novel is set in three centuries. Apart from Thomas Chatterton's story, the novel recounts how the nineteenth-century painter Henry Wallis uses George Meredith as a model for his painting of Chatterton. The third frame involves the adventures of the twentieth-century fictional writer Charles Wychwood who acquires a manuscript and a portrait belonging to Chatterton and tries to uncover the mysteries of his life. Alongside Charles, this frame of the novel includes his friends who are also writers, namely Harriet Scrope and Andrew Flint, as well as the librarian, Philip Slack, who wants to write a novel based on Chatterton's life. The novel continuously shifts back and forth between these three different centuries and narratives using the narrative technique of cross-cutting, non linearity of narrative. Lars Riber Kristensen discusses the multi-layered structure of the novel, saying:

> By beginning the whole book with a biography of Thomas Chatterton, and by time and time again using lines and passages from the works of Thomas Chatterton, George Meredith and others, it fully embraces its historical characters and thereby tries seemingly desperately to become a historical narrative. However, it soon becomes clear that the walls between past and present, indeed between history and fiction, are starting to break down. The events of the past and the present are intertwined and interconnected. (Kristensen, 2009: 46)

Such relations between past and present as well as history and fiction are what Ackroyd's novel tries to foreground.

Hence, this thesis seeks to analyze Ackroyd's *Chatterton* with respect to the characteristics of historiographic metafiction to show how the writer challenges historical writing and underlines the textuality of history in a postmodern text. For this aim, the next chapter will take into consideration the change in the objective notion of history in the twentieth-century with specific reference to the theories of postmodernism and new historicism. In this discussion, certain characteristics of postmodernism, such as historiographic metafiction, parody and intertextuality will also be explained. The third chapter will analyze Peter Ackroyd's novel *Chatterton* with respect to the characteristics of historiographic metafiction, and it will be followed by a conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY WRITING AND METAFICTION

Before discussing the concept of historiographic metafiction, it is useful first to give definitions of the term "historiography." The online *Encyclopædia Britannica* defines "historiography" as:

> The writing of history, especially the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particular details from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those details into a narrative that stands the test of critical examination. The term historiography also refers to the theory and history of historical writing.
> (http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/267436/historiography)

Similarly, in the *Companion to Historiography*, Paul Cartledge observes that this term is used

> to distinguish the study of and writing about some past facts from the facts themselves. But, since the distinction of facts from the writing about or of them is actually not at all clearcut - indeed is eminently contestable - a further meaning has been accorded to historiography, as meta-history or the study, from various standpoints, of the writing of history by others than the historiographer. (Cartledge, 1997: 2)

"Historiography," therefore, is not concerned with specific historical events, but the changing interpretations of those events in the studies of individual historians. In

other words, historiography takes into consideration the writer's theoretical orientation as well as the intended audience.

History is traditionally regarded "as an empirical search for external truths corresponding to what was considered to be absolute reality of the past events" (Onega, 1995: 12). Since the early nineteenth century, historical studies have become a professional discipline in the social sciences. As Georg G. Iggers notes, "What was new in the nineteenth century was the professionalization of historical studies and their concentration at universities and research centers" (Iggers, 1997: 1). Historians shared the optimism of objectivity in historical writing, because they thought that "methodologically controlled research makes objective knowledge possible" (Iggers, 1997: 2). According to this belief, the result of historical research, like that of experiments in the natural sciences, should be testable. In Germany "the term *Geschichtswissenschaft* (historical science) replaced the term *Geschichtsschreibung* (the writing of history) to describe what professional historians were doing" (Iggers, 1997: 99). This orientation culminated in the rise of Leopold von Ranke's "scientific history" which became the standard practice in published histories and remained the dominant influence in Western historiography until the 1960s.

Postmodernism rejects absolute truth and reality and challenges history by asking such questions as:

> Is it possible to say what really happened in the past, to get to the truth, toreach objective understandings or, if not, is history incorrigibly interpretive?What are historical facts (and indeed are there any such things)? What is bias andwhat does it mean to say that historians ought to detect it and root it out? Is it possible to empathise with people who lived in the past? Is a scientific historypossible or is history essentially an art? What is the status of those couplets thatso often appear in definitions of what history is all about: cause and effect,similarity and difference, continuity and change? (Jenkins, 1991: 4)

It is the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard who has finally shattered the illusion of an "objective history" in the minds of historians. Lyotard's *The*

Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge is an influential book in which he argues that "scientific knowledge is a kind of discourse" (Lyotard, 1984: 3). Lyotard also maintains that scientific knowledge "has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with narrative knowledge" (Lyotard, 1984: 7). According to Lyotard, postmodernism is defined as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv). He holds that "the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (Lyotard, 1984: 37). He calls for a plurality of competing mini-narratives to replace the totalitarianism of "grand narratives" or "metanarratives". Usually taking the form of a single totalizing, over-reaching narrative schema of history, such as Christianity, the Enlightenment, Marxism, etc., metanarratives claim universal truth and absolute authority. In the postmodern age, however, Lyotard regards the totalizing metanarrative as a terror.

According to postmodernism, an objective representation of history is not possible firstly because historians cannot seize the past as it is; they can reach the past only through historical documents written probably by other historians. What historians attain is not the past itself, but representations of the past; thus, the very opposition lies within the fact that history is not equal to the past. Jenkins clarifies the difference between history and the past as follows:

> The past has occurred. It has gone and can only be brought back again by historians in very different media, for example, in books, articles, documentaries, etc., not as actual events. The past has gone and history is what historians make of it when they go to work. History is the labor of historians (and/or those acting as if they were historians) and when they meet, one of the first questions they ask each other is what they are working on. (Jenkins, 1991: 8)

The historian searching for facts about the past comes up against a wide range of historical materials, which leads him to make a choice among these materials. Thus, he selects the appropriate ones in accordance with his intention while omitting others. According to Elisabeth Wesseling "the historian only selects as not worthy those historical data that fit into the picture which he has in mind" (1991: 126). In

other words, the historian begins his search with certain questions and possible answers to these questions in his mind and looks for the facts which will support his argument. This selection is, for Wesseling, also ideological in that the historian is inevitably influenced by and reflects his ideological commitment in his narrative of the past. The process of interpretation of the selected materials, undergoes the same influences, as well; that is, how the historian interprets these materials is closely related to what he aims to reveal. Considering this selectivity and influence of ideology and politics, postmodern theorists reject the claim that the past can be truthfully and objectively represented. Accordingly, what the historian presents as "history" can by no means be the actual representation of the past; it is only one of the possible interpretations of past events.

When taking into account that history is composed of fragmented and incomplete events, what is meant by the historian's interpretation is virtually to link these fragmented events to one another and create a whole which he calls "history". In order to compose a chronological whole out of pieces of past events, Alun Munslow states that these events are "correlated and placed within a context, sometimes called the process of colligation, collation,configuration or emplotment, which then leads the historian to generate the 'facts'" (1997: 6-7). In other words, these events are turned into facts through the historian's narrativization.

In relation to postmodernism, New Historicism, Hayden White in particular, challenges the objectivity of history. As one of the most vital modes of literary study in the 1980s, New Historicism "has restored its range beyond the Renaissance to regions as far afield as the American Renaissance, British Romanticism, Victorian Studies, and Latin American Literature, so that today no bastion of literary scholarship has managed to exclude New Historicism" (Veeser, 1998: xiii).

With a shift from "History" to "histories," New Historicism intends to "dissolve 'literature' into the historical complex that academic criticism has traditionally held at arm's length" (Veeser, 1998: xii). This new approach to literary research was a counterattack against the dominance of old historicism in which history serves as the reliable background while literary texts serve as merely footnotes to it. Declaring that all history is subjective and biased, New Historicism rejects any definitive truth about the past. Furthermore, New Historicism asserts that history is only one of many discourses, such as anthropology, art, politics, economics, sociology, literature, and that they are all interrelated. What New

Historicism is concerned with, perhaps is best summarized as "the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (Montrose, 1989: 20). By emphasizing the intertextuality of historical and literary discourses, New Historicism blurs the borderline between history and fiction.

