The Problematisation of the Representation of Reality in Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* in the Light of Postmodern Theories

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Abstract

The representational view of literature has highly been questioned in the last few decades. Postmodernist metafiction, as a type of postmodernist fiction, aims at putting the view into question, not to reject any representational view of art so as to assert anti-representationality, but to problematise both views. It simultaneously draws upon and withdraws from previous conventions to highlight the text's fictionality and to offer its meaning as created and granted in the process of narration. To do so, metafiction juxtaposes the historical with the fictive. It also self-reflexively exposes its own fictionality and the process of construction through narrative strategies and techniques to suggest history as well as literature is a human construct. This study discusses how Peter Ackroyd's Chatterton problematises the representational view of literature regarding postmodern theories. It also highlights the novel's narrative strategies and techniques which result in demystifying the text's meaning-granting process; hence, problematisation of reality.

Keywords: Problematisation, Representation, *Mise en abyme*, Parody, Self-reflexivity

1. Introduction

Throughout history, men of letters and thought have been obsessed with the representational view of literature alongside with its critique. For many it has almost been a truism that art must reflect the reality of life. Nonetheless, seemingly an "axiomatic fact," the idea that literature can represent reality has highly been questioned specially by postmodernists. Moreover, in the last few decades there has been a great inclination, as highly supported by modernists and especially by the avant-garde movement, towards proving a crisis in the representation of reality so far as to mark anti-representationality of art. However, postmodernist metafiction puts both views into question, not in a sense that it rejects the two but in that it is neither and at the same time both of them. In effect, paradoxically as it may seem, postmodernist metafiction is both representational and anti-representational. In other words, it signals problematisation of representation of reality.

In the last few decades some have touched upon and discussed the issue of representationality and its crisis. Structuralists, including Ferdinand de Saussure, have pointed out the arbitrariness of the relation betwixt the signifier and the signified rather than a *natural* relation as elaborated in *Course in General Linguistics*; hence, the crisis of representation of reality. Yet, Saussure stipulates that the relation is fixed. Unlike Saussure, Jacques Derrida goes so far as to cast doubt upon the idea by offering differance, a constantly delaying of the signified and subversion of the hierarchy; hence, the relation as slippery. Nonetheless poststructuralists including Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, to name but two, have undermined the text, be it of literary or historical, to only a set of signs or in Barthes' (2000) terms "a tissue of signs" (p. 149) by relating the uncertainty of the text to language itself. Therefore, they have either been anti-representational or attributed the problematisation of representationality to the language itself. They have been anti-representational in their rejection of the text's representationality as expressed in Derrida's (1976) highly-quoted remark "there is nothing outside the text" (p. 163) and in the avant-garde's total rejection of the past by discarding its conventions, or to use Eco's (1995) terms by destroying and defacing the past (p. 173), to highly emphasise the text's auto-referentiality.

However, metafiction "can never be totally autonomous" (Waugh 1986, p. 100), for it does not deny the past and its relation to the outside world. Besides, many poststructuralists including Derrida assume the impossibility of representation due to language: language is inherently unreliable which can be implied in almost all of Derrida's works including "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Science," "Difference," and *Of Grammatology*, to name only three. Nonetheless, to ascribe the double-voicing feature of metafiction only to the nature of language is to underestimate a major contributory factor: artistry or literariness. In other words, it is not only the inherent unreliability of language that makes metafiction uncertain, double-voicing, and self-contradictory; rather, juxtaposition of the materials decided by the *writer*. Availing themselves of the contribution the Formalists, especially Shklovsky's key notions (Selden 1989, p. 13), made to literary criticism and practice, metafictionists have practiced and focused upon narrative techniques in providing problematisation to the extent that they have taken the concern as their theme, if any. Thus, as realism is an inadequate means of depicting the contemporary situation, so is poststructuralism's linguistic strategy of reading in approaching the mode, for metafiction is highly self-reflexive, self-conscious, auto-referential (auto-representational), as well as representational.

Consequently, metafiction requires a new methodology that can account for its strategies and techniques which lead to the crisis of representation. A study is accordingly required to analyse this mode of fiction. For that reason, the present study aims at demonstrating how narrative strategies and techniques are employed in *Chatterton*, as a metafictional novel, to problematise the representation of reality with regard to theoreticians including Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh, and Hayden White, to name only three.

2. Theory

Aristotle's defense of poetry offered what is known as mimesis. He elaborates upon the idea by differentiation in means, models (objects), and manners of imitation. To wit, in so doing as well as in asserting such remarks as "[i]mitation is natural to man" (p. 7) he, in consequence, keeps postulating the imitative and representational function of poetry (literature). He would like a poet to present what is probable (pp. 17-18) – literature must be true to life. Also, in comparing literature to history he holds the former as universal and the latter particular; hence, a belief in universality of literature. Such imitative and mimetic view of literature has continued its dominance throughout history specifically gained a prominence in realism till it has been put in a crisis in the recent decades especially in metafiction. Metafiction, as a (or the) major postmodernist form of art, consummates the problematisation of representation by expanding the notion of historiography to the realm of fiction. An especial type of narration "historiographic metafiction" in Hutcheon's terms (2000, p. ix), as the term historiographic points out, explores the ways by which *historical reality* is constructed. Consequently, postmodern theories concerning historiographic metafiction is an investigation of how this especial form of postmodernist art underlines, in its ironic way, the realisation of the *process* in which ideology of any kind grants meaning to historical events and to our historical and literary knowledge and experiences. As a postmodernist mode of representation, historiographic metafiction renders this *meaning-granting process*, which might not have otherwise been realised, *problematic*. Therefore, the myth of a possibility of language to objectively represent reality thus came to almost an end.

