

The Postmodern
Representation of Reality
in Peter Ackroyd's
Chatterton

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By

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PREFACE

In our rapidly digitizing age, we are constantly subjected to multiple perspectives, mass media, and waves of information (and often misinformation). The postmodern narrative and its storytelling techniques has emerged in recent decades as a crucial way of engaging with and navigating our experiences of representation, meaning, and historical understanding. The postmodern novel indeed reveals to us that literature as well as history are socially constructed. Reality as we know it is not a monolith, but the result of our own individual, subjective experiences with the world around us.

Dr Arya Aryan's *The Postmodern Representation of Reality* is a masterful analysis of Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* and an essential addition to contemporary postmodern literary scholarship. It is a timely and relevant exploration of how literature and more broadly art mediate our experiences with reality. Aryan's fusion of literature, philosophy, and history successfully reveals that historiographic metafiction, that is historically rooted postmodern fiction that draws attention to itself as an art form, problematizes the predominant distinction between representational and antirepresentational views.

Aryan draws from a wealth of philosophical sources and thinkers, including Derrida, Althusser, and Barthes, and his analysis is thoughtful, lucid, and clearly explained, providing fresh and insightful readings on Ackroyd and other twentieth-century fiction, such as T. S. Eliot. *Chatterton* best embodies this newfound approach to postmodern blurring of representation and anti-representation, and such an approach is a watermark for further postmodern literary studies on this topic. Most importantly, Aryan presents his philosophical and literary findings in a clear, economic, and effective manner. This study is a pioneering intellectual reading of Ackroyd's literature, while further cementing Ackroyd's status as a vital (and contemporary) postmodern writer. Aryan's *The Postmodern Representation of Reality* is a triumph for the ages.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Recent postmodern literary critics, such as Patricia Waugh and Linda Hutcheon, connect postmodern literature with the paradox of self-referentiality, that a text is only capable of referring to itself. However, I argue that Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton*, as a key example of historiographic metafiction, offers a new perspective into our understanding of postmodern literature. This text reveals that historiographic metafiction not only problematises the representational and anti-representational views of literature, but also offers the text as heterocosmic and hetero-referential, that is, it represents an external reality by referring to real historical events and historical figures while simultaneously challenges its representationality and indicates self-referentiality—that a text is only capable of referring to itself or to another text. I contend that Ackroyd's *Chatterton* at once contests both its self-referentiality and representational claims towards reality through certain narrative techniques such as parody, *mise en abyme* and emplotment. Therefore, the novel subverts a generally accepted understanding of postmodern texts as only self-referential.

In the last few decades, poststructuralism has offered a new strategy of reading. Its impact can be seen upon what is generally called postmodernist fiction. Poststructuralists and deconstructivists demonstrate contradictions lying at the heart of texts which highly question and overturn binary oppositions. However, they regard language as responsible for self-contradictions and hybridity in a text. They consider language as inherently unreliable. As Jacques Derrida puts it, “language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique” (2000, 92). However, artistic techniques and strategies responsible for self-contradictory statements have been overlooked. In other words, metafictionists have in a sense revived an obsession with form and artistry. Accordingly, I aim to demonstrate here that this self-contradictory status is achieved by the writer's artistic

manipulation of narrative strategies and techniques. That is, I rely upon a postmodern strategy of reading to show and explain the novel's problematic characteristics regarding specific narrative strategies and techniques such as *mise en abyme*, parody and emplotment.

Moreover, many poststructuralists and the avant-garde practitioners argue for the impossibility of representation in fiction and regard it as anti-representational as opposed to the representational view of art and literature. These theorists and practitioners call the metaphorical death of fiction as representational, that is, fiction is no longer able to represent the external reality. For instance, modernists extol a work of art to the degree it stands for its own sake and in isolation. Nonetheless, historiographic metafiction aims at both representationality and anti-representationality. In addition, although some have applied theories of intertextuality to metafictional texts, intertextuality has not been regarded as the text's possibility of representation. Here, I reveal that Peter Ackroyd's novel *Chatterton*'s references and allusions to other works establish the novel as representational. However, its references to the process of construction and its own artificiality undermine the very possibility of the novel as essentially representational. As *Chatterton* suggests, historiographic metafiction is both representational and anti-representational. As a result, it simultaneously connects to the outside world and marks its own fictionality. Accordingly, I also examine how narrative strategies and techniques make this hybrid status of the novel possible.