Hayden White has been one of the key figures in the discussion of historiography. His ideas question the traditionally rooted norms of history and he suggests the concept of metahistory to challenge this traditionalism. In his essay "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact", he explains the aim of metahistory as attempting to challenge the presuppositions of history writing and discusses:

> In order to write the history of any given scholarly discipline or even of a science, one must be prepared to ask questions about it of a sort that do not have to be asked in the practice of it. One must try to get behind or beneath the presuppositions which sustain a given type of inquiry, and ask the questions that can be begged in its "practice in the interest;" of determining why this type of inquiry has been designed to solve the problems it characteristically tries to solve. This is what metahistory seeks to do. (White, 1978: 81)

Published in 1975, Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* further undermines the scientific nature of modern historicalresearch to a substantial degree. His view on the nature of historical writing developed andbecame more radical in his next book *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* published in 1978. According to White, history is "a verbal structure in the form ofa narrative prose discourse" (White, 1978:ix). He denies thathistorical writing implies an actual historical past. Rather, he emphasizes thatmetahistorical element exists in all historical works.He explains the aim of metahistory as attempting to challenge the presuppositions of history writing.

White's concept of metahistory comes from the view that the traditional history writing lacks self-reflexivity and he uses theories of fiction to reconceptualize historical writing. By doing so, he deconstructs the general idea that literature and history writing are different concepts, because literature is concerned with imagination while history with the real and the factual. As he asserts:

The events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certainof them and highlighting of others, by characterization, motif, repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like-in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play. (White, 1978: 84)

The historian, just as a novelist, chooses a plot to present the historical even the has chosen, fills the gaps between these events with his imagination, sets imaginary relations and creates a story. Questioning the objectivity of historical narratives, White argues that both historical and literary narratives are discursively alike depending on the text and language. White maintains that what historians do is not to tell a reality, but an interpretation of it. Thus, the meaning we get from a historical writing is always variable, because "each new historical work only adds to the number of possible texts that have to be interpreted" (White, 1978: 89) and therefore it is subjective.

To sum up, Hayden White has been one of the main figures in the discussion of historiography. His ideas question the traditionally rooted norms of history and he suggests the concept of metahistory to challenge this traditionalism. White's revolutionary views on historical knowledge have exerted enormous influence upon scholars both in historiography and literary criticism.

In light of this line of thought, objective history which reigned modern historiography for more than a century now turns out to be an illusion. History, as a scholarly discipline, confronts the most severe challenge ever. If the research of well-trained historians is not as they claimed to be "scientific" and "objective," and if professional historical studies and the works of novelists are both fictional only differing in degree, then the next question is whether we should reevaluate the function of fiction in reconstructing history in the postmodern age. It is a possibility that the fiction writer can now assume a more significant position. At any rate, it is worthwhile to examine how the postmodernists write about historical events and what the writers can do politically in this kind of reconstruction.

Postmodernism has become perhaps the most over-defined as well as underdetermined term in discussions of contemporary culture. First widely circulated in architecture theory, the term postmodernism has now permeated the discourses of almost every field of human endeavor: philosophy, literature, historiography, painting, sculpture, film, music, and dance, to name only a few. Despite the considerable scholarship that has been devoted to the natures and features of this problematic phenemenon, postmodernism remains open to debates and arguments.

The term "metafiction" was first introduced into literary discussion by William H. Gass, a professor of philosophy, critic and fiction writer. In his 1970 essay entitled "Philosophy and the Form of Fiction," Gass acutely noticed that there was a kind of new fiction in which "the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed" (Gass, 1970: 25). Gass adopted the term "metafiction" to describe the emerging genre of experimental texts. The concept of metafiction in these texts "provides, within itself, a commentary on its own status as fiction and as language, and also on its own processes of production and reception" (Hutcheon, 1985:xii). A more detailed explanation was made by Patricia Waugh in her own definition of the term:

> *Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (Waugh, 2001: 2)

As this definition underlines, metafiction is a fictional writing that also involves the process of creation. In this kind of writing, writers usually use postmodernist self-reflexive techniques like a self-conscious narrator or author, intertextuality, parody and ask for the reader's involvement in recreation of the text. This mode of writing allows the author to examine the conventional forms of narrative fiction and explores the construction of reality. Obviously, it is worth noting that self-reflexiveness is by no means an invention of the 1960s and 1970s. As Patricia Waugh observes,

"although the term of 'metafiction' might be new, the practice is as old (if not older) than the novel itself" (Waugh, 2001: 5). For example, *The Arabian Nights,* Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* may all be called metafiction, but they are not postmodern in nature, as reference to the act of writing in postmodern texts aims to remind the reader of the constructedness of fiction.

Bearing in mind that history and fiction are both modes of writing, linguistic constructs and intertextual, Linda Hutcheon like White, in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism* emphasizes the relation between history and fiction by asserting:

> [both] are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which wemake sense of the past (exertions of the shaping, ordering imagination). Inother words, the meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make those past "events" into present historical "facts." This is not a"dishonest refuge from truth" but an acknowledgement of the meaning making function of human constructs. (Hutcheon, 1988: 89)

Hutcheon in this book introduces and discusses the term "historiographic metafiction". She argues:

> Historiographic metafiction, like both historical fiction and narrative history, cannot avoid dealing with the problem of the status of their "facts" and of the nature of their evidence, their document. It rejects projecting present beliefs and standards onto the past and asserts, in strong terms, the specificity and particularity of the individual past event. Nevertheless, it also realizes that we are epistemologically limited in our ability to know that past, since we are both spectators of and actors in the historical process. Historiographic metafiction suggests a distinction between "events" and "facts" that is one shared by many historians. (Hutcheon, 1988: 122)

From this quotation, it could be induced that the main concern of historiographic metafiction is to deal with the events that occured in the past from a postmodern perspective. According to Hutcheon, "historiographic metafiction" is a form that incorporates history, theory and literature. She claims that "historiographic metafiction's theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (Hutcheon, 1988 : 5). She suggests that this kind of writing is self-conscious that it is concerned with deconstructing the notion of history and our knowability of the past, both in terms of form and content. Thus, historiographic metafiction attempts to revise historical knowledge.

Like Hutcheon, Larry McCaffery in *The Metafictional Muse: The Works of Robert Coover, Donald Barthelme, and William H.Gass* remarks that fiction like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is "a kind of model for the contemporary writer" for its "being self-conscious about its literary heritage and about the limits of mimesis […], but yet managing to reconnect its readers to the world outside the page" (McCaffery, 1982: 264). By expanding the scope of metafiction from the world of fiction into the world outside fiction, historiographic metafiction has reconnected the severed bonds between literature and social reality.

Discussing the relationship between the past and the present, Hutcheon maintains that postmodernism is generally characterised by parody, which is "one of the postmodern ways of literally incorporating the textualized past into the text of present" (Hutcheon, 1988: 118). She suggests that parody gives an opportunity to rethink about history and what it means in historiographic metafiction. Hutcheon argues that certain historical details are falsified in order to prove "the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history," and to ask some questions about the truth of history like "how do we know the past? What do (what can) we know of it now?". (Hutcheon, 1998: 114-115). For instance, Michael Coetzee's novel *Foe* which problematizes history, and questions the role of women in the ninteeth century, since they were silenced and unrepresented.