Postmodernist re-presentation, best reflected in metafiction, is, firstly, a reaction against realism's conventions and mode of discourse in general and of writing in particular and the-today-overriding liberal humanism's totalising notions. Secondly, it contests the autonomy of art put forward by modernists, as well as the avant-garde's anti-representation. This type of fiction "uses and abuses," establishes and "subverts" that it strives to contest, question, and challenge (Hutcheon 1988, p. 3), whether it be the conventions of realism or those of modernism which have remained inviolable and now turned into metanarratives over the years. Moreover, it does all simultaneously. It aims at making contradictions, lying at the heart of realism and any mode of representation, manifest whilst leaving them instead of trying to resolve them, as does realism. It does not play havoc with previous conventions as does the avant-garde. Nor does it naively accept them.

It is not a rejection, as some postmodernism's detractors may claim, of what is known as grand-narratives whose aim is to naturalise, universalise, generalise, and totalise (p. x). It is but a questioning of them. It makes attempts to de-totalise and "de-naturalize" what we have always thought of as "natural" so as to divulge to the reader that they are nothing but "cultural" constructs (Hutcheon 2000, p. 2). Besides, as the prefix "re" in the term re-presentation implies, it presupposes the presence of the past: past (or previous) time, work, style, convention, and so on. It plays the conventions, be they of realism or of modernism, off against each other in order to question, to problematise. In this type of representation, realism's seemingly transparency referred to as the natural or the real, recognised as conventional artistic forms, has been under scrutiny but not denied. Thus, postmodernist re-presentation tends to make inquiries into how the real or the natural is portrayed and constructed and how we come to know it.

As Hutcheon (2000) states, "[t]here is nothing natural about 'the real' and there never was" (p. 33). Postmodernist re-presentation, metafiction by implication, does not reject the existence of the real. Nevertheless, it discloses that they are cultural, not natural, products *made* through representations; hence, problematic. It, therefore, designates the concept of *process*; that is, the process of constructing and perceiving these apparently realistic "truisms." In actual fact, in historiographic metafiction, realism's apparently unproblematic natural transparency is made overt. It "makes explicit the implicit problematic of realism" (Lodge 1995, p. 154). This is consequently made possible through re-presenting the *process* of fiction-making. As Patricia Waugh (1986) has it, novels that highlight and emphasise their "process of construction" expose *narrative strategies* through which objective and apparent reality, which is usually regarded as "natural," is created (p. 2). Therefore, not only the ability of novel in reflecting reality is challenged but also liberal humanism's notions such as universality, originality, authority, and the natural as fixed and sacred. Historiographic metafiction problematises realism's objectivity, unity, and closure through conflation of aesthetic formal self-reflexivity together with historical backgrounds. Hutcheon (2000) observes "[w]hat postmodernism does is to denaturalize both realism's transparency and modernism's reflexive response whilst retaining (in its typically complicitous critical way) the historically attested power of both" (p. 32).

Paradoxically as it may appear, it adverts to its referentiality and auto-referentiality at the same time. Therefore, resolving contradictions, an action in which realism seeks solace, is abandoned. This is best done in the conflation of the historical and the fictive as opposed to liberal humanism's attempt to separate the artistic from the real. Its paradox lies in its aesthetic engagement with language and referentiality, worldliness. Hutcheon (1980) points out the two aspects of a text in that its "own paradox is that it is both narcissistically self-reflexive and yet focused outward, oriented toward the reader (p. 7). It, therefore, calls upon readers as a co-creator of the work in the process of creation initiating them into the act of writing. Self-reflexivity proposes that the work be treated as an artefact, whilst references to the reader's real life and experience acknowledge the work's still representational relation to the outside world; hence, the problematisation of the representation of reality. However, its representationality is fictional, that is, its referent is fictional created in the *process* of narration through artistic strategies and techniques. In Hutcheon's (1980) words its "representation is of a fictive referent" (p. 97). Consequently, any desperate attempt to assess it in terms of its truth value will be of no avail, for the narrative is constantly aware of its status as artifice. Distraught about the combination of the fictive and the real, readers of the realist novel fail in their attempt to construe a literary work as a direct access to reality. Hence, postmodernist re-presentation imparts to the reader the *process* of its own *creation*: the process through which meaning is created, constructed as opposed to literary realism's view of art as a *product*.