In addition, meaning and reality, which can be used interchangeably, have been either traditionally depicted as natural and final as in realism or totally rejected as in modernism and specifically in the avant-garde (Selden 1989, 50). Literary realism and historiography regard meaning and reality as natural products. The two aspects use language as a medium to depict the outside world. In other words, they postulate the possibility of immediate and direct access to the outside world—representationality of art. On the other hand, modernists lament the lack of meaning and reality. Even Jean Baudrillard, known as a postmodernist, presumes the existence of reality and mourns for its loss in the present era. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, he casts doubt upon the exchangeability of the sign and the truth and their equivalence. However, his account of how the real is masked and changed to a “pure simulacrum” (Baudrillard 2020, 6)

implies the loss of the real as natural. On the contrary, historiographic metafiction tries to suggest that those phenomena that we may recognise as natural and real are in fact social, cultural and political structures that we manufacture, not given to us. Thus, I argue that *Chatterton* as a work of metafiction acknowledges the existence of the real and meaning. Nevertheless, it self-reflexively exposes that they are human constructs created in the artistic process of construction. It exposes how we give meaning to historical events through the act of writing and representation. Consequently, I draw upon a postmodern strategy of reading to textually analyse the novel as it does not reject reality and meaning. Instead, it questions and problematises them by offering the possibility of both representationality and anti-representationality of fiction while challenging both.

Therefore, the predominant views in treating a work of literature have been either representational (as in literary realism) or anti-representational (as in modernism) or attributing the problematisation of representationality to language itself (as in poststructuralism). By the same token, I show how the novel parodies historiography and literary realism's conventions and how it challenges the representational view of art. Afterward, I focus upon how these boundaries are blurred in the novel and how the novel problematises representationality. I examine the novel's possibility of representation as opposed to modernism's anti-representational view. Finally, I argue that the novel acknowledges the existence of reality and meaning yet as ideologically constructed in the process of writing as opposed to the idea that postulates meaning as a final product.

My applied methodology in this book is deconstructive and based upon close readings as well as textual analysis of the form and content of the novel. I also engage with the scholarly analysis of postmodern theories in literature too to help students of literature who struggle with the theories have a better understanding of them and their application in literature and provide them with both a detailed and in-depth explanation of the theories and a textual analysis of *Chatterton*, a key example of postmodern historiographic metafiction. I argue that postmodernist texts are hetero-referential as they create a heterocosm as opposed to other representational views as well as a practical, deconstructive and textual criticism of a postmodern text by specifically focusing on the ways the text distorts the

representation of reality. As Ackroyd's *Chatterton* reveals, postmodernist historiographic metafiction is not simply self-referential, as many critics contend, but hetero-referential. It lays bare the paradoxes of self-referentiality while simultaneously creating a heterocosmic world, hence, hetero-referential.

In Chapter Two, I begin by elucidating postmodernist theories and ideas considering historiographic metafiction, with a specific focus upon the concept of representation in art specifically because the novel is mainly preoccupied with its depiction of art both at the level of subject matter and structure. I present detailed theoretical discussions of the narrative techniques and strategies employed in the novel which critique the novel's representation of reality. In this chapter, I present a theoretical framework of postmodern theories as an introductory section. I also provide the reader with a brief survey concerning the issue of the problematisation of the representation of reality. Then, I discuss and demarcate postmodernist hetero-referentiality or "re-presentation" as opposed to the representational and anti-representational views of art and literature. I argue that postmodernist re-presentation holds a paradoxical position as it is both representational and anti-representational. Next, I elaborate historiographic metafiction's standpoint towards historical texts and historiography and argue that the mode conflates the historical with the fictive to problematise the representation of reality. I discuss that historiographic metafiction *re-presents*, but not represents, reality. In other words, it represents reality whilst undermining the possibility of the representation of reality through establishing an ironic distance and detachment to the reader via narrative techniques. The ironic distance helps subvert the view of art as a truthful, unmediated representation of reality. I devote the final section of Chapter One to historiographic metafiction's drawing upon narrative techniques and strategies in challenging the representation of reality. Parody emerges as a prominent form, for it is a dominant narrative strategy in the novel which best helps the text create a heterocosmic world.