In the literature of metafiction, play and games take a significant role. The postmodernist metafictional writers usually apply parody to achieve a playful effect.In order to discover new possibilities of the game, metafiction examines and manipulates the rules, particularly the old ones (Waugh, 2001: 42). Metafictional novels, according to Waugh, first constitute a play world to "ensure the reader's

absorption," and then lay bare its rule to explore the connection of fiction to reality, the concept of pretence (Waugh, 2001: 40-41). Sometimes the play can be constructed on the presence of the reader. Therefore, the reader suddenly becomes a player in the novel.Many novels are written by postmodernists that make the reader enjoy what she / he reads such as Michael Coetzee's novel *Foe*, Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children,* when the writer alters the date of some events happened in the past in India and Pakistan, and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* the writer breaks the chains towards freedom of women's sexuality in the Victorian era.

Another technique of metafiction is intertextuality which is based on the idea that texts are influenced by other texts and that there exists a network between texts. The term intertextuality was coined and developed by Julia Kristeva. This term suggests"a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another (Kristeva, 1986: 37). The aim of intertextuality is to re-interpret earlier texts in the current situations of the society. "Intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context" (Hutcheon, 1988: 118). On the other hand, intertextuality provides the reader with new perspectives to make comparisons between literary texts. In this view, the past and the present can be harmonized with each other to create new texts from the older ones, for instance, *The Casebook of Victor Franckenstein.*

Peter Ackroyd clearly displays his skepticism towards history and historical writing in *Chatterton*. Focusing on the gaps in his biography, he creates a fictional version of the famous poet Thomas Chatterton's life, and filling these gaps with imaginary events, many of which seem to contradict the official history regarding the poet. While writing about the poet's personal history, he also highlights the process of historiography with the purpose of making his reader aware of the interconnectedness between history and fiction. In the light of what I have mentioned above, in the following chapter I will discuss Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* with respect to historiography, metafiction, parody, imitation and intertextuality respectively to display how the boundary between history and fiction is blurred by deconstructing the historical records and giving a new version of history.

CHAPTER THREE

PETER ACKROYD'S *CHATTERTON*

The focus of representation in Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton*, as the title indicates, is Thomas Chatterton, a well-known Romantic poet and forger. Choosing him as its subject matter, the novel deconstructs the authenticity and originality of historical facts as well as art by employing various metafictional techniques and games. First in this chapter, I will discuss how *Chatterton* problematizes history by giving specific examples from the novel, then I will analyze its metafictional characteristics, parody and imitation and intertextuality.

3.1 Historiography

As we discussed in the introduction, it is this relationship between the past and representations of the past, between reality and artifice, upon which Ackroyd's *Chatterton* focuses. The text layers representation upon representation, invoking the authority of historical documentation and then breaking the frames it has constructed in order to reveal those frames as constructs, as artifice. It is at the level of plot that the novel most systematically flaunts its own status as artifice. *Chatterton*, consists of multiple plots, embedded within and interconnected with each other to an extent that lays bare the constructed nature of all structures that aim or claim to represent (past) reality. The various plots of the novel are all connected in some way to Thomas Chatterton.

In the eighteenth-century, Chatterton imaginatively represents the past by writing Rowley's poems in medieval style, as well as various official documents. In the nineteenth century, the painter Henry Wallis is engaged in the process of representing the past by creating his famous painting of Chatterton's death. For his aim, he uses another poet and novelist George Meredith as his model. After Meredith's wife Mary Ellen, leaves him to embark upon a liaison with Wallis, Meredith writes his poems sequence, titled *Modern Love*.

In the twentieth century, yet another poet, Charles Wychwood, is caught up in the process of finding and interpreting various documents about Chatterton, including a portrait and a document that appear to be the poet's signed confession.Within this twentieth-century plot, additional plots multiply. Charles works with his librarian friend Philip Slack to discover the mystery about Chatterton's life. Charles's wife, Vivien, works at an art gallery whose owners try to conceal the fact that its latest collection of painting by a recently deceased artist, Seymour, are forgeries, painted by his assistant, Stewart Merk. Merk is employed by the gallery to authenticate the portrait of the middle-aged Chatterton for the novelist Harriet Scrope. Charles's friend Andrew Flint is in the process of writing a biography of George Meredith. Presented in fragments interpenetrating into one another in a non-chronological order, the novel's plot structure questions the linear structure in historical texts which will be discussed in terms of parody.

Before the novel begins, Ackroyd presents a biography of Chatterton, which serves as the official history of Chatterton's life. As is related in the novel, Chatterton was born in Bristol, and began to write at the age of fifteen or sixteen after being inspired by scraps of a manuscript that his mother gave him, and later he composed verse under the name of Rowley by imitating medieval styles, and then moved to London with the hope of fame. In a fictionalized conversation between Chatterton and Samuel Joynson,the publisher, Chatterton inquires about the popularity of Rowley's poems. Joynson answers that his books are not sold much because some people consider him an "Imposture" (Ackroyd, 1987: 90). Chatterton thinks that Rowley "is as real as I am" (Ackroyd, 1987:90). Through this instance, Ackroyd toys with the reader's belief in the existence of writers, Chatterton and Rowley in this case, and questions artistry and originality.

Finally, he committed suicide by swallowing arsenic in his attic room because of depression at the age of seventeen. Briefing the official biography of Chatterton, which can be easily found in any encyclopedia, Ackroyd intends to create a contradictory situation resulting from the difference between the official history of Chatterton's life and alternative histories that he will introduce in the forthcoming pages of the novel. Ackroyd, who regards both biography and fiction as "aspects of the same process," namely "just writing," attempts to create a fictionalized version of Chatterton's life (Ackroyd & Onega, 1996: 2-3).

Chatterton also focuses on the impact of first-hand accounts within the context of historical representation. The confessional document that Charles Wychwood and Philip Slack discover in Bristol immediately takes precedence over the other documents presented or referred to in the text. The manuscripts seem to prove that Chatterton himself faked his own death and continued to write under the name of the poets of his age."The documents which have recently been discovered show that he wrote in the guise of Thomas Gray, William Blake, William Cowper and many others; as a result, our whole understanding of eighteenth century poetry will have to be revised" (Ackroyd, 1987: 127). It is precisely the centrality of these firsthand accounts that Ackroyd's novel works to undermine. The autobiographical text written by Chatterton, which is revealed to be a document that Charles reads aloud, is at a lower ontological level than the rest of the text because it is fake. In this way, the reader is allowed to experience the excitement of discovering such a valuable document and is simultaneously reminded not only of the fictionality of the document, but of the discovery itself.

In contrast to the omniscient narration of the rest of the text, Chatterton's confession is immediate and, in a text where textual as well as pictorial representations of Chatterton multiply, the temptation to treat this document as evidence of the presence of the real or original Chatterton is strong. In fact, there is always a temptation to fetishize the autobiographical text. The characters in *Chatterton* and its readers are, in fact, allowed to circle around Chatterton's confession throughout the text. It is from this document that Charles Wychwood develops his alternative history, in which Chatterton lived on to forge many of the significant works of the eighteenth-century. Yet this document is itself revealed to be a forgery and its ability to convince becomes even more ironic when we consider that it is a document forged, not (only) by the dead Chatterton's disgruntled publisher, but by Ackroyd as well. And, even though the forgery is revealed, the uneasiness that arises with the possibility that outright lies can stand as truths in historical representation cannot be dissipated.

Along with the one in the official biography, Ackroyd offers three alternative versions of Chatterton's death which all contradict with one another. In the official one, Chatterton is presented as having committed suicide by swallowing arsenic due to being "apparently worn down by his struggle against poverty and failure" (Ackroyd, 1987: 1). In the second version, it is claimed that he forged his own death

and continued to write under the name of William Blake. Lastly, he is revealed as happy with his life and his poetry, but accidentally killed himself with arsenic while actually trying to cure himself from a venereal disease. Through these three different versions of Chatterton's death, Ackroyd depicts how the same event can be interpreted differently and turned into facts by the historians, and in this way, he leads the reader to question the validity of the official version.

