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Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* as a Historiographic Metafiction

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Abstract

This study examines Peter Ackroyd's novel *Chatterton* through the lens of historiographic metafiction, a genre that intertwines historical discourse with self-reflexive fictional elements. Ackroyd's work challenges traditional notions of history and fiction by blurring their boundaries and emphasizing the constructed nature of historical narratives. Through an analysis informed by Linda Hutcheon's framework, which highlights the fusion of historical events with fictional techniques such as parody and intertextuality, *Chatterton* emerges as a provocative exploration of representation and reality. The novel problematizes the authenticity of historical accounts surrounding the poet Thomas Chatterton, offering multiple, conflicting narratives of his life and death. These alternative histories not only question the reliability of official records but also underscore the subjective nature of historical knowledge. Moreover, Ackroyd employs paratextual elements such as illustrations, epigraphs, and self-referential poems to subvert conventional historiographical practices. By doing so, *Chatterton* invites readers to reconsider how history is constructed and interpreted, ultimately illustrating the complex interplay between fact and fiction in the portrayal of historical reality.

Keywords: Historiography, Metafiction, Historiographic Metafiction, Intertextuality, Paratextuality, Aporycyphal History.

1. Introduction

Peter Ackroyd, one of the most prolific and renowned postmodern writers with his works blending history and fiction. Susana Onega, in her interview with Peter Ackroyd, states that Ackroyd refuses any differences between genres and calls "his poetry, his biographies, and his novels simply as "writing," the result of the same creative impulse" and in that way he repudiates the generic discrepancy by claiming there is no difference between poetry and fiction or biography and fiction since he calls them as a "part of the same process" not "separate activities". (Onega 1996: 208,

212). Accordingly, Ackroyd does not acknowledge the traditional association of truth with biography and fiction with lie. Therefore, though he refrains from categorizing his works under certain genres, most of his novels can be called as historiographic metafictions, which transgresses the boundaries between fact and fiction, story and history in other words word and the world.[1] In his interview with Onega, he admits that he inserts historical data into his novels and fictional elements into his biographies which makes him one of the most prolific writers of historiographic metafiction. Ackroyd who gains a worldwide reputation with his biographies (*T.S Eliot* (1984), *Ezra Pound* (1987), *Dickens* (1990), *Blake* (1995), *The Life of Thomas More* (1998), *Shakespeare: The Biography* (2005), *Charlie Chaplin* (2014) and *Alfred Hitchcock* (2015)) and historical surveys on ancient Egypt and ancient Greece, as well as poems, combines his knowledge of biography and history writing in his historiographic metafictions both as an author and a historian. Therefore, his novels, fusing history and fiction, *The Great Fire of London, Hawksmoor*, *First Light*, and *Chatterton* can be categorized as historiographic metafictions.

This study focuses on Ackroyd's fourth novel, *Chatterton* is a novel telling an alternative life story of Thomas Chatterton who tragically lost his life and became the precursor of and the emblem for Romantic poets, such as Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge. *Chatterton* consists of a preface and three parts composed of fifteen chapters. The preface of the novel starts with an encyclopedic biography of Thomas Chatterton, which is assumed to present an objective account of his life. The first part of this two-paragraphed biography mentions his childhood life and his poetry writing and composing Rowley sequence by creating and inventing an authentic medieval style following his discovery of some verses written by a medieval monk. The second part dwells on his travel to London for the quest of literary success and then his tragic suicide with arsenic because of his despondency due to poverty and failure in literary fame. This part also includes the information that the only portrait belongs to Chatterton painted by Henry Wallis was modelled on George Meredith posing as Chatterton. This so-called objective record of Chatterton's life and death supposed to present an objective and true account of the past is challenged by the alternative versions in the novel. The preface is followed by four extracts from the novel, which belongs to the three chapters of the novel. As Onega underlines, these four extracts are edited versions of the following chapters, and they refer to basic topoi of the novel. Accordingly, the first extract addresses "the question of whether writers live forever in the work of other; the second "the question of reality/unreality and of the truthfulness of art", the third "plagiarism and the question of originality and indebtness" and the fourth "anticipates Charles's climactic encounter with Chatterton and the end of his "wanderer's quest" for illumination" (Onega, 1999: 59-60). As these excerpts foreshadow, *Chatterton*, is about representation of art and life, ontological questioning of the reality and fiction, and authenticity and plagiarism. With its accentuation on the issue of

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[1] Word refers to literature and the world refers to history Edward Said (1983)

representation, questioning of real and fiction, problematization of traditional notion of history, and employment of metafictional narrative techniques and deconstruction of notions of traditional historical novels, *Chatterton* can be listed as one of the most prominent historiographic metafictions. The aim of this paper is to examine *Chatterton* as a historiographic metafiction by analyzing to what extent the novel harbors the concerns and characteristics of historiographic metafiction. Therefore, the paper will consist of two parts; the first part will dwell on what historiographic metafiction is, with which basic issues historiographic metafiction deal with and what the characteristics of historiographic metafiction are and the second part will analyze Chatterton as historiographic metafiction on the basis of content and form.

Historiographic Metafiction
Historiographic Metafiction: Historiography, Metafiction or Both?

Historiographic metafiction, coined by Linda Hutcheon in her essay "Beginning to Theorize the Postmodern" for the first time and further expanded in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), refers to postmodern historical fiction and overtly challenges the binary opposition between literature and history; fact and fiction; art and life. According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction is "what would characterize postmodernism in fiction" (Poetics 1988, ix) and she defines historiographic metafictions as "well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (Poetics, 1988: 5). As the term itself suggests historiographic metafiction embodies historiography and metafiction. At this point, it is imperative to mention the two pillars of historiographic metafiction: postmodern historiography (the writing of history or narrated from of history) and metafiction.

