THOMAS CHATTERTON. MEDIAEVAL MYSTIFICATION

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This article discusses how Chatterton's mediaeval mystification problematises the representational view of literature regarding theories of forgery in XVIII century. 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: Chatterton, mystification, forgery, problematization, parody.

The aim of this article is the study of Chatterton biography and his mediaeval mistifications.

The "spectre" of this great plagiarist, whose **method we will study in more detail later on**, appears to be of the greatest relevance in the recreation of the present London society we are offered in the article.

The question of representation is inherently related to the status and nature of literature itself. Far be it from me to give a definition of literature, unavoidably a problematic and questionable task. The debate has long been established and it is still far from reaching a definite conclusion.

The focus of representation here is Thomas Chatterton, "the greatest plagiarist or the greatest poet." This representation does not limit itself to just one system or field but expands and turns to be a representation of him in history, biography and art.

Thomas Chatterton (1752−1770), the fourteenth century English poet, gained popularity by inventing the poet-monk Thomas Rowley, who allegedly lived in the fifteenth century, and wrote poems on his behalf. The mystery, authored by Chatterton, "fully corresponded to the romantic perception of the Middle Ages, which began to emerge at the time, as well as the phenomenon of pre-romantic mystification, the most striking example of which was Macpherson's "Ossian" [8, p. 15].

"Many of Chatterton's scholars believe that the greatest influence on the writer was Thomas Percy, known as the author of "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry", an anthology of ballads and songs, first published in 1765. This is the book, most likely, inspired the young Chatterton to create a monk Thomas Rowley [2, p. 188]. Couched in Chatterton's pastiche of Chaucer and other medieval sources and indited on parchment the elder Chatterton had pilfered from church, the poems glorify Bristol's past, considerably elevate the Chatterton lineage, and lionize Sir William Canynge, the actual benefactor of that same church. According to Kaplan, this canard served to endow its perpetrator with the patrimony he lacked. It also fetched him just enough income from gullible patrons to lead him to think he might make a living by his pen. In London he stooped to journalism and pamphleteering, turning out satirical and pornographic screeds in the manner of his hero, anti-royalist reformer John Wilkes. But not even this strategy paid. Despairing and broke, the boy swallowed arsenic one night and was found dead the next morning. (In an irony he might have enjoyed, the famous portrait of him newly dead hanging in the Tate Gallery − and reproduced on the cover of both these books − turns out to be a fraud. Without access to the sole surviving likeness of the youth, the painter engaged the future novelist George Meredith as a model.) His works were saved and published, and a generation later the Romantic movement annexed him.

Chatterton's access to a chest in his parish church which contained historical documents enabled him to obtain scraps of ancient parchment. It was on such scraps that he began producing manuscript poems which he claimed were the work of a fifteenth-century Bristol monk and poet, Thomas Rowley. Initially, Chatterton's audience

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was limited to local antiquaries who were thrilled to learn of the existence of this early Bristol poet. Soon, however, Chatterton became more ambitious. He sent samples of his work, including some of the Rowley poems, to Town and Country Magazine. In an effort to gain patronage from Horace Walpole, whose gothic novel The Castle of Otranto (1765) had claimed to be a translation of a lost manuscript, Chatterton sent Walpole samples of his Rowley poems. But after initially encouraging the young prodigy, Walpole subsequently changed his position and pronounced the Rowley poems forgeries, denouncing Chatterton in the process.

Unlike Semyel Johnson, who for no second believed in the authenticity of Rowley's poetry, could not help but wonder how "this puppy could write like this [7, p. 30], Percy himself considered the works of Chatterton as "originals, mutilated by an ignorant boy (originals, mutilated by an Ignorant Boy) [5, p. 202]. "But, at least as it was, the creation of forgery helped to manifest the genius of fabrication. In addition to pseudo-medieval poetry, Chatterton had time to write and a large number of other works that were distinguished by their high poetic qualities. At the age of 17, the poet committed suicide for some unknown reason, taking a mixture of arsenic and opium. The volume of the creative heritage of Chatterton is so great that the full collection of works of the seventeen-year-old poet occupies almost 700 pages (the Oxford edition of 1971), and this cannot but cause admiration.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote a monody on Chatterton; Robert Southey edited his poems (1803); John Keats dedicated Endymion (1817) to him; in "Adonais" (1821) Percy Bysshe Shelley ranks Chatterton with Sir Philip Sidney as "inheritors of unfulfilled renown":

Chatterton

Rose pale, − his solemn agony had not

 Yet faded from him…

Oblivion as they rose shrank like a thing reproved. Alfred de Vigny, Robert Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Francis Thompson wrote about him; George Meredith posed for Henry Wallis's painting of his death.