The third chapter then draws upon postmodern theories examined in Ackroyd's *Chatterton* to illustrate how it establishes and simultaneously contests the representationality of art and literature. In the first section, I discuss and demonstrate the problematisation of historiography and referentiality in the novel with a focus upon the form and content of the

novel. I then elaborate the narrative strategies and techniques in the text, especially parody, which make the problematisation of representation of reality possible. In the next section, I explore the novel's use and abuse of some conventions of literary realism. I also argue and reveal that the problematisation of the representation of reality in the novel is aimed at the level of both structure and subject matter.

In Chapter Four, I focus upon the novel's blurring the conventional boundaries, specifically the one between life and art. Therefore, I mainly expand upon the novel's hybrid stance towards modernism's and especially modernist avant-garde's anti-representationality of art. I discuss the ways the novel demonstrates an ability to make connections with the external reality thereby problematising modernist idea of anti-representationality of art. Then, I explore and examine the novel's postmodernist perception of meaning, specifically the historical meaning of an event, as constructed in the process of artistic creation. The novel demonstrates and comments upon how in literary realism and historiography narrative techniques and strategies are used and abused in the process of producing and granting meaning to historical events. Finally, in Chapter Five I summarise the most important findings of the book. I also briefly anticipate and share some more approaches and methodologies that can be applied to *Chatterton* and are appropriate for further researches.

Historiographic Metafiction

Coined and applied by Linda Hutcheon, the term "historiographic metafiction" refers to a type or mode of metafiction which juxtaposes the fictive with the historical. Postmodernist re-presentation as it is, the mode is the artistic manifestation of the problematisation of the representational and anti-representational views. It exposes how we give meaning to historical events and experiences through representations. This term reveals historians and historiographers' narrative strategies and techniques in writing history and about it. Self-reflexive and auto-representational, it explores the process of writing through which meanings and ideologies are granted to historical events by the use of narrative techniques and strategies. This type of fiction examines and points out how we create facts based upon events through representations. It questions and renders problematic our

possibility of knowing the past. The mode is self-contradictory, paradoxical, self-reflexive, hybrid, representational, auto-representational and consequently problematic. It explores and questions how historiographers provide meaning to historical events by examining and using the forms and contents of the past as well as exposing the ways through which they select the materials from the available sources and documents, critically analyse them and finally put them into a narrative with arriving at conclusions. Historiographic metafiction encompasses fiction, history and theory to offer that all are human constructions (Hutcheon 1988, 5). Historiographic metafiction is a reaction against modernism's way of looking at a work of art as totally autonomous. In effect, historiographic metafiction challenges the view of the separation of art from culture and society by offering the possibility of artistic representation.

Anti-representation/ Anti-referentiality

The term "anti-representation" or "anti-referentiality" is mostly associated with modernist and especially the avant-garde's mode of art which tries to totally break from the outside world and previous conventions. Practitioners and supporters of the view, instead, aim at writing a work of art which is extremely auto-representational by constantly killing any illusion of realism. They regard language not as a medium to reality, as the representational view requires, but as a target. The anti-representational view of art totally rejects any possibility of the work's representationality. It marks the death of the novel as representational. The obsession with, and interest in, form and intrinsic features as well as the rejection of the notion of content signal modernists' anti-representational views. They practice the idea of the work of art as totally autonomous. Standing in opposition to this view, Hutcheon regards postmodernist art as problematically representational and obsessed with history (1988, 52).

Representation/ Referentiality

The terms "representation" and "referentiality" can be used interchangeably. The notion of representation known also as mimesis is mostly associated with Aristotle's ideas expressed in his *Poetics*. He points to the nature of art as mimetic. In effect, the representational view implies that a work of art is

a representative of the outside world. In other words, it is a small world (microcosm) reflecting an outside larger world (macrocosm). The view has played a significant role throughout history in literature and literary theories, especially in literary realism. The idea postulates the existence of a natural connection between a work of art and its referents (Quinn 2006, 360). However, the idea that art can represent reality has been challenged put in a crisis in the last few decades.