This discrepancy among the versions of Chatterton's biography blurs the distinction between what is real and what is imaginary because "the real world is just a succession of interpretations. Everything which is written down immediately becomes a kind of fiction" (Ackroyd, 1987 : 40). This reminds the reader of how meaning is constructed through writing; in Hutcheon's words, "he really exists (and existed), but our understanding of it is always conditioned by discourses, by our different ways of talking about it" (Hutcheon, 1988: 157). Ackroyd highlights that since the real which existed in the past cannot be experienced as it occurred, it is brought to the present through its present interpretations. That is, what is claimed to be history is just one of the presentations of the past which is as fictional as the novel.

Not only textual representations of the past, but pictorial representations through Henry Wallis's painting of Chatterton's death and the portrait Charles finds at Leno antiques also question the truth value of history. Wallis draws a painting of the poet's death by using George Meredith as a model to create a realistic painting. The painter sets the painting in the attic where Chatterton lived, and makes use of a realistic decorum and costumes. For instance, he has Meredith wear eighteenth-century clothes, he purchases exact copies of Chatterton's furniture, consults written accounts which refer to the fact that Chatterton's last writings were found torn and scattered on the floor. As a painter, he believes that if he can copy what he sees, the physical objects associated with Chatterton, he can represent reality, which inheres in what can be perceived: "There is no reality [. . .] except in visible things" (Ackroyd, 1987: 139). As this quote suggests, Wallis is after realism to depict Chatterton's death. It is obvious that he has no access to Chatterton's death although he insists that he "can only draw what he sees" (Ackroyd, 1987: 133). All he knows about Chatterton's death is limited to the official biography, which is given at the beginning of the novel. Nonetheless, what he sees is not Chatterton himself, but Meredith, who strives to pretend to be Chatterton in the way Wallis has instructed

him. Ackroyd creates the same problematic situation with Wallis's painting of Chatterton's death as he does with the biography of the poet. The possibility that the painting might capture something closer to reality is certainly played with throughout the novel. In this sense, Brian Finney states that "the Victorian episodes in which Wallis uses Meredith to pose as the dead Chatterton offer a perfect simulacrum of the world as Ackroyd conceives it in his fiction, fiction which is itself - as Chatterton's publisher says of his forgeries - (an imitation in a world of Imitations)" (Finney, 1992: 255). Such a copy of reality in the case of Wallis's painting highlights how the copy - in this case the painting - replaces the reality of Chatterton's death.

Unlike the painter, his model George Meredith questions Wallis's idea of realism and his role as a model in his painting. Yet Meredith's assertion that "the greatest realism is also the greatest fakery" (Ackroyd, 1987: 139) is not necessarily a condemnation or even a belittlement of the practice of artifice. On the contrary, Meredith emphasizes both the pleasure gained from art and the power of artifice, not to represent reality, but to create it. As long as history's ability to represent absolute reality is maintained and valued, art is seen as fostering dangerous illusions. When, on the contrary, the representation of reality in factual texts is questioned, all texts become artifice and truth needs to be radically redefined. All texts, then, become "true fictions" (Ackroyd, 1987: 133), representing not a common, unchanging, empirical reality that can be perceived and transcribed, but a reality of texts, of artificial worlds created in and by the artifice of words.The painting story shows Meredith's dilemma about posing as the dead poet and brings the question of how we recognize the reality. Meredith's discussion with Wallis displays the poet's concern about representation:

> "Yes, I am a model poet," Meredith was saying. "I am pretending to
> be someone else [. . .] I can endure death. It is the representation of
> death I *cannot* bear."
> "You will be immortalised."
> "No doubt. But will it be Meredith or will it be Chatterton? I merely
> want to know." (Ackroyd, 1987: 2-3)

Ackroyd questions the historicity of history through this fictional conversation between Meredith and Wallis. In the portrait, Meredith pretends to be Chatterton, who did not exist when the painting was drawn.

Wallis's painting exhibited in the Tate Gallery also represents how the historical and fictional characters interact. During his visit to the gallery to see the picture, Charles for the first time realizes that there is a weird connection between him and the man in the picture: "And, at last, he looked at Thomas Chatterton.But was there someone now standing at the foot of the bed, casting a shadow over the body of the poet? And Charles was lying there, with his left hand clenched tightly on his chest and his right arm trailing upon the floor." (Ackroyd, 1987: 132). Like Meredith, Charles travels back in time and enters into Wallis's painting, so the line between history and fiction, between the past and the present are blurred. As Susana Onega asserts, "the protagonists of each story, the visionary poets Thomas Chatterton, George Meredith, and Charles Wychwood, can easily cross their respective historical boundaries and interact with each other" (Onega, 1999: 60).

The portrait which is believed to be a picture of Chatterton forms another ground for the discussion on the truth value of history. Charles sees "the portrait of a seated figure" (Ackroyd, 1987: 11) at Leno Antiques, and intrigued by it, he exchanges some books with the portrait. Before investigation is done by art critics, Charles's son Edward considers it to be fake (Ackroyd, 1987: 14). As will be mentioned in the parody section, after bringing the portrait home, Charles starts working on it like a detective to find out the identity of the figure, which he believes to be Thomas Chatterton. Unfortunately, after Charles's death from a brain tumor, the painter Stewart Merk discovers that the portrait is fake: "Merk had realised at once that the painting contained the residue of several different images, painted at various times" (Ackroyd, 1987: 205). The antique shop, which is supposed to sell remnants of the past, actually holds a fake portrait and through this instance Ackroyd plays with the truth value of history.

Ackroyd, in other words, challenges the authenticity of historical records in this novel through texts as well as paintings. To him, history is not objective, but is based on interpretation that changes from one generation to another, which is obvious via the different versions of Chatterton's death.

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3.2 Metafiction

Chatterton strategically inscribes and then subverts conventional narrative perspectives in order to explore the authority of the teller and the imposition of patterns of meaning inherent in any act of narration. According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction interrogates the convention of a stable narratological perspective: "Its subversion of the stability of point of view [. . .] takes two major forms. On the one hand, we find overt, deliberately manipulative narrators; on the other, no one single perspective, but a myriad voices, often not completely localizable in the textual universe" (Hutcheon, 1998: 160). In Ackroyd's novel although there is a third-person narrator recounting the story of twentieth-century characters, there is also a first-person narrator, Chatterton, telling his story. Hence the writer achieves multiplicity in the narration as well.

Chatterton is a narrative whose primary focus is the act of narrativization itself: it is concerned with the process of writing and reading. From the title onward, the novel seems to emphasize the role of the author. Both historical as well as fictional characters, like Thomas Chatterton, George Meredith, Charles Wychwood, Harriet Scrope, Philip Slack, Sarah Tilt and Andrew Flint, are, in fact, all authors as well as readers. Throughout the novel, these characters discuss their process of writing, and their problems in creativity, which also reflect Ackroyd's process of creativity.

First of all, Thomas Chatterton discusses the relationship between history and writing in his own forgeries of the Rowley poems, saying:"I will perform a Miracle [...] I will bring the Past to light" (Ackroyd, 1987: 83). This determination of the writer to clarify the past is contrary to Ackroyd's stance; as a postmodern writer, unlike the eighteenth-century poet, he tries to show that to know the past is impossible. Chatterton further dwells on how his stories from the true reality: "I reproduc'd the Past and filled it with such Details that it was as if I were observing it in front of me: so the Language of ancient Days awoke the Reality itself for, tho' I knew that it was I who composed these Histories, I knew also that they were true ones"(Ackroyd, 1987: 85).This quotation self-reflexively problematizes Ackroyd's notion of creating reality through fiction as well. Chatterton's art, described in the preface to the novel as "a unique conflation of his reading and his own invention" (Ackroyd, 1987: 1) is as close to truth as historiographic metafiction allows.