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The postmodern understanding of history referred in historiographic metafiction radically differs from traditional understanding of history. Susan Onega defines traditional history in the 19th century "as an empirical search for external truths corresponding to what was considered to be absolutely reality of the past events" (Onega, 1995: 12). Accordingly, traditional historiography attributes two characteristics to history. Firstly, history is empirical, and this positions it as a branch of science associated with fact and separates it from literature associated with fiction. Secondly, the reality of the past can be recaptured and reflected as it is. On the other hand, postmodern historiography, adopting poststructuralist thought, approaches history as a discourse like language and reality. Therefore, postmodernists refutes both the clear-cut separation between history and literature and the attainability and re-presentability of past as it is. Hutcheon accentuates that history and literature are more alike than different as follows:

They have been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms,

and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality." (Hutcheon, 1988: 105).

Being discourses based on linguistic structures, both history and literature are intertextual; employ similar narrative forms and neither can represent reality or facts as they are. Both of them tell us stories claimed to be *facts* and for that reason, facts are at the centre of both historiography and fiction. Herein, Hutcheon draws attention to a basic dilemma between "event" and "fact" also shared by many postmodern historians and claims that historiography and fiction "constitute their objects of attention; in other words, they decide which events will become facts" (Hutcheon, poetics,122) This process of turning events into facts is coined as "emplotment" by Hayden White and defined as "the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind" (White, 1973: 7). White emphasizes the role of the historian in the emplotment of history by claiming that "historical events are value-neutral" and they are not "inherently, tragic, comic or romantic" and historian can "transform a tragic situation into comic situation" by "shift(ing) his point of view or change(ing) the scope of his perceptions" (White, 1978: 84,85). Both the historian and the author are engaged in a process where they self-consciously investigate, select, organize and interpret their documents in order to plot their desired version of the past in history and fiction so neither history nor fiction can be considered as an objective account of the past. Hutcheon also underlines that "Historiography is …no longer considered the objective and disinterested recording of the past" but as "more an attempt to comprehend and master it by means of some working (narrative/explanatory) model that, in fact, is precisely what grants a particular meaning to the past" (Hutcheon, 1989, 4). Hutcheon's explanation on postmodern historiography emphasizes the subjectivity of history, postulates history's classification as a narrative and considers narrative as meaning-granting process for both history and fiction so that she reiterates the similarity of history and fiction. Therefore, historiographic metafictions do not tell a *History* (official -public) but multiple *histories* (provisional -individual). The subjectivity and multiplicity of history and fiction are often referred in metafiction, the other pillar of historiographic metafiction as well.

Metafiction was first identified and coined by William Gass in the late 1960s and he defined metafiction as works of fiction, which were about fiction itself (Currie, 2013: 1). However, Patricia Waugh is the one who extends the definition and elaborates on the relationship between reality and fiction both inside and outside of writings:

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. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only

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examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text (Waugh, 1984: 2).

The definition of Waugh especially highlights the relationship between fiction and reality, fiction and reality as human constructs and a heightened awareness of language as basic characteristics of metafiction. Postmodernist fiction's emphasis on self-consciousness of fiction, the blurred boundaries between art and life and art and fiction, and the interrelationship between reader and author embodies itself as metafiction, one of the most used techniques of postmodernist fiction. Waugh accentuates the society's heightened sense of "meta" levels of discourse and the role of language in "constructing and maintaining everyday reality" and dismisses the presumption that "language passively reflects a coherent, meaningful and "objective" world" and claims, "language is an independent, self-contained system which generates its own "meanings"" (Waugh, 1984: 3). In other words, in metafiction, language constructs meaning and recreates it textually in fiction. According to Waugh, "language *constructs* rather than merely *reflects* everyday life" (Waugh, 1984: 54). Waugh's this proclamation about the function of language reveals the fact that even the World we live in is textually constructed. It is a counter-reaction to realistic view of the world and mimetic understanding of fiction. Thus, metafiction challenges realism and offers a postmodern perspective of world and this world is constructed through language, which is also a construct itself. What lies in the constructedness of language, and metafiction, is self-consciousness and self-reflexivity. At the heart of metafiction resides self-reflexivity in other words literary self-consciousness. According to Waugh,

Metafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in the traditional realism) and the laying bare of this illusion. In other words, the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. (Waugh, 1984: 6)

What is foregrounded in metafiction is fictionality of fiction and it makes the readers question the relation between fiction and reality all the time. Therefore, for metafiction, the aim of fiction is not to reflect the fact like a mirror instead, it is to unmask the fictionality of reality and reflect upon fiction's own creation process. While postmodern historiography informs us about the "history" referred in historiographic metafiction, having background information on metafiction helps us to gain insight into the metafictional aspects of historiographic metafiction, which predominantly focuses on the issues of constructedness of fiction and the world itself and self-reflexivity of fiction.

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Basic Concerns of Historiographic Metafiction