Although one of the Rowley poems was published in Town and Country Magazine in May, 1769−making it the only Rowley poetry published during Chatterton's lifetime−after his rebuke by Walpole, Chatterton turned his pen to political satire and other writing he could sell to periodicals, usually writing under pseudonyms. Chatterton achieved moderate success through his writing, and developed a reputation of some note in literary circles. Despite his achievements, however, Chatterton led the life of a pauper. He became severely depressed and experienced other health and financial problems which he could not overcome. In August 1770, Chatterton committed suicide by swallowing poison and was dead by the age of seventeen [3, p. 300].

The first published collection of the Rowley poems appeared in 1777, seven years after Chatterton's death. It was greeted with both enthusiasm and skepticism. The poet Thomas Warton, in particular, questioned the authenticity of the Rowley poems and pronounced them forgeries in his History of English Poetry (1778). Chatterton had

his supporters, however, and it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the controversy over Chatterton ended and there was general acceptance that he was the true author of the Rowley poems and the fifteenth-century Bristol monk was merely his invention.

Throughout the controversy, Chatterton's harshest critics and strongest doubters nearly all held the opinion that he was a poet of great talent. He became an icon to the Romantic poets. Keats dedicated "Endymion" to Chatterton's memory and Wordsworth dubbed him "the marvelous boy." Fascination with Chatterton continues today and he has even been the subject of a novel, by Peter Ackroyd. Like James Macpherson's Ossian poems, Chatterton's Rowley poetry continues to be read and studied as Chatterton's own imaginative creation.

However, his posthumous glory, the attention of romantics and the creation of the myth of a romantic poet Chatterton was made by "Rowleian" texts. Written by Chatterton, he mislead many prominent people of that time and gave impetus to a long debate called "The Rowley Controversy." Discussions around Chatterton and his work began almost immediately after his death and have not stopped until now. The "Rowley Dispute" led to the fact that for many years Chatterton's reputation fluctuated between a "fraudulent genius" and a "honest ignoramus" [3, p. 229]. "The paradox is that only Chatterton-the author of fakes could later become such a popular romantic hero. This fake is a false text, but in this case, at least, its author must be genuine. However, for several years after Chatterson's death, the personality was "invisible". Only 7 years later, in 1777, Thomas Tyrwhitt felt obliged to provide readers with at least information-a note on "the main circumstances of his (Chatterton) short life." More complete biographical data about Chatterton appeared three years later in the form of a retreat in the epistolary novel by Gerbert Croft, "Love and Madness", although this version of life cannot be called official. The full biography was published only in 1789, twenty years after the death of the poet, in the fourth volume the publication of "British biographies" (Biographia Britannica), performed by Andrew Kippis. However, this biography was not included in the main text, but in the "Appendix to the letter C", and in volume was not too much note. In parallel, the aforementioned "The Rowley Dispute", which was devoted to countless numbers of various articles and treatises, gained momentum.

Most of the researchers of Chatterton's creativity at that time treated himself as a secondary proof, no more. This explains almost complete lack of interest in Chatterton's biography at that time. But the "Controversy" did its job and, in the end, it was it who awakened from the romantics the attention to the personality of Chatterton, the circumstances of his life and creativity. In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, the emergence of interest in the personality of Chatterton is largely due to the central aesthetic issues of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: whether the artistic gift is congenital or acquired; what definition can give poetic personality and whether it is the result of innate originality or study within the literary tradition; how relations with

the patron, publishers and the public influence the literature. A particular problem was the attitude to the literary biography that existed at the time. In his desire to clearly state what a true poet is, romantic poets cultivated the figure of Chatterton as the ideal model of a unique creative person whose tragic devotion to his art was not tainted by any material ambitions. This "nostalgic" Chatterton, the poet, by his very existence obliged to premature death, became the privileged prototype of a romantic genius. A forgotten poet-outsider, not an ambitious author of fake poems by Rowley, was transformed into a paradigm of poetic personality whose talent was touched by social and educational factors. Chatterton's marginal poverty was mentioned as the probable cause of his early death. This poverty was the result of an image from the patrons and publishers, as well as the underdeveloped public taste. In order to create such a nostalgic image, romantic poets had to ignore the real facts of Chatterton's life (such as his intense desire to earn more money) and most of his writing. The result was the most paradoxical − the emergence of a romantic "forgery" of the life of the great author of fakes [6, p. 211−212].