Secondly, George Meredith also comments on the act of writing, which highlights Ackroyd's creativity as well. In a conversation with Wallis, Meredith says: "I never know what is mine any more" (Ackroyd, 1987: 134). Like Chatterton and in this case Meredith, Ackroyd is concerned with copying other writers. Such an act of plagiarism will further be discussed in terms of intertextuality in this thesis.

Thirdly, Charles, trying to discover the real story of Chatterton, understands the importance of narrativization in historical documentation. As it is underlined in chapter two, there may be no way of ever unproblematically knowing the past or the single, absolute truth about Chatterton, but this does not make the writing of history impossible. Rather, it means that history is continually (re)written and that multiple interpretations, even the contradictory ones with which Charles faces, exist and are valid: "At first Charles had been annoyed with these discrepancies but then he was exhilarated by them: for it meant that anything became possible. If there were no truths, everything became true" (Ackroyd, 1987: 127). This last statement, of course, suggests that the investigator of the past, upon realizing that anything became possible, would decide that everything is false, rather than true and that, since nothing is certain, no knowledge is possible. *Chatterton,* then is a text that emphasizes the adventure of the process of interpretation over the triumph of completing the single, correct interpretation. During dinner at the Khubla Khan restaurant Charles tells his wife, Vivien: "You see, poetry never dies, here is a biography about George Meredith. The poet lives" (Ackroyd, 1987: 148). This quotation is also self-reflexive as it refers to Ackroyd's fictional biography of Chatterton and his desire to remind the reader of this mysterious poet. Early in the novel, Charles is depicted as choosing "his story words" (Ackroyd, 1987: 21) to tell a story to his son. This ambition of Charles is metafictionally the ambition of every writer and in this quotation by breaking the word history into two as his story, Ackroyd also plays with the notion of history as a narrative. What *Chatterton* shows, is the ability of Ackroyd to manipulate the readers through a playful style in depicting his historical and fictional characters in order to raise questions about the truthfulness of the records that compose what is called history.

Another fictional writer character in the twentieth-century frame is Harriet Scrope who underlines the metafictional aspect of Ackroyd's novel. For example, she loses interest in the mystery of Chatterton's death when it appears to have been solved, since "she had always preferred stories in which the ending had never been

understood" (Ackroyd, 1987: 208). It is the ending that novels like *Chatterton* problematizes and suggests, perhaps, at the end of the story an analogue for the end of storytelling through the three versions of Chatterton's death. Moreover, like Chatterton and Meredith, Harriet can only write by imitating the plots of other writers:

> She found a strange comfort in the rows of dusty books which surrounded her. She picked out at random *The Last Testament* by Harrison Bently and, even as she began to read it, she realized that here was the answer to her problem. Since he believed that plots themselves were of little consequence, why should she not take this one and use it as a plain, admittedly inferior, vessel for her own style? So she bought the old novel, and set to work. And with the story of *The Last Testament* to support her, she found that the words came more easily than before. Where phrases and even syllables had once emerged as fragments of a large structure which she could not see nor understand, now she could make her own connections; she went on from sentence to sentence, as if she were carrying a lamp and moving from a room to a large mansion. And she looked about her with wonder, sensing her ability to describe what she was seeing now for the first time. (Ackroyd, 1987: 102)

By imitating other writers such as Harrison Bentley, Harriet finds creativity, and this shows Ackroyd's notion of writing, as *Chatterton* is intertextually a very rich novel. As Onega suggests:

> The most accomplished example of Dickensian-cum-music-hall character is Harriet Scrope, Charles's ex-employer and a former bestselling novelist, who is currently attempting to write her autobiography as a way to come to terms with her writer's block. Harriet Scrope is an opinionated and hilarious figure who betrays her plagiaristic proclivities in her speech, practically made up of

misquotations from earlier writers in the English canon (Onega, 1999:
64)

As will be mentioned in term of intertextuality, Harriet Scrope sets a vivid example of plagiarism through her act of writing.

Similar to Harriet Scrope, Philip Slack believes "There is a charm or even a beauty in unfinished work.Why should historical research not also remain incomplete, existing as a possibility and not fading into knowledge?" (Ackroyd, 1987: 213). It is this question that dominates *Chatterton* and it is manifested not only in the novel's problematization of historical representation, but also in its consistent obsession with the relationship between artifice and reality in general. Slack is a character who is influenced by uneasiness as he could not create his own style. As Onega claims, Philip Slack "cannot recognize his own voice in his writing" (Onega, 1999:66). Therefore, he abandons writing his novel, but at the end of the novel, which is the most metafictional turning point, Philip Slack is liberated from the writer's block and is ready to write Charles's story. Onega claims that "Slack's liberation from his writer's block gives an unexpected metafictional or self-begetting twist to the novel, opening up the possibility that Slack might have picked up Charles's story as the subject of his novel and thus that he might be the fictional author of *Chatterton*" (Onega,1999: 68). This incident could be interpreted as Ackroyd's solution the writer's block by copying other writers.

To sum up, *Chatterton,* as metafiction, deals with the processes of writing to challenge the objectivity of history, while it considers history as a form of narration. The novel touches upon imitating previous writers in these metafictional sections as well, which will be discussed in detail in the section concerned in the intertextuality.

3.3 Parody

In his work *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Gerard Genette discusses the numerous modes of the relationship among texts, and parody is one of them. Genette proposes that any text is transtextual, meaning a text's "relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (Genette, 1997: 1). He suggests that transtextual relations are five types, one of them is "hypertextuality" or "rewriting"

as in the case of *Chatterton.* Hypertextuality is defined by Genette as "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (Genette, 1997: 5). There are two sorts of relationships in which a hypertext and its hypotext are produced, the first of which is "transformation" (Genette, 1997: 7) resulting from parody, while imitation results from pastiche, and forgery. Mainly Ackroyd's *Chatterton* parodies auto/biography, memoir and realistic fiction as well as detective characters in English literary canon to question the validity of historical data.

Postmodern parody both reminds the reader of a traditional form of writing such as biography and realistic fiction and shows how it differs from this type of writing. Against criticisms of a historicism in postmodern parody, Hutcheon claims that "postmodern art [. . .] uses parody [. . .] to engage the history of art and the memory of the viewer in a reevaluation of aesthetic form and contents through a reconsideration of their usually unacknowledged politics of representation" (Hutcheon, 1989:96). It is rewriting the past in a new context of the present to subvert the objectivity of history. Berkem Gürenci argues "metafictional parody does not limit itself to literary forms, conventions and texts, it also frequently makes use of forms like painting (as Ackroyd's *Chatterton*), architecture (*Hawksmoor*)" (Gürenci, 2011: 17). Ackroyd parodies Wallis's *The Death of Chatterton*, which becomes the main plot in the nineteenth-century frame. Unlike Wallis's highly romanticized depiction of Chatterton with a semi-smiley face, Ackroydportrays Chatterton's death in an ugly way. The narrator says:

> The saliva fills Chatterton's mouth [. . .].There is a pain in his belly like the colic but burning so, my liver and spleen might roast in the heat. What is happening to me? He tries to rise from his bed, but the agony throws him down again and he rolls in terror to stare at the wall. Oh God the arsenic. He vomits over the bed, and in the same spasm the shit runs across his thin buttocks – how hot it is – and trickles down his thighs, the smell of it mixing with the rank odour of the sweat pouring out of his body. Everything is fleeing from me. I am the house on fire. Oh god the poison. I am being melted down. (Ackroyd, 1987: 227)

The quotation above describes the misery and pain Thomas Chatterton faces at the moment of his death, and that is why this description forms a parody of the painting.