Based on the definition of historiographic metafiction by Hutcheon, what is at issue in historiographic metafiction, the intersection point of historiography and metafiction, are critical rethinking of history and fiction, the problematization of the relationship between history and fiction, and self-reflexivity (metafictionality) of fiction. Thus, historiographic metafiction dwells on the issues of "subjectivity, intertextuality, reference, ideology" (Hutcheon, 1988: 121). The issue of subjectivity has always been the focus of postmodernism and therefore it is one of the issues on which historiographic metafiction is based as well. In postmodernism and postmodern fiction, the subjectivity is not the unified, singular and totalizing; on the contrary it is fragmented, plural, and non-totalizing. In historiographic metafictions, the notions of subject are subverted, and the subject is not seen as the origin of meaning. In historiographic metafiction, the position of the subject in relation to language and discourse is foregrounded. With the analyses of historiographic metafictions, Hutcheon addresses the inscription of subjectivity and foregrounds how these novels problematize subjectivity. First, she draws attention to issue of point of view which "has traditionally been the guarantee of subjectivity in narrative" (Hutcheon, 1988: 160). According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafictions employ two methods, which is either "overt, deliberately manipulative narrators" or "myriad voices", for subverting the stability of point of view and problematize the subjectivity (Hutcheon, 1988: 160). Both of these methods challenge the realist notion of subjectivity, the former incorporates an "over-assertive and problematizing subjectivity" while the latter employs "a pluralizing multivalency of points of view" (Hutcheon, 1988: 161). In other words, historiographic metafictions, with both controlling narrator and multiple points of view, address to the impossibility of making sense of the past by employing traditional narrative voices. Regarding the problematization of subjectivity, historiographic metafiction dwells on the position of subject in both making history and making sense of history; the exposition of the subject to the issues of discourse, knowledge and power in history, and the plight of the (wo)men in history written by men. Besides subjectivity, intertextuality is also an indispensable issue with which historiographic metafiction is constantly engaged. With his proclamation of the death of the author where he argues writing destroys every single voice and point of origin, Barthes also refers to the issue of intertextuality:

We now know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture (Barthes, 1977: 146).

Similarly, Julia Kristeva also states that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva, 1986: 37). Therefore, Hutcheon defines

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postmodern intertextuality as "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). Accordingly, intertextuality comes with the issues of *textuality*, *originality*, and *parody*. In historiographic metafiction, the textuality of both literature and history is a given and the only way to reach history is through its textual remains. Intertextuality is directly related to problematization originality since all texts are in relation to and in dialogue with the other texts before or after them so it is not possible to mention originality. Parody, as well as originality, is an issue intertwined with intertextuality. Marshall claims "intertextuality is not simply a reference to earlier texts but is a manipulation of those texts as well" (Marshall, 1992: 130). This manipulation through intertextuality is frequently reflected in historiographic metafictions by employment of parody. Due to postmodernism's decentrism, "the center of both historical and fictive narrative is dispersed" and "margins and edges gain new value" (130). Through the use of parody in historiographic metafictions, the accentuation is on difference rather than otherness and plight of the differents - be it nationality, ethnicity, gender, race, and sexual orientation- is foregrounded. The interdependence of the histories of central and peripheral is presented through parodies. According to Hutcheon, what intertextual parody does is "to offer a sense of the presence of the past, but this is a past that can only be known from its texts, its traces – be they literary or historical" (Hutcheon, 1988: 125). Therefore, intertextual parody works in historiographic metafictions by incorporating both literary and historical texts and then using and abusing them. Along with the issue of intertextuality and parody, historiographic metafiction poses new questions about reference and representation and questions the whole notion of representation. Historiographic metafiction problematizes "the entire notion of the relation of language to reality- fictive or historical" (Hutcheon, 1988: 141). While referring to these two notions of reference, it begins with refuting the notion that history's referents are real and the fiction's are not. Because both fiction and history actually refer to other texts and our only access to history is its textualized remains (Hutcheon, 1988: 119). Historiographic metafiction asks the following questions regarding the nature of reference:

Does the linguistic sign refer to an actual object- in literature, history, ordinary language? If it does, what sort of access does this allow us to that actuality? *Reference* is not *correspondence,* after all (see Eco 1979). Can any linguistic reference be unmediated and direct? (Hutcheon, 1988: 144).

To sum up, historiographic metafiction problematizes the notion of representation from the level of the signifier to the signified to the one of language to reality. In that sense, historiographic metafiction puts forward that "there is no direct access to that real which would be unmediated by the structures of our various discourses about it" (Hutcheon, 1988: 146). However, this does mean that postmodernist reference denies the existence or accessibility of reality, it claims that "past *was* real, but it *is* lost or at least displaced, only to be reinstated as the referent of language, the relic or

trace of the real" (Hutcheon, 1988: 146). In other words, historiographic metafiction believes the existence of past, but it interrogates its accessibility. Consequently, historiographic metafiction problematizes the whole notion of representation and reference by underlying the textuality of reality and history and the status of history as a narrative account. The issue of reference and ideology is also directly related to the issue of ideology in historiographic metafiction. The reciprocal relation between discourse, power, ideology and art has been at the center of the concerns of historiographic metafiction. Hutcheon claims that in historiographic metafictions, the ideological and the aesthetic are inextricably bound with each other and postmodern art and theory, by its ideological positioning, foregrounds the political status of the "silenced ex-centrics, both outside (post-colonial) and within (women, gays) our supposedly monolithic western culture" (Hutcheon, 1988: 179). In other words, historiographic metafictions make ideological criticisms and questionings which lead to the problematization of power and politics in general sense. However, this interrogation of power and politics in historiographic metafiction does not involve any kind of imposition on the reader to accept a certain worldview instead historiographic metafictions induce their readers to question these notions. Hutcheon refers to Nochlin to reveal the "the uncomfortable (and usually ignored) question of the ideological power behind aesthetic issues such as that of representation: *whose* reality is being represented?" (Hutcheon, 1988: 182). Almost all historiographic metafictions attend to the representation of reality and the lenses through which we see these realities. Therefore, we, as readers, interrogate the authorized representation of realities on the one hand and the absented or discarded realities on the other hand. This interrelationship between ideology, power and the representation of reality lead us to the issue of discourse which harbors the interaction of these phenomena. Discourse is an indispensable concept in postmodernism, and it is intertwined with ideology and politics. Therefore, "discourse analysis", which "looks at authority and knowledge in their relation to power and also consequences of the moment in history" and the act of enunciation gains importance since "the *act* of saying is an inherently political act" (Hutcheon, 1988: 185). Discourse is also inseparable from the notion of power since it is "both an instrument and an effect of power" (Hutcheon, 1988: 185). Hutcheon turns to Foucauldian notion of power which is "omnipresent" and "constantly *being produced*" to mention the role of power in postmodern discourses and she mentions that "in postmodern art, there is "a simultaneous avowal or inscription, plus a challenge to that" (Hutcheon, 1988: 186). Thus, in historiographic metafiction, margins and ex-centrics have agency to represent themselves against totalizing systems and subverts the hierarchy. Accordingly, the reciprocal interaction of ideology and art in historiographic metafiction enables the discourse where the ex-centrics and the margins speak with their own voices against the totalizing system. As a result, the issues of subjectivity, intertextuality, reference and ideology in historiographic metafiction are in constant interaction with each other and crucial to gain insight into the basics of historiographic metafiction.