Heterocosm

With regard to the etymology of the word, the term consists of “hetero” meaning other or different and “microcosm” which is a small and complete world that can represent a larger one. In effect, it denotes another or alternative complete world. In modern and postmodern literary theory, the term has come to be applied to the world a work of art creates during the process of artistic creation. As opposed to the classical view of art as being a microcosm which is representative or analogous to a larger world (the macrocosm), heterocosm emphasises the autonomy of art. However, in postmodern criticism and art it mainly refers to a world that the literary work creates in the process of artistic creation which whilst referring to itself can simultaneously refer to the outside world. Indeed, this other or alternative world is created through fictive referents which are constructed within the text by artistic strategies and techniques. This world is governed by a set of rules created in the process of artistic construction which should be acknowledged by the reader (Hutcheon 1980, 90). Heterocosm can be achieved in different ways beyond the text’s possibility by referring to external theories and ideas and to the text’s intertextuality. Historiographic metafiction creates a heterocosm which problematises the representational and anti-representational views of art, for whilst the text establishes connections to the external reality, it refers to its own autonomy by the conflation of the historical with self-reflexive fictionality.

Mise en abyme

“*Mise en abyme*” originally denotes a shield at the centre of which lies a small model and copy of itself. Andre Gide applied the term to a literary narrative technique. In its postmodernist usage, it is a narrative technique

that self-reflexively echoes and reflects or mirrors itself. In postmodernism, it is used to expose that generally all representations are by nature self-reflexive (Sim 2001, 318). It is a kind of self-reflexive mirroring. For instance, a character in the narrative may feel confused and lost whilst reading a story in which a character feels confused and lost when reading a story. This self-reflexively mirrors and reflects the whole novel's confusing status.

Emplotment

The term "emplotment" is coined by Hayden White and denotes the arrangement of the materials, the previous events, in the act of historiography which determines the meaning of the narrative. He regards history as a process of selecting and arranging information from the available documents (1975, 5). Borrowing the notion from White, Hutcheon contends that facts are constructed by the act of emplotment (1988, 92). By implication, it refers to historiographers' act of selecting, arranging and putting historical materials from the available sources into a narrative. Historiographic metafiction exposes the ways through which emplotments result in the construction of facts.

Paratextuality

The term "paratextuality" is applied to the insertion of footnotes, epigraphs, epilogues, titles, excerpts from magazines and journals, excerpts from other texts in a literary work and so forth in the narrative. Put simply, it is the insertion of history in literature. It is a convention rife in history-writing and historiography. However, it is employed to a large extent in historiographic metafiction to allow the conflation of the historical with the fictive. Paratextuality, therefore, makes possible the representational view of literature by providing a seemingly documentary authenticity within the narrative. Also, it helps the narrative to parody the conventions of history-writing and historiography. As Hutcheon contends, paratextuality relies upon history's paratextual conventions to subvert historians' view of documentary authenticity (1986, 303). In other words, it is a convention in history upon which historiographic metafiction draws whilst taking distance from it by questioning history's authenticity, coherence and linearity.

Moreover, the use of paratextual conventions in historiographic metafiction provides postmodernist tendency in reviewing the past with a critical eye in the light of the present.

Parody

The term “parody” is applied to a comic and playful or serious imitation of a style of a writer, a work of art or characteristics of a serious genre. Therefore, it is a critical re-consideration of a previous past. It is mainly used not to criticise the parodied text, author or style, but to instead question the contemporary issues or special discourses. As Hutcheon observes, in the twentieth century works of art parody’s objective is not the hypotext (1985, 50). Although an imitation, parody marks differentiation within correspondence (Hutcheon 1988, 124). In other words, it is a critical imitation which is self-reflexively aware of its own nature. Thus, in the last few decades it has come to be known as a double-coded and double-voiced deconstructive technique which aims at creating a high degree of self-reflexivity. As an all-purpose commonly-used technique or genre, parody in historiographic metafiction helps to contest the previous conventions whilst still relying upon the very conventions for its effects. It could be a genre, a technique or a series of techniques within a work. For instance, the title of this study, “postmodernist re-presentation,” offers a serious type of parodic technique.

Self-reflexivity

Self-reflexivity is a characteristic of many modern literary works and almost all metafiction. Metafiction is more or less self-reflexive or involuted. That is, it refers throughout the story to the process of writing and story making (Abrams 1999, 235). In so doing, the writer attempts to keep readers aware that they are reading a fictive story constructed by some certain narrative techniques and strategies and that the story reflects upon itself rather than upon the outside world. In effect, these may be achieved in a variety of ways using paratexts, quotations, allusions, ironies, intervention of narrator or real characters, *mise en abyme* and so on ad infinitum. Historiographic metafiction’s self-reflexivity, laying bare narrative techniques and strategies, demonstrates the process through which both writers of fiction and historiographers attach especial meanings to historical events. Contrary

to modernism, historiographic metafiction's conflation of the self-reflexive with the historical functions to problematise the representationality and anti-representationality of the work.