Thomas Chatterton is claimed to be "the greatest parodist" (Ackroyd, 1987: 81) because he parodied medieval poetry. To support this idea, Ackroyd provides the following epigraphs on separate pages at the beginning of part one and two in the novel:

Look in his glommed face, his sprighte there scanne;
Howe woe-be-gone, how withered, forwind, deade!
(An Excellent BaladeofCharitie. Thomas Chatterton)
So have I seen a Flower ynn Sommer Tyme
Trodde down and broke and widderynn ytts pryme.
(The Story of WyllyanCanynge. Thomas Chatterton.)
(Ackroyd, 1987: 5)
This ys mie formaunce, which I nowe have wrytte,
The best performance of mie lyttel wytte.
(To John Lydgate Canynge. Thomas Chatterton.)
Strayt was I carry'd back to Tymes of yore
Whylst the Poet swathed yet yn fleshlie Bedde
And saw all Actyons whych had been before
And saw the Scroll of fate unravelled
And when the fate mark'd Bad acome to Syghte
I saw hym eager graspeyng after Lyghte.
(The Story of Wyllyan Canynge. Thomas Chatterton.)
(Ackroyd, 1987: 79)

Thomas Chatterton parodies the Medieval style to fake his identity as an eighteenth-century poet, but as a postmodern writer Ackroyd's parody involves the questioning of previous genres to suggest the impossibility of writing in the conventional forms.

As the protagonist of the twentieth-century frame of the novel, Charles experiences that biographies of Chatterton fall short of giving true information about the poet. The narrator explains Charles's amazement, saying:

> In any case he [Charles] noticed that each biography described a quite different poet: even the simplest observation by one was contradicted by another, so that nothing seemed certain. He felt that he knew the biographers well, but that he still understood very little about Chatterton. At first Charles had been annoyed by these discrepancies but then he was exhilarated by them: for it meant that anything became possible. If there were no truths, everything was true. (Ackroyd, 1987: 127)

Charles faces the condradictions among the biographies that he reads about Thomas Chatterton. Ackroyd alludes to Coleridge's process of writing "Kubla Khan"; just like Coleridge who was interrupted, Charles is interupted too by a telephone call in the middle of his writing the preface about Thomas Chatteton.Thus, *Chatterton* both reminds of a classical biography and underlines its fictitious nature. As Waugh suggests, metaficational parody "offers both innovation and familiarity through the individual reworking and undermining of familiar conventions" (Waugh, 2001: 12). Similar to the writing process of a historian, as discussed in the introduction, the biographer has to select, arrange and interpret his/her sources and materials, which are often contradictory. Therefore, s/he is the one, who endows the facts with meaning. Aylin Atilla claims "*Chatterton* is involved with the historicity of history and the problems in history writing. Ackroyd deconstructs the truth of history especially by means of parody" (Atilla, 2008: 119-120). Ackroyd gives his reader an excerpt of Thomas Chatteton's history then deconstructs it giving different endings of his life. As mentioned before, one of them is traced by Charles Wychwood who thinks that Chatterton forged his death.

Similar to the parody of one form of life writing, which is the biography, Ackroyd also parodies literary memoir through Harriet Scrope. She is one of the writer characters who tries to represent her own past in the form of a literary memoir. Since she has difficulty remembering her past memories and in this way writing her

memoir, she hires Charles to be her "ghost writer" (Ackroyd, 1987: 40). Charles agrees, saying, "I will be the finest ghost you ever saw" (Ackroyd, 1987: 40). This is actually a very ironic situation, as Charles, who knows nothing about Harriet's past life, will narrate her story. Ackroyd uses this scene to pose questions about life writing. Charles literally becomes a ghost at the end of the novel, haunting his son through Chatterton's painting.

Another fictional character who is fond of writing biography is Andrew Flint. Thus, unlike Harriet's case, where a fictional character, Charles, is hired to write her memoir, in Flint's case a fictional character is in the process of writing the biography of a real writer George Meredith's biography. In this way, Flint reminds Meredith to the readers. As Charles comments on Flint's biography "The poet lives" (Ackroyd, 1987:148). In both cases Ackroyd problematizes the narration of real events, and also underlines the importance of parodying biography and reminding of an earlier writer to the new generation.

Apart from the biography, Ackroyd's novel parodies the well-made plots of historical and realist fictional texts with its chrological disorder done through sudden time shift between the frames. Waugh asserts:

> Metafiction, then, does not abandon 'the real world' for the narcissistic pleasures of imagination. What it does is to re-examine the conventions of realism in order to discover-through its own self–reflection – a fictional form that is culturally showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds. Metafication helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly 'written'. (Waugh, 2001: 18)

Ackroyd in his novel questions realism and tries to show the constructed nature of realism.

Charles talks with Harriet claiming that "Realism is just as artificial as surrealism, after all [. . .] the real world is just a succession of interpretation. Everything which is written down immediately becomes a kind of fiction" (Ackroyd, 1987: 40). This metafictional quote, which also displays characteristics of Ackroyd's novel, suggests that realism is illusory and it criticises totalizing narrative forms.

That is, the novel betrays an uneasy cognizance of both the appeal of totalizing order and the tyranny inherent in such order. Hutcheon asserts:

> A plot, be it seen as a narrative structure or as a conspiracy, is always a totalizing representation that integrates multiple and scattered events into one unified story. But the simultaneous desire for and suspicion of such representations are both parts of the postmodern contradictory response to employment. (Hutcheon, 1989: 65)

Then parodic metafiction novel connects different events in one unified whole is mentioned in the metafiction section. Unlike the chronological order in realistic fiction, in Ackroyd's parody there are time shifts between the three frames to destroy the order and realism.

Finally, *Chatterton* parodies detective genre with a detective characterwho is totally different from those in the old detective stories, such as Sherlock Holmes and Poirot. Gürenci says "In parodic metafictional detective fiction, the detective is hardly ever a hero, and the story itself never arrives at a closure. The detective, rather than establishing order in a chaotic world, ends up struggling in the midst of his chaos and is inefficient in solving the problem/crime" (Gürenci, 2011: 43). Charles becomes curious after acquiring a portrait and manuscripts he thinks to belong to Chatterton. Charles believes that he is similar to Sherlock Holmes in trying to prove that Chatterton did not die at the age of seventeen. He also insists that his acquaintance Philip Slack represents Watson (Gürenci, 2011: 43). Philip is smarter and more logical than Charles. Ackroyd uses Charles as a pseudo-detective in order to make the reader trace the events that had been recorded in historical documents. Charles dies unlike the real detectivebefore solving the mystery of the portrait and the manuscripts. For this reason, unlike a traditional detective story where order is achieved at the end, Ackroyd's novel finishes without such sense of completness. This is in line with the parody of realism as well.

In short, through the parody of life writing and realistic fiction, *Chatterton* treats writing based on facts and fiction as equal. Moreover, the parody of detective ficiton in the novel displays the loss of order in postmodern detective stories and the

readers are given the role to recreate the novel by following the clues that the failed detective leaves.

3.4 Imitation and Intertextuality

The use and abuse of documentary evidence in historiographic metafiction works to foreground the fact that it is not in the past that gaps occur, but in the record(s) of the past, in the textual traces that are presented as evidence for past empirical events. *Chatterton* too is aware of both the authority that narrative history derives from its documentary paratexts and the problematic status of those paratexts. Paratextual conventions, as Hutcheon points out, are powerful markers of truth in historiography:

> Although [. . .] the validity of the entire concept of objective and unproblematic documentation in the writing of history has been called into question, even today paratextuality remains the central mode of textually certifying historical events. [. . .] paratexts have always been central to historiographic practice, to the writing of the doubled narrative of the past in the present. (Hutcheon, 1989: 76)

By self-consciously employing historiography's paratextual conventions within fictive writing, *Chatterton* draws the reader's attention to textuality.*Chatterton* begins with two conventional historiographic paratexts. In his book, *Paratexts: Threshold in Interpretation,* Gerard Genette defines paratext: "Paratexts are those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher, and reader: titles, forewords, epigraphs, and publishers' jacket copy are part of a book's private and public history" (Genette, 1997, i).