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Characteristics and Literary techniques and devices of Historiographic Metafiction

Referring to Lukács's definition of historical novel, Hutcheon enumerates three characteristics of historiographic metafiction. First of all, contrary to historical traditional fiction, the protagonist of the historiographic metafiction is not an all-encompassing and stereotyped figure representing the total, instead they are "the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history" and "even the historical personages take on different, particularized, and ultimately ex-centric status" (Hutcheon, 1988: 114). In other words, instead of universal and the normalized, the peripheral, the local, the different and the marginal is foregrounded, and difference is recognized unlike traditional historical novels. Secondly, while traditional historical fiction gives limited place to details solely to ensure veracity, historiographic metafiction employs historical details and truths by falsifying them sometimes internationally and other times unintentionally to make readers interrogate the truths and lies of the historical records and to foreground the potential minute errors in historical record. Thus, historiographic metafiction "acknowledges the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its textualized accessibility to us today" (Hutcheon, 1988: 114) Lastly, Hutcheon refers to the ontological status of historiographic metafiction by comparing it with other historical writings. What renders historiographic metafiction different from other historical writings is that self-consciousness of historiographic metafictions. While other historical writings try to validate their presence and confute their fictiveness by referring to historical personages and events, historiographic metafictions have self-consciousness about their fictiveness and try to foreground the joints between fiction and history wherever possible by asking questions such as "How do we know the past? What do (can we) know about it now? "(Hutcheon, 1988: 115). Consequently, what differentiates historiographic metafiction from traditional historical novels and constitute the characteristics of historiographic metafiction can be summed up as;

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- The prevalence of the peripheral and the marginal over universal and normalized (especially in character choice),
- intentional and unintentional falsification of minor (sometimes major) details of acknowledged historical facts in order to induce readers to question both the ontological status of history and reality,
- self-consciousness of historiographic metafiction (especially employment of metafictional literary devices and self-consciousness of characters about their constructedness and fictiveness),
- characters engaged with historical research and /construction of history

Historiographic metafictions employ some literary techniques and devices in order to reveal these characteristics mentioned above. Among the main literary techniques and devices employed in historiographic metafiction, there are parody, paratextuality, apocryphal or anachronistic histories and multiple points of narrative or overtly controlling narrator. While almost all of these techniques and devices employed in some historiographic metafictions, several of them are employed in other

historiographic metafictions. Though Hutcheon has not provided an overt list of these techniques and devices, she refers to them in her works especially in *Politics of Postmodernism*. Besides, Mchale's *Postmodernist Fiction* also contributes to understanding these techniques and devices.

Parody, an indispensable property of postmodernism, is central to historiographic metafiction as well. Parody is inextricably interwoven with another postmodern concept which is intertextuality. According to Hutcheon, "postmodern 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). Historiographic metafictions consist of embedding of both literary and acknowledge that textuality is the very condition of intertextuality. Hutcheon enunciates both textuality and intertextuality of literature and historiography since both "derive from other text (documents)" (Hutcheon, 1988: 118). Historiographic metafictions first use and then abuse these intertextual echoes through parody. Therefore, Hutcheon refers to parody as "a perfect postmodernist form" since "it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (Natoli and Hutcheon, 1993: 251). Parody, in historiographic metafiction, revisits the past but this revisit, for Hutcheon, is not "nostalgic", "ahistorical or de-historicizing" but "critical" (Hutcheon, 1989: 93). Parody, simultaneously inscribing and subverting the literary conventions and specific literary forms, is the ideal literary device in terms of presenting double-vision of postmodernism in historiographic metafiction. Besides, parody serves as a form of self-reflexivity in historiographic metafictions in the way that it reflects the ideological contexts incorporated in the past. Therefore it becomes the ideal form for the narrative of "ex-centric-, of those who are marginalized by a dominant ideology" since parody suggests "a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist *to* speak to a discourse from *within* it, but without being totally recuperated by it" (Hutcheon, 1988: 35). From this point of view, most of the historiographic metafictions, handles the ideological dimension of the narratives and parodically rewrites the history from the gaze of the ex-centrics, black, gay, and women living in a predominantly white, heterosexual, and male culture. Thus, these works present the silenced (hi)stories of the ex-centrics omitted from historical narratives by the dominant ideology of the term.