Accordingly, postmodernist re-presentation implies and necessitates acknowledging the process of construction. By this is meant putting the artistic materials together in a special order (artistically) determined by the writer by disclosing and demystifying the techniques (narrative techniques or strategies) as well as the process of reading to constantly keep the reader in a quandary as to the identification of the work as representational or anti-representational. The attention is, therefore, drawn to the process, to the ways and techniques or strategies which lead to grant meaning. In addition, such a focus upon the process should not lead the reader to stray from the fact that metafiction is still imitative, mimetic. Thus, a note of caution needs to be made here, "auto-representation is still representation" (Hutcheon 1980, p. 39); hence, imitative, mimetic. Here lies postmodernism's another concern: postmodernism is not completely anti-representational as modernism and the avant-garde by and large are. Scholes's (1995) words "[a]fter the first myth, all fiction became imitative" in that they all imitate other fictions (p. 24) can bear witness metafiction's imitative and mimetic quality. As Umberto Eco (1994) puts it "[n]o fictional world could be totally autonomous, since it would be impossible for it to outline a maximal and consistent state of affairs . . ." (p. 221).

In the same way, one cannot postulate an imaginary work of art as a self-sufficient, independent world. In effect, by the introduction and blurring of the historical and the literary, the view of history as a true-to-life, realistic, monolithic, coherent entity is no longer cogent and tenable. It moreover poses questions as to how statements such as "Elizabeth I was the queen of England" within the narrative should be treated. The statement does refer to the real life, doesn't it? Or should we regard it as fictive and say it has nothing to do with reality?! As a result, the conflation of the literary and the historical suggests both referentiality and anti-referentiality, hence, problematisation of representation. What historiographic metafiction aims at is how historical events are turned to seemingly natural *facts*. In Hutcheon's (1988) terms "the meaning and shape are not *in the events*, but *in the systems* which make those past 'events' into present historical 'facts'" (p. 89). In delineating how "facts" are constructed, borrowing from White, Hutcheon refers to the idea of emplotment by which is meant the configuration of events in the narrative.

As she states, "[i]t is historiography's explanatory and narrative emplotments of past *events* that construct what we consider historical *facts*" (p. 92). The ways through which real events are narrativised condition the meaning of the past. In effect, historiographic metafiction exposes the ways through which historiography gives special meaning to an event by self-reflexive conflation of the literary and the historical. To wit, "our common-sense presuppositions about the 'real' depend upon how that 'real' is described, how it is put into discourse and interpreted (Hutcheon 2000, p. 31). Therefore, we may come to know the real only through representation which in turn is made possible by narrative strategies and techniques. For that reason, how historical documents of real events are put together decides the reality – the *meaning* – of that special narrative representation which we call history. Take for instance the statement "godisnowhere" which may have absolutely two opposite meanings implying metafiction's degrees of formalism and its concern with narrative strategies: "god is now here" and "god is nowhere." poststructuralists (deconstructists) would impute this paradoxical state to the language itself. Language is inherently unreliable they would conclude. In other words, for structuralism and poststructuralism meaning is placed in the structure, whereas, in addition to the inherent unreliable nature of language, as a metafictionist would hold, this double-voicing feature (similar to Shklovsky's fabula) which would have not otherwise been self-contradictory is elicited due to the juxtaposition of the letters (suzet) in this especial order.

Closely related is White's (1975) the mode of explanation. Bearing resemblance to mode of representation – the way it is narrated – it determines a single event to be a comedy or tragedy (p. 27). Consequently, special narrative strategies may lead to generating special meaning(s) taken to be *real* and *natural*. White acknowledges history as a process "of selection and arrangement of data from the *unprocessed historical record*" (p. 5). Historiographic metafiction aims at highlighting this function and the *arbitrariness* of the *meaning* of a text, be it literary or historical, through self-reflexively manifesting narrative techniques and the process of construction in general. Likewise, as Hutcheon (1988) emphasises once more, "while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by *selection* and *narrative positioning* [emphasis added]" (p. 97). Consequently, manifesting narrative strategies and techniques will reveal the artificiality of meaning. Of cardinal significance in the problematisation of representation is the technique parody which merits special treatment here. For one reason, it is one of the best and dominant narrative techniques and strategies in playing artistic conventions off against each other resulting in problematisation of reality. For another, almost all narrative techniques and strategies in *Chatterton* as well as many other metafictional novels can be delineated in that light. Parody draws upon familiar conventions to create unconventionality. It marks differentiation within correspondence or, to revert to the vocabulary of Hutcheon (1988), it is "difference at the heart of similarity" (pp. x, 124), an idea also reverberating throughout *A Theory of Parody* (1985).

