CHATTERTON BETWEEN REALITY AND IMAGINATION AS A POSTMODERN WORK

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ABSTRACT

Peter Ackroyd creates a new version of history which is more credible and reliable than History (His/story) because he gives different types of endings in his writing leaving the reader believes according to his/ her mentality. His authenticity comes from the imagination to claim that is reliable and truthful. Authenticity may defined in History as (living history), in a living history donation, or in a chronological renovation, an assess of how close a thing of fabric civilization, or a person's action, is to the known proceedings relating to what was used or done in the time period being represented. While Culture Authenticity is defined as an study of the level to which a book reproduces the worldview of principles and significance and the exact details of everyday life and language for a definite cultural grouping.

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As far as concerns Peter Akroyd Authenticity can be found in multiple choices that suit the readers because it will give a large view of what is called reality through imagination and cannibalization of texts. He does not believe in History since it is just interpretations of events that happened in the past as well as history is narrated by the victors and rulers . Because there was no one from the past centuries alive to narrate an actual reality of past events then it is fill the gaps of information. Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodern works confront tale wonder and harmony in the name of variety and difference. Through narrative, they present fictive corporality in its place of ideaes, but at the same time they do to be inclined to piece or at least to render unbalanced the conventional unified characteristics or subjectivity of character (Hutcheon, 90). She says that postmodernists through multiplicity give ideas to readers to open their minds and participate in the work of different endings.

To sum up, Authenticity will be more truthful when the writer and the reader participate in the work of art 'Novel'. In such kind the reader will take a position as same as the writer.

Peter Ackroyd is one of the most significant postmodern writers who addresses the concern of narrative depiction and modernization of the past and the difficult relation between history and literature. He was born in London in 1949, Ackroyd first published poems in his book such in 1971. His other poetry books are London Lickpenny (1973 Hawksmoor (1985), Chatterton (1987 The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein: A Novel (2008), The Death of King Arthur. The Immortal Legend – A Retelling (2010) and Three Brothers (2013). extremely aware of ontological questions of postmodernism, Ackroyd shows an awareness of the postmodern accepting of history and searches the responds of such questions as whether it is probable to clutch the past, how history is understood and created and to what extent historians can symbolize 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 appearances 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 skeptical 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.

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

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 charged to construct 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 Hawksmoor, from an architect into a detective.

Chatterton is a historiographic metafiction about the biography of the eighteenth-century poet Thomas Chatterton. The poet's mysterious life story provides Ackroyd with prosperous font to play freely with the postmodern issues such as copying, legitimacy, objective realism and demonstration, since Chatterton was a falsifier of (pseudo-medieval poetry) (Antakyalıoğlu, 2009: 22).

Hence, this research 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

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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.

Peter Ackroyd's novel Chatterton, published in 1987, is a historiographic metafiction on the biography of poet Thomas Chatterton. Using a fragmented structure, the novel is set in three centuries it presents the life of Thomas Chatterton in the 18th century, George Meredith in the 19th century who was asked by the painter Henry Wallis to model Chatterton for a painting, and the adventures of the writer Charles Wychwood who acquires a manuscript and a portrait belonging to Chatterton and tries to uncover the mysteries of his life.

> 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. (Kristensen, 2009: 46)

Alongside Charles, the present cast of the novel includes his friends who are also writers like him, namely Harriet Scrope and Andrew Flint, as well as the librarian, Philip Slack who wants to write a novel based on the life of Chatterton. In the light of these, this paper seeks to analyze Ackroyd's novel with respect to the characteristics of historiographic metafiction to show how history is textualized.

Historiographic metafiction is defined and introduced by Linda Hutcheon in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. Before discussing this term, it will be useful to give a short discussion of Patricia

Waugh's concept of metafiction and Hayden White's theory of metahistory.

The term metafiction is often associated with postmodern fiction that self-consciously addresses its status as an artefact. Patricia Waugh in her seminal work *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* defines the term, saying:

> Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. [. . .] they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (Waugh, 2001: 2)

From this definition, it is understood metafiction is a fiction about creating a fiction by referring to other literary texts. In this kind of writing, writers usually use postmodernist self-reflexive techniques like a self-conscious narrator or author, intertextuality, parody and the reader's involvement. This mode of writing allows the author to examine the conventional forms of narrative fiction and explores the construction of reality.

The effects of postmodern challenge of conventions is seen in history. As Alice Mandricardo states, postmodernism strengths us to evaluation and reassess our idea of what history is, discovering the cultural presumptions on which any relation of history is founded" (Mandricardo, 2010: 108). Hayden White has been one of the key figures in the discussion of historiography. His ideas

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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 that:

> 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 [. . .] to solve the problems it characteristically tries to solve. This is what metahistory seeks to do. (White, 1978:81)

White's concept of metahistory comes from the view that the traditional history writing lacks self-reflexivity and he uses fiction theories 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 factual. Questioning the objectivity of historical narratives, White argues that both historical and literary narratives are discursively alike mechanisms 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 historical writings are always variable, because each new chronological work only inserts to the figure of probable texts that have to be understood (White, 1978: 89) and therefore it is subjectivity.