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The postmodern use of paratextuality- book covers, illustrations, titles, chapter headings, dedications, forewords, epigraphs, the index, or table of contents, footnotes and other non-authorial material- which is also closely associated with self-reflexivity and intertextuality, is rather common in historiographic metafictions. Hutcheon refers paratexts as devices used to incorporate "the intertexts of history, its documents or its traces" into "fictional context" (Hutcheon, 1989: 82). Paratextual practice is not peculiar to historiographic metafictions and it is frequently used in realist fiction in order to enable veracity to the historical intertexts. However, the postmodern use of paratextual elements in historiographic metafictions, with its principle of double narrative, both sustains and subverts its role in realism. Hutcheon claims that "history writing's paratexts

(especially footnotes and the textual incorporation of written documents) are conventions which historiographic metafiction both uses and abuses" and draws attention to the significance of paratexts in "the writing of doubled narrative of the past in the present" (Hutcheon, 1989: 84). The footnote is the most common paratextual form employed in historiographic metafictions. Footnotes, on the one hand, claim the veracity of the historical data, disrupts the linear reading and reveals the fictionality of the narrative. In that way, footnotes, like other paratextual devices, both inscribe and invert literary conventions. According to Hutcheon, chapter headings and epigraphs, forewords and epilogues, like footnotes, function in two ways at once first "to remind us of the narrativity (and fictionality) of the primary text and to assert its factuality and historicity" (Hutcheon, 1989: 85-86). In general, the paratexts, used once to procure veracity and believability in realist fictions, are used to direct reader's attention to both historicity and fictionality of the narrative in historiographic metafictions. Though paratextuality functions as insertion of historical texts into fiction it simultaneously becomes a vehicle of self-reflexivity and intertextuality in historiographic metafictions.

Apocrypchal histories and anachronisms are also employed frequently in historiographic metafictions. According to McHale, apocryphal, alternative history, "contradicts the official version in one of two ways: either it supplements the historical record, claiming to restore what has been lost or suppressed; or it *displaces* official history altogether" (Mchale, 1987: 90).

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Historiographic metafictions, in a way, questions the reliability of what is called as official history and rewrites alternative histories. The writers of historiographic metafictions, as well as of historiography, are aware of the fact that their work is all about the relation between the past and the present since they write the events of the past in the present. While preoccupied with the relationship between the past and the present, historiographic metafiction "does not fall into either "presentism" or nostalgia in its relation to the past it represents. What it does is de-naturalize that temporal relationship" (Hutcheon, 1989: 71) with anachronisms, the linear textual flow of the writing is deliberately distorted and/or any characters, events, things are misplaced outside their time. McHale calls it "creative anachronism" and exemplifies it as incorporation of devices of the modern (present) world into the past and attribution of "the attitudes and psychology of modern, that is late-twentieth-century [wo]man" to a character of novel set up in earlier times. (Mchale, 1987: 93). Historiographic metafictions, by deliberately repudiating the official (public) history with apocryphal histories and incorporating the inventions or historical personages of different periods into one (hi)story, overturns the reality effect realist historical novels pursue.

Types of narration employed in historiographic metafiction is clearly related to the problematization of subjectivity in postmodernist fictions. Hutcheon points out that "two kinds of narration, both of which problematize the notion of subjectivity: multiple points of view…or an

overtly controlling narrator" are employed in historiographic metafiction and adds that "[i]n neither, however, do we find a subject confident of his/her ability to know the past with any certainty" (Hutcheon, 1988: 117). Whether there are multiple narrators or solely an overtly controlling narrator, the narrators of historiographic metafiction are aware of the fact that they are constructing history and they both acknowledge themselves and make their readers realize the complex process of constructing a narrative of past. Through the multiple points of view or an overtly controlling narrator, the readers of historiographic metafictions face the heterogeneous observations of the same event, so these different perspectives of the same event lead the readers question the possibility of an objective account of the past/history. Therefore, we cannot reach a "unitary, closed, evolutionary narratives of historiography" and that is the very reason "we now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few, and I might add, of women as well as men" (Hutcheon, 1989: 66). Therefore, the narrators of historiographic metafictions do not cling to a singular version of the events but offers multiple ones.

Authorial intrusions are generally "characterized, and criticized, as interruptions to a narrative that disrupt the illusion of fictional truth to varying degrees" (Dawson, 2016: 145). Though traditional historical novels intend to persuade their readers to the factuality of the fictional world in the novels, historiographic metafictions draw attention to the fictionality and authorial intrusions are the most common ways to reveal the fictionality and artificiality of the novels. Through authorial intrusions, the narrator addresses readers directly and calls attention to both the production process of the narrative and the fictionality of the work so that breaks the illusion of truth or reality. Waugh highlights that narrative intrusions remind the readers that "not only do characters verbally construct their own realities; they are themselves verbal constructions, *words* not *beings*" (Waugh, 1984: 26). Another function of authorial intrusion is directly related to the production process of the narrative. It is not uncommon for the narrator to disrupt the narrative to address the readers to give information about the production process of the narrative in historiographic metafictions as well as metafictions. Thus, authorial intrusions function to disrupt the verisimilitude, to lay bare the constructedness of narrative and to reflect on the production of narrative linguistically.

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Chatterton as a Historiographic Metafiction

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon underlines that "historiographic metafictions situates themselves within historical discourse while refusing to surrender their autonomy as fiction" (Hutcehon, 1988: 124). Considered together with her definition of historiographic metafiction where she accentuates both "self-reflexivity" of these fictions and inclusion of "historical events and personages" into them, historiographic metafictions are postmodern historical novels incorporating self-reflexivity. These novels on the one hand, incorporate the intertexts of history and fiction and render their readers to question all notion of history by blurring the boundaries

between fact and fiction and fiction and history and challenge them to be aware of metafictional qualities (especially self-reflexivity) of what they are reading. *Chatterton,* harboring all of these characteristics, is referred as "a novel about history and representation and about parody and plagiarism" by Linda Hutcheon, the coiner of the term, historiographic metafiction. (Hutcheon, 1989: 95). She also adds that with its "form and content", *Chatterton* "denaturalize[s] representation in both visual and verbal media in such a way as to illustrate well the deconstructive potential of parody" (Hutcheon, 1989: 95). *Chatterton,* retelling life (hi)story of unfortunate prodigy Thomas Chatterton, dwells on one of the basic concerns of historiographic metafiction which is the representation of reality. The problematization of representation in history, biography, and art prevails throughout the novel.