Henry Wallis's painting of the death of Chatterton and the preface, in which Chatterton's biography is presented in a scant two paragraphs, are paratexts. Other standard paratexts such as the epigraphs taken from Thomas Chatterton's poems that open the two parts of the novel and the quotations that are dispersed throughout the narrative, function to inscribe the authority of historical evidence. *Chatterton*'s

preface and epigraphs, for example, are both set apart from the narrative spatially and typographically: the illustration is on the cover of the novel; the preface precedes the novel division into parts and chapters; the epigraphs are printed on separate pages; both preface and epigraphs are printed in italics.

The novel further problematizes the status of the paratext as both evidence and authority in a number of ways. First, the narrative contests the version of events given in the preface, not once, but twice, with its two alternative versions of Chatterton's life and death, so that the preface's role of providing evidence for the truth of the text's historical representation is radically undermined. Second, the preface is followed by a series of fragments of dialogue between the real and fictional characters of the novel. These fragments precede the narrative, yet are parts of that narrative. Presented in association with the preface, as if they are themselves paratexts, these fragments invite the reader to consider the constructed nature of the preface itself. Third, the picture on the cover both is and is not a copy of Wallis's painting of Chatterton; the fragments of Chatterton's writings that, in Wallis's portrait, are torn and scattered on the floor, are replaced on the cover illustration by a representation of a document that, while indecipherable, remains intact. By overtly challenging, altering or fictionalizing its own paratexts, *Chatterton* foregrounds the constructed nature of not only historiography, but the documentation that makes historiography possible and powerful.

Chatterton is divided conventionally into chapters, but within these chapters, fragments, that are spacially and typographically set apart from the main body of the text, create gaps in the text that are far more problematic than those between chapters. In the first chapter, for example, the phrase "oh yes . . . if this is real, this is him" (Ackroyd, 1987: 23), which is part of a dialogue when it is presented at the end of the chapter, is fragmented and scattered throughout the chapter, in italics and spaced apart from the text, before it is encountered within the context of that dialogue. In another chapter, a sentence from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, "whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent" (Ackroyd, 1987: 36), is quoted by Ackroyd to be part of the narrative after it has already been dispersed, in italics and spacially set apart, within the narrative. Onega asserts that this reference underlines "the radical autonomy of language" (Onega, 1999: 61).Such separated and separating sentences, sometimes recognizably intertextual references and sometimes fragments of *Chatterton* itself that have not yet been read, recur throughout the text. These

fragments serve to remind the reader of the narrator's presence and of the control inherent in that narratorial position. By teasing the reader with the yet-to-be-discovered significance of these textual fragments, the process of selection and organization that constitutes narrativization is foregrounded. Thus the narrator, though unnamed, is never effaced but proves to be just as overtly manipulative as in realistic fiction, but in Ackroyd's case, the narrator's manipulation aims to play with the reader unlike the role of the narrator in realistic fiction.

As it is argued in metafiction section, in the novel most of the characters deal with art, imitations and forgeries. Plagiarism and forgery are crimes, distinguished only by the fact that the former is conventionally seen as a crime against authors, while the latter is more usually seen as a crime against readers. Both crimes, however, are presented here as ultimately having the same "victim," the literary canon. That is, both plagiarism and forgery, by linking the wrong authorial signature to the text in question, reveal canonization as an author-centred process while denying the text the proper name that would stamp it with the necessary author(ity) and origin(ality) to facilitate its entry into the canon. As Hutcheon underlines, historiographic metafiction's foregrounding of its own intertextual relations works "to put into question the authority of any act of writing by locating the discourses of both history and fiction within an ever-expanding intertextual network that mocks any notion of either single origin or simple causality" (Hutcheon, 1989: 129). It is this very concept of canon as a linear tradition of authorized, unified origins that is under interrogation in *Chatterton*. Philip Slack is one of the characters who thinks there are "limited number of plots in the world" (Ackroyd, 1987: 70):

> He had once attempted to write a novel but he had abandoned it after some forty pages: not only had he written with painful slowness and uncertainty, but even the pages he had managed to complete seemed to him to be foiled with images and phrases from the work of other writers whom he admired. It had become a patchwork of other voices and other styles, and it was the overwhelming difficulty of recognizing his own voice among them that had led him to abandon the project. (Ackroyd, 1987: 70).

This metafictional explanation about Philip's act of writing exemplifies the notion of intertextuality and shows that "everything is copied" (Ackroyd, 1987: 70) in postmodern fiction. As said in metafiction Philip finds out that the plot of Harriet's text is stolen from Harrison Bentley's novel. Philip Slack also tries to write a novel built on the already situated story of Chatterton's manuscripts.

In this sense, the novel focuses on authors as copycats of other writers. Furthermore, we realize that Thomas Chatterton was aware of the issues of imitation and influence, confessing his interest in the medieval writers. Thus, by problematizing the notion of forgery and using intertextuality as a theme, Ackroyd blurs the line between the fake and the genuine. Thomas Chatterton narrates his life to Joynson who makes comments on Chatterton's forged works:

And when at last you admit these Works to be your own, the "Confession will bring you Fame".
"The Fame of a great Plagiarist? ""No, the Fame of a great Poet. You prove your Strength by doing their Work better than ever they could, and then by also doing your own." (Ackroyd, 1987: 91).

While discussing forgery in Chatterton's literary career, Ackroyd self-referentially warns the reader of the intertextual nature of his own novel.

Chatterton's case shows that conscious use of earlier texts as the basis of a literary text can be a solution to the anxiety of the writer to create new texts, as it suggests that the influence of the other texts is not passive, but active, resulting from "a new combination of texts which to a certain extent resembles its predecessors but which also reads like no other text before it." (Hanninen, 1997: 34). For Ackroyd, intertextuality is a feature of writing by which a writer can assert his strength and independence as Chatterton states: "thus do we see in every Line an Echoe, for the truest Plagiarism is the truest Poetry" (Ackroyd, 1987: 87). Ackroyd, by using the writer characters in the novel,builds his own view of intertextuality that "originality consists in forming new and happy combinations, rather than searching after thoughts and ideas which had never occurred before" (Ackroyd, 1998: 58). Ackroyd implies that though texts are always influenced by other texts, writers still can reflect their originality and individuality by combining existing texts with pre-existing ones.

Ackroyd's view of the originality through intertextuality and imitation can also be exemplified in Thomas Chatterton's experience witha nameless boy. When Chatterton says that his name is Tom and asks the boy who he is, he says: "Tom. The boy points to himself, in imitation, and smiles" (Ackroyd, 1987: 210).A similar example can also be found when Edward imitates the voice of his father, Charles and Vivien becomes happy for that: "her husband was dead and yet he was not dead" (Ackroyd, 1987: 181). Thus, Edward becomesa copy of Charles.

All these examples point out the construction of *Chatterton* that the novel delights in its own artifice. As Charles underlines "How could we know that it was real without a copy?" (Ackroyd, 1987: 93). Yet if all texts are made up of traces of other texts, another problem arises. What then, becomes of the authority of the act of writing, when the boundaries between text and text, author and author, author and reader are problematized? The final image in *Chatterton* is Thomas Chatterton, George Meredith, and Charles Wychwood linking hands in apparent solidarity. Within the context of the relationship between text and world, historiographic metafiction self-consciously focuses on the acts of writing and reading and the figures of the author and the reader that those acts summon.