It imitates and simultaneously takes a distance to what it imitates. Additionally, it makes conventions bold through imitation with a critical distance and in so doing problematises the apparently real and natural status of "facts." Both history and literature employ a set of narrative conventions. Moreover, since parody is one of the best ways to confront the past with the present (Hutcheon 1995, 86), the conventionality of both literature and history writing as human constructs are exposed. It suggests the past never expires but that it is always open to interpretation. It makes the past "a 'living present'" (Hutcheon 1985, p. 42) drawing the attention to the process of creation. Nonetheless, it is not nostalgic as in modernism (Hutcheon 1988, pp. 4, 195), however an ironic critical one. Sophisticated as it is – since it requires the reader's knowledge of recognising "literary codes" (Hutcheon 1980, p. 25) – parody self-consciously and self-reflexively alludes to the historical past to indicate the impossibility of *objectively* imitating the past. For, any imitation necessitates deviation; hence, similarity together with difference. This suggests that historiography, as a form of imitation, necessitates distortion; hence, history's, as well as literature's, referentiality is problematised. Indeed, in historiographic metafiction, problematisation of representation is made possible through parodic re-writing and re-working of conventions of historiography. For that reason, the present study aims at exploring narrative strategies and techniques employed in *Chatterton* which results in problematisation of representation of reality.

3. Chatterton

In a broad scale *Chatterton* (1993) is a parody of an historical text and historiography in general reflected on the level of structure and subject matter. To wit, it is a return, however not nostalgic but critical, to the past, be it of an historical event or of literary texts. As a parody, *Chatterton* uses, abuses, and lays bare the style and conventions of historiography. It is a parody, for "the work of art is itself a reordering of other works of art from the past . . . Texts are *rearrangements* of other texts" (Finney 1992, p. 250). Recalling White's idea of emplotment, the way Ackroyd has managed to re-arrange the material is so crucial to the problematisation of representation. As the novel reveals, problems arise when the text tries to make references to historical events or what we may know as the outside reality.

As the name of the novel *Chatterton* suggests, it is an historical investigation and interrogation of real Thomas Chatterton, an eighteenth century poet and writer. At first glance, this suggests the whole novel as a book of history or at least an historical text. It is set in three different historical eras starting in the twentieth century with Charles' haphazard encounter with a painting said to have been representing Thomas Chatterton; nineteenth century in which a painter, Wallis, is using a poet called George Meredith as a model to paint the portrait of the last moment of Thomas Chatterton's suicide; finally, eighteenth century and the last moment of Thomas Chatterton's life. Ackroyd establishes the theme of historical exploration by Charles' investigation of the portrait which the seller attributes to Chatterton's suicide scene. Inspired by the curiosity over the portrait, Charles sets out to see the real owner from whom he receives a set of documents and a manuscript with the initials "T. C" and a confession of Chatterton having faked his own death continuing to write under famous names including William Bake. Resorting to an historical event which is historically known as a suicide, Ackroyd confirms the reader's already expectation and interpretation of the event; that is, Chatterton's committing suicide. He, as well as Charles, imitates the act of historiography in using the available documents and interpreting them to arrive at a final truth. Being "engaged in an act of research" (Ackroyd 1993, p. 9), Charles, in the vein of a historiographer, starts writing about Thomas Chatterton based upon the findings. He investigates through "Chatterton's books" (p. 14).

Here, Ackroyd uses historical evidence to plant the seeds of incredulity in the reader by suggesting that "Chatterton didn't die" but continued to write "fake" medieval poems (p. 14). Nonetheless, taking a distance from mere copying and arriving at a final conclusion, Ackroyd puts the whole situation in a crisis by revealing the manuscripts as fakes to lay bare how a historiographer makes *truth* and *reality*. Throughout the novel, references are made to the outside reality ranging from Chatterton's life, the place where he lived, detailed information of his surroundings and activities during his lifetime, his faking Rowley poems, his status as a genius highly esteemed by the romantic poets, and so on. Nonetheless, such referentiality is suggested to be remained problematic so far as it is challenged and questioned, not in a sense that reality did not exist but that it is a construct, granted a meaning. It is questioned and challenged in different ways from the events and incidents in the story to the juxtaposition of the real with the fictive to the symbolic use of the setting. After referentiality and references to the real world are established, the novel questions their possibility by self-reflexive comments, however esoteric, given by the characters. For instance, Harriet asking Charles for help says, "I can't put them together. I have all the names and dates. I have my notes and my diaries. But I can't . . . 'Interpret them'" (p. 25). This is exactly the situation we do have in the novel: we cannot arrive at a final interpretation.

The idea of history writing and imitation-with-distortion of history is extended and emphasised throughout the narrative on the level of both structure and subject matter. Chatterton in the autobiography given in the narrative says, "I read heraldry, English antiquities . . . But nothing enthralled me so much as Historicall works, and indeed I could not learn so much at Colston's as I could at home" (p. 51). As we see, Chatterton is a good reader of the past as well as a good faker. Charles is depicted as a good faker too just as Meredith fakes the portrait of Chatterton. This self-reflexively suggests that the novel is a parody historical novel, imitating it in terms of subject matter and form whilst taking a distance from it. In effect, by taking the idea of possibility of representation as its theme, the novel plays the subject matter and the form off against each other. In addition, biographical account of Thomas Chatterton at the beginning of the novel as the prologue before starting the story is Ackroyd's attempt in using historical documents as the background of the novel. This use of paratextuality both establishes and uses historiographic conventions. When combined with a fictive story of Chatterton fabricated by the writer, it, nevertheless, shatters the established illusion. Harriet's study called "*The Art of Death*" (p. 20) has remained incomplete though she has started it long time ago. This is the study of the dead, that is, the past reflected in a work of art, be it literary or historical.