According to Hutcheon, *Chatterton,* with its "form and content", "denaturalize[s] representation in both visual and verbal media in such a way as to illustrate well the deconstructive potential of parody" (Hutcheon, 1989: 95). The problematization of representation in history, biography, and art prevails throughout the novel. Hutcheon also points out that "the focus of representation (in history, biography and art) is Thomas Chatterton" (Hutcheon, 1989: 95). Ackroyd underlines Chatterton's centrality to the novel and highlights Chatterton as the main object of representation: "So everything moved towards the centre, towards Thomas Chatterton" (Ackroyd, 1993: 164). Throughout the novel, the problematization of reference and representation is foregrounded. Though the traditional historicism sets out with the assumption that the referents of history are real while the referents of fiction are not, historiographic metafictions refer to language as the sole reference of both history and fiction. Accordingly, both history and fiction are substantially textual. *Chatterton*, with its characters, lead the readers to question the issue of reality, referentiality and representation. The representation of reality is problematized throughout the novel. The Saussurean claim of the arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified is foregrounded and the idea of Aristotelian mimesis- the idea that there is one-to-one correspondence between the word and the external world- is rejected. Hutcheon explains this fact as "reference is not correspondence, after all" (Hutcheon, 1988: 144). Thus, Historiographic metafictions deny the fact that there is "a natural connection between a work of art and its referents" (Quinn, 2006: 360). As Hutcheon claims "there is nothing natural about 'the real' and there never was" (Hutcheon, 1989: 30). Whether it is history or story (literature), the language is always representational and reality becomes textual. Postmodern understanding of representation does not deny the existence of reality, it postulates that reality is only accessible through language. Accordingly, both history and literature employ language as a medium to represent outside world. Thus, Historiographic metafictions, harboring both fiction and real in itself, inquire how historical reality is constructed through language. *Chatterton* as a historiographic metafiction is engaged with the issue of representation on the level of content and form, as well. In *Chatterton*, the characters, throughout

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the novel, dwells on the issue of referentiality and representationality and pose questions about the reality:

The dialogue between Vivien and Charles on reality especially focuses on language and how language (re)presents reality:

You once told me a very beautiful thing Charles. You told me that reality is the invention of unimaginative people". "Can we imagine reality?" "Oh yes" he said, "it is a question of language. Realism is just as surrealism, after all." He remembered these phrases perfectly. The real world is just a succession of interpretations. Everything which is written down immediately becomes a kind of fiction" (Ackroyd, 1993: 40)

Charles, here, refers to language as the mediator of reality and the sole way of (re)presenting reality. The border between the real and fiction is blurred when they are transcribed into language. Thus, everything that is textualized, becomes fiction. Similarly, the accentuation on the role of language to mediate the representation of reality reveals itself again in one of Chatterton's ponderings "Without words, Chatterton thinks, there is nothing. There is no real world. Without words I cannot even warn or protect you (...) without words you are in a different time" (Ackroyd, 1993: 210). Here, *Chatterton* does not only refer to language as the mediator of reality but also the creator and the shaper of reality. Without language it is not possible to mention the reality so the demarcations between real and imaginary, truth and lie, history and story are blurred. Meredith also refers to language as the creator of the reality. Meredith claims that "There is nothing more real than words. They are reality" (Ackroyd, 1993: 157) and goes on "I said that the words were real, Henry, I did not say that what they depicted was real. Our dear dead poet created the monk Rowley out of thin air, and yet he has more life in him than any medieval priest who actually existed. The invention is always more real" (Ackroyd, 1993:157). The boundaries between real and fiction is blurred and fiction becomes more real. Besides reality, the representation of history and the nature of historical knowledge is problematized throughout the novel, as well. Referring to the fabricated papers about Chatterton, Harriet says: "I didn't quite see. That was the problem. None of it seemed very real, but I suppose that's the trouble with history. It is the one thing we have to make up for ourselves" (Ackroyd, 1993: 174). Postmodern understanding of history denies the direct accessibility of history. It claims that history is inaccessible to us except in textual forms. As Hutcheon claims both literature and history are human constructs and the past "can be known only from its texts, its traces" (Hutcheon, 1988: 353) In that case, history is constructed like literature and it requires a process of turning events into facts which is coined as emplotment by Hayden White. This process entails the investigation, selection, organization and interpretation of the historical documents and this makes the history *one thing we have to make up for ourselves* as Harriet mentions. Similarly, fictional Chatterton in the novel referring to his writing process of Trew histories, tells "I reproduc'd the Past and filled it with such Details that it was as if I were awoke the Reality itself for, tho' I knew that it was I who composed these Histories, I knew also that they were the true ones" (Ackroyd, 1993: 85). As Hutcheon underlines "[k]nowing the past becomes a question of representing, that is, of constructing and interpreting, not of objective recording" (Huctheon, 1989:

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74). The conversation between Chatterton and his publisher Joynson also focuses on the authenticity and veracity of history:

"How goes the poet Rowley in your Bookshop?"
"The Monk is too prolific," he said ... "I cannot sell him as much as I did before. There are some Voices raised against him ...There are some who say that he is an Imposture."
I turned around quickly. "He is as real as I am!" (Ackroyd, 1993: 90)

Chatterton, here like a historian emplots his own version of (hi)story. Ackroyd, here, underlines the fact that the past is as invented, fabricated and constructed as fiction. Along with history and reality, the representation of art is problematized throughout the novel. The characters question whether the art can represent life and to what extent art represent its subject matter. Almost all of the characters in the novel are related to art. Charles Wychwood, Thomas Chatterton and George Meredith are poets; Henry Wallis is an artist, Harriet Scrope and Philip Slack are novelists; Andrew Flint is both a biographer and a novelist, Sarah Tilt, tries to write about the Art of Death in English Painting, Charles's wife Vivien works at an art gallery. The paintings of Chatterton (the one Meredith posed as Chatterton on his deathbed and the one portraying a middle-aged Chatterton found by Charles) become the locus of problematization of representation of art. While Wallis adopts a traditional realistic perspective and believes that he can exactly represent reality (which is Chatterton's death on this occasion) in a mimetic way, Meredith questions the mimetic value of art. The conversation between Meredith posing as Chatterton on his deathbed and Wallis painting him focuses on what exactly the art represents:

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"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, 1993: 138).
The question is whether the art exactly reflects the subject matter (in this case, it is Thomas Chatterton) or it defines sometimes entirely independent from its subject matter. Hutcheon claims that "it is not that representation now dominates or effaces the referent, but rather that it now self-consciously acknowledges its existence as representation- that is, as interpreting (indeed as creating) its referent, not as offering direct and immediate access to it (Hutcheon, 1989: 34). Though Wallis strives to picture the death of Chatterton he "can only draw what he sees" (Ackroyd, 1993: 133) which is Meredith posing as Chatterton because as Meredith mentions "the greatest realism is also the greatest fakery" (Ackroyd, 1993: 139). Therefore, the portrait of Chatterton becomes an artistic creation, It does not (re)presents what it depicts. As Historiographic metafiction blur the boundaries between story and history, they also blur the boundaries between art and life. Meredith cannot bear the representation of death since the distinction between art and life is blurred. As Meredith claims Wallis's painting "will always be remembered as the true death of

Chatterton" (Ackroyd, 1993: 157). According to Violeta Delgado, while Wallis "believes that art is a faithful replica of external reality, for Meredith, art cannot and does not describe the world but creates it" (Delgado, 1997: 356). In that case, Wallis's painting does not represent the death of Chatterton but re-presents and creates a new version of Chatterton's death. Similar to life, art has its own power of creation. In that way, the plurality of realities is foregrounded again. Similarly, the painting found by Charles, accentuates the plurality of realities. As Stewart Merk works on the painting to make it seem authentic, he finds out that ""[t]here are so many different layers … There's definitely another painting behind this one, and there may be more …. the painting contained residue of several different images, painted at different times" (Ackroyd, 1993: 205) The fact that there have been residues of several different portraits also mean that there has never been a sole unified reality but many realities. The plurality of realities can also mean the plurality of histories. Therefore, the next chapter will focus on the different (hi)stories of Thomas Chatterton narrated in the novel.

Apocryphal Histories of Chatterton

According to McHale, apocryphal, alternative history, "contradicts the official version in one of two ways: either it supplements the historical record, claiming to restore what has been lost or suppressed; or it *displaces* official history altogether" (Mchale, 1987: 90). Ackroyd, in *Chatterton,* makes the reader question the reliability of what is called as official history and offers alternative histories. Chatterton's so-called official record of suicide is given on the preface of the novel but the novel focuses on other (di)versions of Chatterton's death which overtly differs from the official version. While the official version claims that Chatterton committed suicide at the age of eighteen, Ackroyd presents two alternatives to the allegedly official one; one of which claims that Chatterton did not die in 1770 at the age of eighteen but faked his own death continued to write under other famous poets' names (Thomas Gray, William Blake, William Cowper and others), the other one he accidentally killed himself with an overdose of arsenic and opium in order to treat his sexual disease (clap). By presenting two alternative (hi)stories to the official one, Ackroyd urges reader to question the reliability of official records, even the nature of history and historical documents. As a historiographic metafiction, *Chatterton* does not aim to unify the three versions of Chatterton's story into one coherent hi(story). On the contrary, it cherishes the plurality of histories. Ackroyd underlines the process of constructing history through the characters in the novel.

Charles stopped uncertain how to continue with the preface. He could not now remember whether all this information came from the documents themselves, or from the biographies which Philip had lent him. […] 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 anything became possible. If there were no truths, everything was true (Ackroyd, 1993: 127).

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Similarly, fictional Chatterton, while referring to his process of constructing Rowley Sequences says, "I knew that it was I who composed these Histories, I knew also that they were true ones" (Ackroyd, 1993: 85) Ackroyd here refers history as a constructed discourse and artefact. Philips pondering on the origin of everything also deconstructs the causality of history: "if you trace anything backwards, trying to figure out cause and effect, or, motive, or meaning, there is no *original* for anything. Everything just exists. Everything just exists in order to exist." (Ackroyd, 1993: 232). Accordingly, besides Ackroyd, all the characters in *Chatterton* postulate that the history can only be constructed and thus there is no access to a single version of history. Harriet explains "I suppose that's the trouble with history. It is the one thing we have to make up for ourselves" (Ackroyd, 1993: 174). Harriet here ponders on the construction and meaning-granting process of history and emphasizes that the history is not a given, it is constructed so an artefect. During a conversation between Philip and Charles about the ownership of the pile of papers about Chatterton, Charles states that "nobody can own the past" (Ackroyd, 1993: 90). Ackroyd, through Charles, posits that neither anyone can impose a single ultimate meaning on the past. Similarly, Philip refers to emplotment process of historical events by stating that "events which are tragedies for us (…) are just changes for them" (Ackroyd, 1993: 214). Once more there is no single ultimate meaning but multiple versions which are constructed through meaning granting processes of different subjects.

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One of the apocryphal histories of Chatterton is constructed upon a failed poet's, Charles Whychwood's, discovery of a portrait depicting a man whom he believes Thomas Chatterton in his middle ages in an antique shop where he goes to sell some books due to his financial difficulties. He trades the books in for the portrait and starts his research about truth of the death of Chatterton. Following his discovery that the portrait dates back to 1805 and finding some manuscripts belonging to William Blake and other poets but signed by the initials of T.C, he believes that Chatterton has faked his own death and gone on writing under other famous names. Thomas Chatterton believed that he could explain the entire material and spiritual world in terms of imitation and forgery, and so sure was he of his genius that he allowed it to flourish under other names. 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 the eighteenth century poetry will have to be revised. Chatterton kept his own account of his labours in a box from which he would not be parted, and which remained concealed until his death (Ackroyd, 1993: 127). After Charles's death, it is found out that Chatterton actually has died and his publisher forged manuscripts for financial gain.