Under Erasure

Used by Derrida in his *Of Grammatology* (1967), "under erasure" (*sous rature*) is a term applied to the act of writing a word and then crossing it out but not its total deletion. What we then have on the paper is a word which is crossed out (e.g. ~~Derrida~~). Thus, the result is both the existence and the effacement of the sign and its concept simultaneously. This feature, to Derrida, is inherent in all signs. That is, signs have in themselves the trace of the previous signs. Derrida uses the terms to explain his reliance upon language and at the same time claims that language is unreliable (Sim 2001, 240-1). In metafiction, as a narrative strategy, it refers to the construction of a part whilst withdrawing and rescinding the very part simultaneously. In effect, the narrator may recount incidents and then cancels the very incidents. Nonetheless, they still continue their existence. In other words, they are put under erasure. Therefore, the result would be a fluctuation between two states of affairs which are equally valid. The strategy is frequently used in metafiction.

Postmodernist Re-presentation

Unlike modernist anti-representation, the postmodernist mode of representation or alternatively, as I have termed it, "postmodernist re-presentation" does not reject the representationality of art. It marks the inescapability of art as a representational mode. Nonetheless, it questions the representational view's transparency and naturalness. Postmodernist re-presentation suggests that reality exists but that we know it only through representations. Postmodernist re-presentation recognises itself as representation which makes its own referents instead of having direct accessibility to the real. Therefore, as opposed to the realist concept of representation that postulates a natural and immediate connection between the work and what it represents, postmodernist re-presentation reveals that reality is constructed through artistic representations. However, it acknowledges the representationality of art. In other words, it crosses and

blurs the boundary between representational and anti-representational views. To achieve these crossings, postmodernist re-presentation relies greatly upon parody and frequently makes representation its subject matter. It is a site where modernist self-reflexivity and autonomy meets with historical and realist representationality.

CHAPTER TWO

POSMODERNISM AND THE PROBLEMATISATION OF THE REPRESENTATION OF REALITY

Introduction to Postmodern Theories: Which Postmodernism?

“[A]s a cultural activity that can be discerned in most art forms and many currents of thought today, what I want to call postmodernism is fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political.” (Hutcheon 1988, 4)

Strikingly enough, the term “postmodern,” when defined, can be misleading and at times may cause misunderstandings, for it is a word of broad conception. One may possibly encounter various definitions. Such differences and diversities mark the heterogeneity, hybridity, provisionality and multiplicity lying at the heart of this phenomenon. Therefore, to have a better understanding of the term we can define postmodern or postmodernism with respect to three major areas. Firstly, in terms of history, the term postmodern, as the prefix “post” indicates, has come to designate mostly the latter part of the twentieth century characterised by “the prodigious expansion of modern capitalism into what has been termed postmodern/late capitalism” or global consumerism due to the domination of later capitalist system (Bağlama 2018, 11). In this sense, it is known as a period during which the mass media and other means of communication were employed to make impossible the distinction between the real and the spurious fabricating what Baudrillard calls “simulacrum” (1981) resulting in mass consensus and conformity. Consequently, notions of truth, reality, validity, originality, authenticity and depth have lost their traditionally attached values. Thus, the term encompasses historical cultural, social and political concepts. In this light, it refers to an historical phenomenon following and as the consequence of, modernism and the Second World War. In culture, it

is characterised by a heterogeneity of voices, mass production and popular culture. Since the term postmodernity has many aspects in common with postmodernism and the adjective postmodern interchangeably refers to both postmodernism and postmodernity, its brief explanation seems pertinent. Postmodernism normally refers to “cultural and artistic” areas, whereas postmodernity is used to indicate “the more general social and political” areas (Hutcheon 2006, 119, 121; Eagleton 1996, vii). Likewise, postmodern and postmodernist are interchangeable; however, the former may be applied to any phenomenon pertaining to the contemporary, after modernism, whereas the latter implies a sense of self-consciousness in putting into practice postmodern theoretical issues and is mainly and restrictively applied to artistic works. In consequence, we would rather speak of novels such as *Chatterton* as postmodernist novels, for they seem to be artistic representations of postmodern theories.