This "past" is called upon through the use of the paratext. It asserts both the possibility of representation by directly alluding to the real information of Chatterton's life and auto-referentiality, for "we only know that external reference through other texts" (Hutcheon 1996, p. 310); hence, auto-referential. As Hutcheon puts it, historiographic metafictionists employ "paratextual conventions" to take vengeance "for the historian's tendency to read literature as only historical documents" (p. 303). Therefore, the narrative's taking a distance from an historical text is manifest in its violation of the historical information offered in the prologue. Moreover, such interrogation of the past can also be investigated in Philip's attempt to circumstantiate the portrait and the documents' authenticity and originality by leafing through historical and biographical books to know more about Chatterton. Ackroyd has accordingly extended the motif of historical investigation to suggest the past is still a living force always open to new readings and interpretations. As Chatterton says in his seemingly autobiography "'I will perform a Miracle . . . I will bring the Past to light again'" (p. 51).

This is a self-reflexive comment upon the way historiographers, as well as Ackroyd in this novel, do. It reflects what Hutcheon (1988) says of this mode of fiction. She calls it "a dialogue with the past in the light of the present" (p. 19). The same idea is expressed by Meredith who addresses Wallis that "'[y]ou *are* a Resurrectionist, Henry. You can bring the dead to life, I see'" (p. 97). This suggests all novelists (especially metafictionists) in particular and artists in general as well as historiographers are resurrectionists, for they bring the past to the present giving it a living presence and force. This implies that reading is dynamic and active, not static and passive as in literary realism. The idea of re-writing and a return to the past is also manifest when Philip enters to find books for more information about Chatterton. Like Charles, he undertakes to *recover* the past, "since he suspected that in old books some forgotten truth might be *recovered* [emphasis added]" (p. 42). Moreover, Ackroyd cunningly and deliberately has extended the idea by now and again referring to Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Having exposed his method of writing, Chatterton says in so doing "thus the living and the dead were to be reunited" (p. 52). It is the language of Ackroyd, *parodying* "the dead," – Eliot's poem which the reader might attribute to Chatterton. Accordingly, the narrative imitates the past – Eliot's poem as a case in point – to use the very theme of rebirth expressed in the poem; hence, representationality. However, it simultaneously takes a distance from it by anachronistic use of a part of Eliot's poem in Chatterton's writing which creates self-reflexivity and undermines authenticity of Chatterton's words; hence, auto-referentiality.

The narrative presents three different contradictory versions of a single event – Chatterton's death – all of which make references to the outside reality; that is, Chatterton's real life and death to problematise the nature of historical originality and its possible representationality. Nonetheless, it puts them under erasure resulting in the problematisation of representation. The first version, generally known and presented in the prologue, predicates Chatterton committed suicide. Consequently, the reader is invited to participate in the act of historical investigation. As presented in the prologue and reiterated at times throughout the narrative, his suicide is due to destitution and despair. This is made plausible and credible, for other references to Chatterton's real life seems to be authentic including the information about his love of antiquity, the place he lived, his love of music due to his father's profession, and so on. The version is supported by Meredith and Charles' despair and poor life. Though finally dissuades, Meredith decides to commit suicide due to the very reason. Moreover, allusion to Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence" by Harriet and Chatterton intensifies the idea that he committed suicide due to "despondency and madness" (pp. 2, 21, 147) which are in turn due to poverty. Consequently, the idea that Chatterton committed suicide is extended and holds water through the novel's strategy of giving real biographical information and its juxtaposition with the fictive.

After such seemingly possible referentiality has been established, the narrative puts it under question by offering a second possible version of Chatterton's death being in total contradiction with the first: Chatterton faked his own death. In Chapter Six, Chatterton undertakes to give an autobiographical account. To make it more plausible the narrator, here Chatterton seems to try to convince the reader so as to accept the information as real, for as he says, "who was present at my Birth but my own self" (p. 50). The section is a parody of autobiography as a subdivision of historiography. In effect, the narrator is drawing upon the convention of biography in that a person's own account is considered to be more "valid." This section challenges the idea of poverty and despair and consequently suicide. Chatterton rejects the generally agreed idea concerning his loneliness and despair, for he "was not alone" (p. 51). He continues to present the reasons and motivation behind what he did; that is, faking his own death. As we are told, he was not able to write in his own name. His artistic productions "would have been despised and neglected" due to the people's low intellect at the time and his being "a boy of obscure Birth" (p. 53). Therefore, Mr. Joynson persuades him to fake his own death to which Chatterton agrees (p. 55). Chatterton divulges into his reader the methods and strategies by which he faked Rowley and continued to write under famous names. This accordingly vindicates and gives credence to faking his death. He starts with his love of antiquity also presented in the prologue. Hence, the part refers to Chatterton's real life. Drawing upon the very information, the narrator elaborates upon exposition of his strategies in faking poems. As he says, "when I wrote out their words, coppying the very spelling of the Originals, it was as if I had become one of those Dead and could speak with them also" (p. 52).