Apart from the fragments, Ackroyd directly quotes from various poets, especially the Romantics, such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats, to question Chatterton's art. In this way, he destroys the Romantic poets's view of poetry, based on originality as they believe that poetry is a spontaneous expression of emotions without imitating other texts. One of those alluded famous Romantic poets is William Wordsworth, who devoted his poem "Resolution and Independence" to Thomas Chatterton:

> I thought of Chatterton, the marvelous boy,
>
> The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride;
>
> Of him who walked in in glory and in joy
>
> Following his plough, along the mountain-side:
>
> By our own spirits are we deified:
>
> We poets in our youth begin in gladness:
>
> But thereof come in the end despondency and madness (43-49)

The last two lines of this poem are misquoted by Harriet Scrope out of context and in this way it becomes difficult for the reader to recognize the original. Gürenci claims that Wordsworth's evaluation of Chatterton was drastically different from Ackroyd's depiction of the poet, saying:

> The poem sets the tone as to how Chatterton was regarded by the Romantic poets, and also how he continues to be regarded, which Ackroyd drastically changes in the novel. For Wordsworth, Chatterton is a "marvellous boy", full of genius, who ends in "despondency and madness", setting what is now a stereotypical image of the over-looked poet in misery, poverty,and madness.(Gürenci, 2011: 65)

Besides the Romantic poets, T. S. Eliot is also alluded to in the novel. Harriet Scrope's references to Eliot, for example, are restricted to the composition of her autobiography. She claimsthat Eliot, whom she could not have known, is her personal mentor: "Now Eliot was a sweetie. He published my first two novels.... But Eliot took me under his wing" (Ackroyd, 1987:100). Harriet Scope's deployment of Eliot has a clear function with regard to her own position as a novelist. In naming Eliot as her mentor she implicitly excuses her own borrowings. Also Ackroyd combines real writers with fictional ones to question the truth value of literature.

There are also allusions to fictional works in the novel. The most striking one is the reference to the *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Charles and Philip travel to Bristol in order to investigate the life of the Romantic poet Thomas Chatterton. On their way back home, Charles tears a page from the book and swallows it.This allusive scene suggests Charles's intention to become creative by eating past texts.

To sum up, *Chatterton* is a collage of other texts to emphasize the significance of textuality and narrativity in history. Ackroyd also appeals to the reader's knowledge of literary texts to discover references to previous texts. Hence, as we mentioned in the introduction, intertextuality is a form of play with the reader.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

In most of his novels, Ackroyd plays with factual information about historical characters who lived in London. The city with its mysterious events as well as its inhabitants give the writer ample material to question the validity of historical information. What Gibson and Wolfreys suggest in relation to *Dan Leno* applies to other works of the writer as well. They claim that:

> The structure of the city, its performance, is, at least in part, a response to the city's violent moment. Writing is thus shaped by London, and Ackroyd's text is written into this obsessive concern. Even as Ackroyd writes of those other writers, [. . .] his own novel is readable as [. . .] an act of writing the city as a response to and dictated by the city, and, at the same time, an act of writing the novel into the textual tradition of urban obsession and interest. *Dan Leno* knowingly invokes not merely history but also textual or literary history. (Gibson and Wolfreys, 2000: 173)

Ackroyd invokes literary history over the last centuries in order to rebuild the past in a context which is apt for the present, because the gaps in the events are filled with the interpretations of the historian. Therefore, he gives the readers a new version of history that its events might happen according to his imagination, challenging the documentation that composes what is called history.

As the product of a novelist who adopts the postmodern incredulity towards history as a metanarrative, Ackroyd's *Chatterton* problematizes history as a human construct, and suggests that it has no difference from a novel in terms of its use of the same narrative techniques. Ackroyd depicts history as an artifact and a discourse which has no right to claim any objectivity or reliability since history is only a

representation of the past in the present action; that is, in Hutcheon's words, "a dialogue with the past in the light of the present" (Hutcheon, 1988: 19). With respect to this idea, Greg Clingham rightfully asserts "Ackroyd's novel conceptualizes the difference between then and now-repeats and defers the closure of history as a metaphysical system-by holding up a mirror to that trace and allowing us to see it more fully in operation" (Clingham, 1998: 40). Ackroyd mirrors the process of historiography by introducing three alternative representations of Chatterton's death that are equally unreliable and equally fictional.

As historiographic metafiction, *Chatterton* questions authenticity and originality through the three time frames referring to both writing and painting. Firstly, Chatterton in the eighteenth-century frame forges medieval style of writing poetry. As Gibson and Wolfreys claim, "the Romantic poet and forger/ventriloquist is employed by the author to foreground questions concering largely Romantic notions of origins, artistry, creativity, and originality, so, too, is the novel put to work, to tease out the reader's assumptions behind these supposedly stable notions" (Gibson and Wolfreys, 2000:124-5). Secondly, Meredith in the nineteenth-century frame questions originality when he models the death of Chatterton in Henry Wallis's painting. Thirdly, the unpublished poet Charles in the twentieth-century frame investigates the validity of biographical information about the death of Chatterton. He tries to prove that Chatterton forged his death and continued to write under the guise of the Romantic poets. The portrait Charles finds at the antique shop is discovered to be a fake one after Charles's death, and with this fictional event too Ackroyd urges the reader to review their view of originality in art.

The novel performs its own intertextual relations with other texts to underline the importance of textuality. This type of fiction maintains a contradictory attitude toward reality, for if its metafictional aspects make it narcissistic, its historiographical aspects indicate a desire to somehow (re)engage with the world. In Ackroyd's text, that desire is reflected through the interconnection between real-world figures who exist(ed) in the historical past and fictional ones. The book's obsession with the oppositions between history and fiction, author and reader, and between reality and artifice is carried out within an overtly intertextual arena. Through his writer characters, who create their own works by imitating other writers, Ackroyd legitimizes his action as a pla[y]giarist writer. In this respect, *Chatterton* undermines the possibility of truth by first inscribing it, and then subverting the

conventions. Thus, the novel questions the power of literary past acknowledging the impossibility of breaking with it.

In relation to its intertextual nature, the novel parodies auto/biography and realistic fiction to blur the line between history and fiction. Ackroyd's fictional biography *Chatterton* supplies the readers with two contradictory versions of Chatterton's death, one, presenting it as a suicide, due to the failure of his poetry, and another, as the result of a failed attempt to cure a venereal disease. The text clearly favours the latter version, which is a parody of the Romantic cult of the 'marvellous' boy, produced by the first one. *Chatterton* promotes in a way this counter-version of Chatterton's death. Ackroyd's fictional biography presents it in a greater detail, and the aim of the parodic version epitomises how the novel challenges the concept of history based on chronology. However, Ackroyd's *Chatterton* considers all versions as equally authentic or fictitious. Moreover, by parodying detective fiction, Ackroyd plays with his reader and forces them to become detectives to solve the mystery of Chatterton's life before the fictional characters, like Charles, find out the reality.

In conclusion, Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* is analyzed in this thesis as an example of historiographic metafiction by focusing on historiography, metafiction, parody, imitation and intertextuality. The first chapter gave brief information about Ackroyd's style of making use of history in his fictional works. The second chapter dealt with how the concept of history has changed throughout the centuries from objectivity to subjectivity. Specifically, the postmodern denial of absolute reality and Lyotard's challenge to metanarratives as well as Hayden White's questioning of historical data are examined.

Ackroyd first constructs history as a metanarrative by borrowing the conventions of traditional history, but then deconstructs it in order to display its constructedness. In this sense, the novel challenges the authority of the traditional concept of history. It depicts history as a well-made story in a chronological order out of fragments of past events and portrays the historian just like a novelist who transforms historical materials into fiction by employing the same narrative techniques that a novelist uses. Finally, Ackroyd explicitly demonstrates that the historian, like a fiction writer, dissociates real events from their original context, creates his own story through the use of narrative techniques and turns such events into fictional representations which no longer have ties with reality.

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