For many years, Chatterton and his creativity were not actually interested in serious scholars of literature, at the same time, he was popular among writers and poets. His uniqueness lies in the fact that he "inspired more works than he himself wrote [4, p. 5]. Virtually each poet belonging to the category of "romantics", considered his duty to sing prematurely died poet boy. The most famous is Wordsworth's Poem "Resolution and Independence", where the poet calls Chatterton "marvelous boy". His fate also became the subject of "Earl" Coleridge, Keats devoted Chatterton "Endymion", Shelley used his image in "Adonis". Not remained unnoticed by romantics and the famous sonnet of Chatterton, addressed to Gorees Walpole and perceived by them as prophetic. To support the myth of Chatterton, who brought suicide by persecutors from literature, considered all romance to be his duty. The only exception was the sarcastic Lord Byron. But it would be a mistake to assume that Chatterton entered a romantic culture as the only monolithic myth. He found his place in it as "part of the dialogue that lasted in the framework of world outbreak of the late eighteenth century, which formulated the needs of the body and spirit and combined satirical and sentimental [3, p. 248]". For 20 years after death, Chatterton's figure has undergone a variety of transformations in the literature. Chatterton is the "marvelous boy" of Wordsworth, "a half blown floweret" and "child of sorrow" Keats, "spirit blest"

Coleridge, (ponte maudit) de Vigny, "Pure artist" of Wilde, this "gentle spirit of the poetic world" [3, p. 232] appeared far from immediately. And in the future, this image was not the only one exploited by writers. David Fairer, in his article "The Deathful Poetic Life of Chatterton", 1770−1794 as a Context for the "Monarchy" of Coleridge, highlights three types of poetic perception of the figures of Chatterton formed immediately after his death: satirical, lyrical and dramatic, with the gradual dominance of the second and third [1, p. 240].

In the early years of his post-mortem existence in the literature, Chatterton often appeared in the form of a courageous young man who grew up and looked much older than his age. This image is more in line with what we know about the poet. After all, at the time of his death, he has long ceased to be a visitor to the school for the poor, and a student at a lawyer's office. In 1770, he already lived in London and made his first, but quite sure, steps in a journalistic career. In addition, contrary to the prevailing opinion, by the time of death in August 1770, Chatterton earned enough money to sell his works [8, p. 96−100]. One of the striking proofs of such a "courageous" image is the elegy belonging to Peru's friend Chatterton, Thomas Cary, printed in the journal Town and Country Magazine in October 1770, only two months after death of the poet. Horace Walpole also did not find anything "fragile" in Chatterton. He describes Chatterton as "brazen young man", dangerous and aggressive. Although after his death, Walpole said that he was "a colossal genius that could rise to unknown heights," he was undoubtedly interested in creating a Chatterton's disappointment, but some part of the truth in his description is probably still present. Sir Herbert Croft in "Love and Madness" (1780) reinforces the image created by him as "courageous and sympathetic" by Chatterton as evidence of eyewitnesses. So, he gives the memories of the niece of the owner of one of the apartments, which the young man hired, that if she did not know how much he really was, she would never have thought that he was still a virgin boy, so he looked like a grown man [3, p. 234]. The image of a young, but quite mature satirist creates in his article 1789 "The Life of Chatterton". However, the image of Chatterton-satirist, with well-formed political views, mature and courageous, strongly did not fit romantics. It was too strong and even horrific in light of the events of the French Revolution model. Some poets were ready to use the image of the Chatterton-victim in a political struggle. The fate of a young artist, forgotten by the government, ignored by society and actually killed by pride.

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ТОМАС ЧАТТЕРТОН. СЕРЕДНЬОВІЧНА МІСТИФІКАЦІЯ

Анотація
В цій статті обговорюється, як середньовічна мистифікація Чаттертона піднімає питання про репрезентативний погляд на літературу щодо теоретичних підроблень у XVIII столітті. Така проекція дозволяє простежити наративну стратегію та авторські принципи оповіді, які обумовлюють процес демістифікації історії, про яку йдеться, а з тим – проблематизацію реальності.
Ключові слова: Чаттертон, містифікація, підробка, проблематизація, пародія.

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Аннотация
В этой статье обсуждается, как средневековая мистификация Чаттертона поднимает вопрос о репрезентативном взгляде на литературу касательно теорий подделки в XVIII веке. Такая проекция позволяет проследить нарративную стратегию и авторские принципы повествования, которые обусловливают процесс демистификации истории, о которой идет речь, а вместе с этим – проблематизацию реальности.
Ключевые слова: Чаттертон, мистификация, подделка, проблематизация, пародия.

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