This reverberates in the prologue where we are told that he created "*an authentic medieval style from a unique conflation of his reading and his own invention*" (p. 1). This part imitates the generally agreed biographical information on Chatterton's life; hence, referentiality: he was a faker, reader of the past, and lover of antiquity due to the situation in which he had grown up. Nevertheless, it undermines and puts it under question by offering a new version of the incident which contradicts the first one: he faked his own death in the same way that he faked medieval poems. Chatterton's account of what he did gives feasibility and credibility to the idea of forging his death.

He confesses and exposes that "[m]y first task was to give myself as good a Lineage as any Gentleman in Bristol, and this I did by combining my own knowledge of Heraldic devices with a document which, as I put it, was 'just newly found in St Mary Redcliffe and writ in the language of *auntient Dayes*'" (p. 52). He continues to self-reflexively exposing his own style: "these I related in their own Voices, naturally, as if they were authentick Histories" (p. 54). This calls into question the *authenticity* of historical accounts, including this one, and their *referentiality*. In Hutcheon's (1995) terms, "[t]he interaction of the historiographic and the metafictional foregrounds the rejection of the claims of both 'authentic' representation and 'inauthentic' copy alike, and the very meaning of artistic originality is as forcefully challenged as is the transparency of historical referentiality" (p. 77). Moreover, it is a self-reflexive manifestation of historians' style of writing. It reveals how language and narrative strategies can give meaning to a phenomenon. Nonetheless, the autobiography is put under erasure when it turns out to have been faked by Joynson due to personal reasons and interest. He decides to smear and take vengeance upon Chatterton by forging the "memoirs" and faking "the work of a faker, and so confuse forever the memory of Chatterton" (p. 139). This suggests the ideological ground of narratives. Narratives, including history, can be faked due to special interests and/or ideologies; hence, history as a human construct. Harriet's distortion of Wordsworth's lines could be much illuminating in that she accords the poem with her personal interest and purpose; hence, the ideological ground of narratives.

Then, the narrative of the documents and confession as fakes is juxtaposed with the third version of Chatterton's death: he accidentally and unintentionally killed himself by overdosing due to his genital disease after having an intercourse with his landlady. His intention and motivation for living is expressed in the letter to his mother in which being in "*high* spirits" and having "*lofty* thoughts" he is "approaching" an eminent status (p. 120). The italicised terms which are in original – seemingly put by Chatterton – imply that he is fraught with hope and incentive expecting a promising future. Consequently, the idea of suicide is annulled. However, this is a strategy deliberately employed by Ackroyd to draw the reader's attention to the version also accepted by the Romantic poets concerning his death as a suicide: he was a genius and motivated due to reaching his pinnacle of success. As a result, each three versions, which are in total contradiction with each other, are made plausible, supported, and extended for a while to be contradicted by the two others. This self-reflexively and self-consciously reveals how a single event may be narrated in a way, thanks to the selection and arrangement of the material, to produce different contradictory meanings. Therefore, meaning is constructed, produced in the process of writing. Put briefly, "[t]he real exists (and existed), but our understanding of it is always conditioned by discourses, by our different ways of talking about it" (Hutcheon 1988, p. 157) each of which may emphasise some specific ideological aspect of it. Consequently any attempt in arriving at a final meaning in a narrative is ideological.

As Philip realises, "[i]f you trace anything backwards, trying to figure out cause and effect, or motive, or meaning, there is no real *origin* for anything. Everything just exists. Everything just exists in order to exist" (p. 146). It is a self-reflexive comment clarifying the idea that everything exists as just a simple event, not as a reality or fact; *we* give it meaning. As Andrew Flint has already apprehended, "[t]he years are incorrigible, aren't they? They never cease" (p. 46). As the self-reflexive, self-conscious comment has it, history cannot be recovered objectively, for it is not a fixed, monolithic narrative but is constantly present and that our understanding of it is always conditioned. It can only be *created*. One cannot re-write history in the sense of recovering; one can but *create* and *construct* it. Historical representation accordingly requires creation and interpretation; it is not an *objective* recounting as historiography and literary realism credit. *Chatterton* exposes the fictionality of the referent. The text does refer to a referent (or a set of referents). Nevertheless, in effect, referentiality is *constructed* and *created* in the writing-reading process; hence problematisation of representation. "[I]t *also* creates a heterocosm through those words because the representation is of a fictive referent" (Hutcheon 1980, p. 97). That is, in metafiction the text is not just a microcosm directly having access to and reflecting the macrocosm – the outside world, reality.