In another apocryphal history of Chatterton, Charles's and Chatterton's death scenes are intertwined into each others'. In this version, Chatterton is depicted a self-satisfied and prolific

poet opposed to the official version in which he is despondent and unsuccessful. Unlike the official version, he does not commit suicide in this version, he accidentally kills himself with an overdose of arsenic and opium in order to treat his sexual disease (clap).These three (di)versions of Chatterton's life and death (one official (hi)story and two other histories) render the representation of past reality problematic; underline that both history and fiction are human constructs and constructed through emplotment; and there is neither a single story nor a history.

Pararatextuality in *Chatterton*

An indispensable element of historical writing, paratexts - book covers, illustrations, titles, chapter headings, dedications, forewords, epigraphs, the index, or table of contents, footnotes and other non-authorial material- have been often employed in *Chatterton* as well. As Hutcheon accentuates that "even today paratextuality remains the central mode of textually certifying historical events" (Hutcheon, 1989: 84). In *Chatterton*, the first historiographic paratexts the readers come across are the illustration of the book and the preface. The illustration of the book is Henry Wallis's painting of the death of Chatterton (The Death of Chatterton) which introduces the reader the subject of the book. After the illustration, the preface, consisting of two paragraphs, presents the "official" history of Chatterton which is challenged by two different (di)versions throughout the novel. Though paratexts in traditional historical novels are employed to ensure the true representation of a past reality, Ackroyd here gives the official history of Chatterton's life and death in the preface just in order to subvert it with two different (di)versions. The preface is succeeded by the fragments of the narrative, which are a part of the book itself. Similarly, Ackroyd also employs epigraphs to start the two parts of the novel. These epigraphs, consisting of Ackroyd's own poems and printed on separate pages, and the fragments are employed in order to disrupt the flow of the narrative and remind the readers the fictionality and artificiality of what they read. Besides, Ackroyd also includes his own poems as quotations into the book. By plagiarizing himself in his own book, Ackroyd again draws attention to the metafictional self-reflexivity and constructedness of fiction. By using and abusing paratextual conventions of historiography, *Chatterton* not only reminds its readers constantly the constructed nature of history and fiction but also encourages its readers to engage with the process of emplotment process: the selection and interpretation of historical evidence. Hence, the readers once again there is not one history but histories, which is one of the foregrounded common features of historiographic metafiction.

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Multiple Narrators of *Chatterton*

Linda Hutcheon, in *A Poetics of Posmodernism*, claims that historiographic metafictions employ two kinds of narration, which are "multiple points of view" and "an overtly controlling narrator" in order to problematize the notion of subjectivity and accentuates that none of these narrator subjects are ever "confident of his/her to know the past with any certainty" (Poetic 117). While

traditional historians/narrators aim to represent an objective historical account, narrators of historiographic metafictions are mostly unreliable and they are aware of the fact that they are constructing subjective accounts of history. *Chatterton* intricately weaves together the lives and (hi)stories of multiple characters through the lens of different types of narrators. In *Chatterton*, there are multiple points of view and the narrative is shifted from one narrator to another one throughout the novel. The readers witness the various (hi)stories of Chatterton due to multiple voices. The narrator in the preface telling the hi(story) of Chatterton's death as a suicide presents the third person point of view. While the omniscient narrator is supposedly reliable and objective in traditional historical novels, in *Chatterton*, omniscient narrator's reliability and objectivity is subverted with two alternative (hi)stories of Chatterton's life and death. Throughout the novel, the narrators constantly alternate and provide readers with multiple stories and histories. Each narrator brings their own biases, interpretations and agendas and present a mosaic of narratives. Accordingly, by juxtaposing different narrative voices and perspectives, Ackroyd encourages its readers to question the nature of real(ity) past besides the boundaries between fiction and reality.

Conclusion

Chatterton, as a historiographic metafiction, engages deeply with the complexities of representation, history, and narrative construction. By intertwining historical discourse with fictional autonomy, Ackroyd's novel challenges traditional notions of history and storytelling. Linda Hutcheon's framework helps illuminate how Chatterton functions as a self-reflexive narrative that blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, while also problematizing the very nature of historical representation. Throughout the novel, Ackroyd explores the idea that both history and fiction are fundamentally textual and constructed through language. This challenges the traditional view that history reflects objective reality, suggesting instead that historical narratives are interpretations that shape our understanding of the past. The character of Thomas Chatterton becomes a focal point for this exploration, as various characters in the novel debate and reinterpret his life and legacy. The novel's emphasis on self-reflexivity is evident in its paratextual elements, such as epigraphs, illustrations, and Ackroyd's own poems integrated into the text. These elements disrupt the narrative flow, reminding readers of the artificiality and constructed nature of historical accounts. By manipulating these paratextual conventions, Ackroyd underscores the novel's metafictional qualities and invites readers to question the authenticity and reliability of historical narratives. Moreover, Ackroyd presents multiple alternative histories (apocryphal histories) of Chatterton's life and death, challenging the notion of a singular, objective truth. These alternative histories not only enrich the narrative complexity but also emphasize the subjective nature of historical knowledge and the role of interpretation in constructing historical narratives. In conclusion, Chatterton exemplifies historiographic metafiction by deconstructing traditional notions of history, representation, and truth. Through its self-conscious narrative strategies and

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exploration of alternative histories, the novel encourages readers to critically engage with how history is constructed and understood. Ackroyd's work not only blurs the lines between fiction and reality but also highlights the power of storytelling in shaping our perceptions of the past.

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