Secondly, in terms of theory generated by the first, the term postmodern or postmodernism has been applied to the various writings of Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, Michael Foucault and Roland Barthes, to name but a few, who were also known as poststructuralists in literary theory and philosophy. Concerned with different readings of a text, these poststructuralists gave definitive shape to postmodern theories. As a leading figure in shaping theories of deconstruction, Derrida holds that the whole Western philosophy has been founded and functioned upon binary oppositions implying a hierarchy; that is, in each binary opposition one takes the centre and is superior or privileged (e.g. man/woman, good/evil, day/night, white/black and so on). He criticises Western thought of creating logocentrism, a belief in the existence of a centre by making metaphysical notions such as “God, reason, origin, being, essence, truth, humanity, beginning, end and self” which determine the way we think and act (Bressler 2007, 120). Derrida, accordingly, undertakes to deconstruct the binary oppositions to stress *différance* and in so doing to arrive at undecidability or what is known as *aporia*. His, as well as other poststructuralists’, deconstruction has provided a new reading strategy. Jean-François Lyotard’s idea of metanarratives—fixed ideologies or centres—and his preference for little narratives or the marginalised is closely related to these literary approaches. In a nutshell, in this sense postmodernism is “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard 1984, xxiv) reminding us that the outside

world is ideologically constructed and made by us, not given to us. Here, the works of figures such as Lyotard, Frederick Jameson and Jean Baudrillard who tried to explain, analyse and account for the present dominant situation, postmodern era, shine.

Thirdly, in terms of art and literature, postmodern or as suggested earlier postmodernist is applied to the numerous and various works of Thomas Pynchon, Tom Stoppard, John Fowles, Don DeLillo, Salman Rushdie, Robert Coover, Margaret Atwood and Peter Ackroyd, to name but a few. They are labeled under a plethora of titles, such as Magic Realism, Hysterical Realism, Metafiction and Fabulation. They stand at odds with both the intellectualism and elitism of modernist esoteric high art and traditional theories of art and storytelling. They contest artistic representation prescribed by realism, as well as the universalising concepts of liberal humanism in favor of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-reflexive, paradoxical and popular-esoteric postmodernist works. They attempt to be privy to their own status as fiction and artifice. Metafiction, as a (or the) major postmodernist form of art, marks the problematisation of the representation of reality. Such metafictional works may be referred to as “theoretical novel” (Currie 1988, 49), “narcissistic” (Hutcheon 1980, 1) or what one might prefer to name theory-in-practice narratives, for they are artistic manifestation in literary narratives of postmodern theories. In other words, they are deeply concerned with theoretical issues, especially in the realm of postmodern theories. Thus, far beyond the linguistic obsession of poststructuralism, critics including Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh and John Barth aim at analysing this postmodernist mode of narrative which can be briefly discussed here.

Since metafiction came into being and developed, its interpretation has generated hot debate. Realism is an inadequate means of depicting the contemporary socio-cultural situation. Likewise, poststructuralism’s linguistic strategy of reading in approaching metafiction cannot be sufficient because, as mentioned earlier, this mode of fiction is highly self-reflexive, self-conscious, auto-referential or auto-representational, as well as representational in its matter and form. To the consternation of many critics, metafictional novels are not just mere texts and should not be treated as just “a tissue of signs” as Barthes does (2000, 149). They emphasise literariness or narrative strategies and techniques as one might call it in

addition to contesting language as being able to represent reality, simultaneously converging the borderline between writing and criticism, life and art, as well as fiction and reality. Consequently, a new poetics derived from metafiction may attribute the possibility of having two opposite interpretations not just to the language but to the techniques and strategies employed for the purpose of the problematisation of reality. This seems to have been condoned so far. Better to say, metafiction makes explicit the process by which multiple contradictory interpretations are possible. The mode has brought about its own criticism. This requires what Hutcheon refers to as “a ‘poetics’ of postmodernism” (1988, iv); that is, a new criticism or reading strategy that can justify for this mode. As she puts it, “[l]iterary history suggests that new critical languages are necessarily developed in order to come to terms with new literary forms (1980, 36). Therefore, one should be in search of new theory which can apply to this mode of writing, that is, metafiction.