It is a heterocosm whose referents are not external but fictive and created, not unreal. Ackroyd's strategy in creating a heterocosm and arriving at the problematisation is the use of the technique *mise en abyme* and similarly parallelism. Process of artistic creation presented in the three stories is a *mise en abyme* of the novel's act of creation. Each story within the novel echoes the two others and the novel itself as a whole. As a case in point, Chatterton's exposing his method of writing in Chapter Six is highly illuminating. The narrator, supposed to be Chatterton, lays bare in detail how he copied the original and combined the present style with the old culminating in his confession that his "method was as follows" (p. 52). He used materials from old books including Holinshed's (p. 52), imitated their language and vocabulary, and added his own materials to it. The terms "device," "invented," "made," "contriv'd style," and "wrote" Chatterton use in describing his own style create a *mise en abyme* reflecting and echoing the style and strategy of the novel itself:

using certain *devices* and techniques in the act of *writing* leads to the work as a *creation*; hence, heterocosm – the work's obsession with process of its own creation and auto-referentiality. The technique's significance lies in the fact that this part, supposed to belong to Chatterton, which is demystifying his act of forgery is itself fabricated by a Mr. Joynson, not by Chatterton, which is itself fabricated by Ackroyd; hence problematisation of referentiality. Similarly, Merk's exposing the techniques and methods employed in the portrait is another *mise en abyme* which echoes and reflects the strategies and techniques in the novel. Taking the pictures of the painting, Merk realises that the cracks are not as deep as he expected: "most of them occurred in the varnish rather than in the paint itself" (p. 144). The narrative continues with "[t]he face of the sitter dissolved, becoming two faces, one *old* and one *young* [emphasis added]" (p. 144). This exposes the method of juxtaposition of the old with the new echoing the painter, Chatterton, Wallis, as well as Ackroyd's style. A metafictionist sheds light upon the techniques which produce a make-belief by disclosing them. The subject matter of the novel here is exposing Ackroyd's style and techniques in the present novel. The reader is accordingly called upon not to passively accept the text as a direct reference to the outside reality, but to actively discover the codes and rules governing the heterocosm – the novel; hence, particularity of the text as opposed to universality postulated in criticism throughout history for so long. Note that the novel is not anti-referential; however, its referentiality is *created*, *made*. This is best manifest when Meredith says "I said that the words were real, Henry. I did not say that what they depicted was real" (p. 98).

Another case of the technique *mise en abyme* occurs when Philip reads a story called *The Last Testament*. It is a story of a poet who is "too ill to compose the verses which had brought him eternal fate; that, in fact, it had been the poet's wife who had written them for him. The plot seemed oddly familiar to Philip but he was not sure if he had read this novel some years before, or if it resembled some daydream of his own" (p. 43). Then, he turns to the last pages of the book and the story of "an actor who believes himself to be possessed by" some spirits (p. 43). The story he has just read "seemed familiar to Philip" (p. 43). He remembers that he has "read the story of *Stage Fire*" by Harriet Scrope (p. 43). It is the story of "a poet who believed himself to be possessed by the spirits of dead writers but who, nevertheless, had been acclaimed as the most original poet of his age" (p. 43). Immediately Philip remembers he has already read *The Last Testament*: a story by Harriet about a novelist whose secretary, totally aware of her employer's style, has written many of his works. The story is similar to the one Philip is holding. This section reflects and echoes the occupational relation between Charles and Harriet. Harriet asks Charles to ghost-write her. It also echoes Chatterton's style, forgeries, and the autobiographical section in the novel. Moreover, it is a self-reflexive comment upon Ackroyd's, as well as other metafictionists', style and strategies of writing.

All are similar in terms of the narrative strategies and techniques they use. The technique *mise en abyme* shatters the illusion of objectivity and transparency, for it unmasks the process of creation and offers the work as an artefact. It demystifies and imparts the fictional relation between the novel and its referents to the reader by exposing the strategies and techniques employed by the writer. Not that by any means the novel can refer to the outside external reality, but that its relation to it is indeed through the fictive referents. Accordingly, the novel can suggestively be presented as a new *Poetics* or *Defence of Poetry* defending art and literature and rejecting any view and judgement of art based upon real-unreal binary opposition as an invalid touchstone. As Hutcheon (1980) puts it "[t]ruth is a meaningless criterion, for art is not verifiable" (p. 132). This leads to another aspect of the novel which makes it distinct form literary realism: parallelism. Whilst realist novels mainly operate through a chronological order, *Chatterton* is narrated based upon not the chronological order or the cause-and-effect pattern but parallelism. The narrative first establishes itself as the realist novel by the use of biographical information and third person point of view in the vein of literary realism. It benefits from the third person point of view, the first person as in the autobiography, and detailed descriptions.

It has also a beginning, a middle, and an end as in the realist novel to suggest they are constructed. Yet, unlike the realist novel, it ends with three endings each of which at contradiction with the two others. It, then, challenges and violates the conventions and their upshot – representationality – by the introduction of a first person point of view and dispersion of the narrative with two more stories set at different times. Unlike literary realism which aims at presenting a monolithic single *God-like* authoritative voice or a set of voices which attests each other in giving just one version of reality and meaning, this provides a set of contradictory voices and meanings. The novel, instead, offers multiplicity of voices which are not, in Barthes' (2000) words, "original" but "blend and clash" (p. 149). The third person omniscient point of view is imitated to confirm *reliability*; it, however, is questioned by a shift to the first person by a character within the narrative relating his own tale. The novel alternates between different narrative voices giving different contradictory version of an incident. Therefore, literary realism's *objective reliable* narrator assuming a God-like position is highly questioned. Even regardless of the shift in the point of view, the third person point of view itself is not homogeneous.