White's idea that the objectivity of a historical event is dubious is also emphasized in Linda Hutcheon's influential book A Poetics of Postmodernism in which she introduces and discusses the term "historiographic metafiction". Hutcheon 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 documents[…] Historiographic metafiction suggests a distinction between "events" and "facts" that is one shared by many historians (Hutcheon, 2004: 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 type that includes history, theory and literature. She asserts 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, 2004 : 5).

Hence, this kind of writing of self-conscious 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 the historical knowledge. Discussing the connection between the past and the present, Hutcheon maintains that postmodernism is generally characterised by parody. According to Hutcheon, parody simultaneously installs and subverts the past events, hence historiographic metafiction reevaluates the past by placing it in the present.

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Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* problematizes the issue of history and its authenticity by combining real historical figures, like Thomas Chatterton, George Meredith and Henry Wallis with fictional ones, as Charles Wychwood, Andrew Flint, Harriet Scrope and Philip Slack. The common characteristic of most of these historical and fictional characters is that they are either writers or artists to emphasize the fictionality of history. As Susena Onega states Chatterton's biography is one example of the questioning of history. There are two important facts in this biography: the death of the poet and his portrait. The narrator says:

> It was here on the morning of 24 August 1770, apparently worn down by his struggle against poverty and failure, that he swallowed arsenic. […]. An inquest was held and […] suicide was announced. Only one contemporary portrait of him is known to exist [. . .]This was completed in 1856, and has the young George Meredith as its model for the dead poet lying in his attic room in Broke Street. (Chatterton, 3)

Ackroyd in the novel follows these historical facts to tell the reader that such historical information cannot be trusted. The research discusses Chatterton's death in relation to the findings of a fictional character Charles later. The quotation above claims that Chatterton's death was a suicide, but later we learn that it was an accident. Chatterton catches a clap and one of his friends recommends him to get arsenic as a cure. Chatterton accidentally kills himself by taking this medicine.

The second story involves the painter Henry Wallis's depiction of Chatterton's death using George Meredith as a model. George Meredith and his wife have a complicated relationship and during the creation of the painting, she leaves him and starts living with Wallis. The painting story also shows Meredith's dilemma about posing as the dead poet and brings the question of how we recognize the reality. As the narrator recounts

> "Wallis put up his hand and stopped him. "Now the light is right, now it is falling across your face. Put your head back. So." He twisted his own head to show him the movement he needed. "No. You are still lying as if you were preparing for sleep. Allow yourself the luxury of death. Go on." (Chatterton, 4)

The third story is about the twentieth century figure Charles Wychwood as a fictional poet who wants to be famous. He searches for truth about Chatterton's life as well as his portrait that depicts Chatterton as a middle-aged man. During his search, he acquires a manuscript about Chatterton's confession that his suicide was fake, because he wanted to live in solitude writing fake poems with the name of some other poets. It says:

> 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 poet will have to be revised.(Ackroyd, 1989: 126 - 127)

Through all his research, Charles wants to prove that Chatterton lived after the forged death and write a new biography of the poet. But due to his wellbeing difficulties and imminent death he cannot focus on

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his studies, he is not even talented to write an original and complete preface to the book he is preparing to write (Antakyalıoğlu, 2009: 25). Hence a new mystery is created by Ackroyd about Chatterton.

Wallis's painting exhibited in the Tate Gallery represents how the historical and fictional characters interact. During his visit to 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.

However, the mystery of the painting is solved after Charles' death when a painter tries to uncover the first layer of the painting to see that there might be another painting behind to Charles' friends find out that both the painting and Chatterton's memoirs are fake. Harriet determines that the painting of the older Chatterton is false, Phillip studies that the autobiographical scripts that Charles established in Bristol were in fact the ones that were written by Chatterton's Bristol publisher and put among Chatterton's papers after his death, and it is made obvious that Charles was tiring himself out for nothing (Antakyalıoğlu, 2009: 26).

It is underlined that it is impossible to be sure whether history is true or not. Another character from the novel, writer Harriet Scrope, whose works are also examples of forgery, affirms this fact when she says; "none of it seemed very real, but I suppose that's the trouble with history. It's the one thing we have to make up for ourselves." (*Chatterton*, 174). Al-mamoori says "Postmodernism rejects absolute truth and reality and challenges history" (*Challenging History in Peter Ackroyd's Chatterton*:2015.7). From these two quotations, it is concluded that the authenticity of history depends on the narrator and the writer of the events and arising some questions about reliability of history.

CONCLUSION

Peter Ackroyd in Chatterton challenges the truth of history using multiple points of view. The reader is first given an official point of view about

the life of Thomas Chatterton, then it is challenged by Charles and his friends in the novel. It is may be considered multiple point of view as a typical narration of historiographic metafiction and reminds that it is impossible to find a subject confident to recognize the past with any assurance. This is affirmed in the novel. Charles' version of events was based on forgery, therefore the reader is left to believe in either the official one or the one told by Ackroyd. Since both of them seem believable, it is complicated to distinguish which one is true. Thus, the novel reminds us of the need to question received versions of history. Through all these narrative points of view, Ackroyd challenges the authenticity of historical truth, because it is impossible for the historical writing to avoid personal interpretation. As well as through imagination the reader could reach the reality of being via questioning the versions events.

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