For instance, in the prologue it establishes and confirms the agreed idea of the death of Chatterton as a suicide to be destabilised later by the same point of view. Liberal humanisms' notions of rationality as created by the chronological order, causal relationships, originality, and authority which all lay claim to a final truth (reality) are accordingly questioned. It, instead, proposes a *parallel* relation between the (little) narratives within the novel. Moreover, almost all the major characters are artists, great lover of antiquity, suffer from despair and poverty, copy other's works with their own innovation, and are in love with antiquity (the past); hence, parallel and echo each other. Charles' curiosity over the painting, Wallis-Meredith's discussion over art and literature, and Chatterton's love of antiquity all echo each other and Ackroyd's same obsession. Besides, in Chapter Eight Merk is introduced as a forger. He has been painted under Seymour's name. Sadleir has kept most of the paintings for he knows by Seymour's death the price will increase. Seymour is in despair, suffering from arthritis, and even cannot "hold a newspaper" (p. 71). Once more, the motivation behind the act of forgery is laid bare: economic incentives and interests. Again, a parallel is made between Merk, Charles, Chatterton, and Meredith. This exposes the ideological or personal interests involved in the production of a work of art which the reader of the realist novel has been persuaded to mistakenly accept as a direct access to reality. Parallelism culminates in the scenes in which Meredith and Charles see the apparition of Chatterton.

Being sick, Charles feels the the appearance of Thomas Chatterton touching his shoulder boosted by the symbolic act of the leaves falling from the trees (p. 2) signaling sickness and death. Also, Meredith is going to commit suicide, but dissuades when he sees Chatterton's spirit. At the end of the novel, Charles, Meredith, and Chatterton who are dead join while holding their hands together: "[t]wo others have joined him [Chatterton] . . . They link hands, and bow towards the sun" (p. 147). This is the culmination of violating realistic conventions of causality and chronological order. Moreover, the novel exposes that the ending is *artificially* and *artistically fabricated* as opposed to the happy ending of the realist novel. The reader accordingly realises that, as Meredith says, "[t]he greatest realism is also the greatest fakery" (p. 86). Among Ackroyd's strategies is the symbolic use of the setting to raise more self-reflexivity to be recognised *only* by the *sophisticated* reader. As a case in point, entering the Dodd's Garden, Charles beholds "the pilasters copied from eighteenth century facades and reproduced in miniature; the small iron balconies, some of them newly painted and others stippled with rust . . ." (p. 4). It symbolically indicates the presence of the past suggested by "rust" in the present implied by "newly." The description of the architecture can symbolically stand for, and self-reflexively exposes, juxtaposition of the historical with the fictive as in parody in which both the ideas of copy and innovation simultaneously exist.

The narrative goes on to say "the curiously moulded fanlights discoloured with age, so that no light could now pass through them; the elaborate stucco work, none of it now without blemish or injury; the wood rotten, and the stone fractured or defaced" (p. 4). As it symbolically suggests, we are not able to have a full knowledge of the past as time passes, for our accessibility to it is only through narrations which are, akin to the present novel, constructed through different techniques; hence, problematisation of representation of reality. The past *can* be re-written but in a *twisted, deformed, disfigured* way. Of cardinal importance is the symbolic function of the portrait. It stands for the act of representation of reality. In this sense, it is a microcosm for art in general and the present novel in particular. However, while it stands for the real Thomas Chatterton, the portrait fails to represent him; as Wallis, whose ideas and attitudes can stand for the mimetic view of art, feeling impatient and uncomfortable finds it impossible to "portray the human body in all its glory" (p. 102) – to portray the things as they really are. Indeed, a kind of poetic revelation occurs to him. Finally, Merk is asked to touch up the portrait so that it may look more real. Nevertheless, as he is doing so it self-destructs. This symbolically marks the impossibility of representation of reality. In effect, it reflects and mirrors the novel itself; hence, problematisation of representation.

4. Conclusion

As a recapitulation, *Chatterton* problematises the representation of reality through juxtaposition of the historical with the fictive to pose critical questions concerning objectivity, coherence, and transparency to offer history as an artifact, a creation, a discourse. It also aims at revealing how meaning is *created* in the process of narration. Therefore, understanding of the past is through discourse constructed by us, not given to us. The novel's postmodernist stance is expressed in Meredith's words concerning the issue of representation: "'I can endure death. It is the representation of death I *cannot* bear'" (p. 2). As implied, the novel does not reject its relation to the outside world as representational; nor does it deny reality. Nevertheless, it asserts that *representation* is the production of a set of artistic conventions; hence, *created*, not given. Consequently, narrative techniques and strategies (*mise en abyme*, under erasure, parody, to name but three) can be employed to produce certain meaning; hence, problematisation of reality.

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