In this sense, postmodern criticism and theory is basically concerned with analysing a work of art in order to make its dominant totalising, naturalising and internalising discourses or metanarratives explicit; to de-centre, de-naturalise and de-totalise them; to regard the marginalized narratives; and to arrive at uncertainty concerning their validity, authenticity, legitimacy and possibility of any representational view of language that lay claims to an ultimate reality. Postmodern theory, in its broad sense including socio-cultural, political, artistic and literary, is primarily concerned with self-contradictory, self-conscious and/or self-reflexive narratives that raise questions as to what reality or “natural” is (2000, xi). As an especial type of narration that Hutcheon calls “historiographic metafiction” (2000, ix) it explores the ways by which historical reality is constructed. 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, in this book I aim to develop a methodology for understanding this new poetics, which is herein referred to as postmodernist

re-presentation, drawn upon theories put forward by Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh and Hayden White, to name a few, in analysing *Chatterton*. I cite numerous literary theories and philosophers to avoid limiting the perception of postmodernism and metafiction as a homogeneous phenomenon. However, my major concern in the course of the book is with the idea of postmodernist re-presentation in metafiction. In the following section, I discuss and define postmodernist re-presentation in detail.

The Representation of Reality and its Critique

“I can endure death. It is the *representation* of death I cannot bear.” (Ackroyd 1993, 2, 86 emphasis added)

Throughout history, men and women 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, and seemingly an “axiomatic fact,” the idea that literature can represent reality has been questioned. Moreover, in the last few decades there has been a great inclination towards understanding the literary representations of reality, shown with modernists and especially by the avant-garde. However, postmodernist metafiction puts both representational and anti-representational views of art into question, not in a sense that it rejects them but in that it is simultaneously neither and both of them. In effect, paradoxically as it may seem, postmodernist metafiction is both representational and anti-representational. In other words, it signals the problematisation of the representation of reality.

Furthermore, such a literary discussion of representation begins with the ancient Greeks. The idea of the representation of reality is of no exception. The representational or mimetic view of literature dates back to two philosophical thinkers: Aristotle and Plato. Yet, this view is more of Aristotelian origin than of Platonic which is in effect “idealistic” (Selden 1988, 8). Nevertheless, one should be cautious enough not to put them into neatly labelled binaries, because, as contradictory as it may appear, Aristotle’s view is idealistic too. Aristotle’s defence of poetry offered what is known as mimesis. He elaborates upon the idea by differentiation in means, models (objects) and manners of imitation. In other words, in so doing and asserting remarks such as “[i]mitation is natural to man”

(Aristotle 7) he consequently postulates the imitative and representational function of poetry (literature). His view is that a poet should present what is probable (Aristotle 17-18); that is, literature must be true to life. By 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 and gaining prominence in realism that seeks to portray the weariness, dreariness, ugliness and heinousness of the life of the middle class.

However, what has come to be known as the crisis or critique of the representation of reality, that reached its acme in poststructuralism, was mainly triggered by Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic model and observation of the arbitrariness of the relation between the signifier and the signified. As he puts it, "[t]he bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary" (Saussure 2004, 62). Saussure's view was a turning point. It received an especial attention amongst poststructuralists. Linguistically speaking, the crisis rises when there is no natural relation between the world and the language which is supposed to represent the world. As far as arbitrariness goes, structuralism and post-structuralism are on par with each other. Nonetheless, whereas Saussure stipulates that the relation is fixed, Derrida goes so far as to cast doubt upon the idea by offering *différance*, a constant delay of the signified and subversion of the hierarchy. Moreover, Derrida's remark that, "there is nothing outside the text" (1976, 163), an insistence upon what was already suggested by Formalists, sets up an opposition not to the real world but to the ostensibly objectivity and ability of language to represent reality. For Derrida, the representation of reality is no longer possible when there is nothing outside. Consequently, auto-referentiality—the idea that any text refers not to the outside world but to itself as well as to other texts (intertextuality)—has received an especial acclaim in recent decades. As inferred from Derrida, postmodernism questions from within. Therefore, as indicated in this section, the myth of a possibility of language to objectively represent reality thus came to almost an end. In the next part, I explicate postmodernist re-presentation in view of postmodernist narrative.

The Problematisation of the Representation of Reality: Postmodernist Re-presentation vs. Representation and Anti-representation

“The poet does not merely recreate or describe the world. He actually creates it.” (Ackroyd 1993, 115)

Postmodernist re-presentation cannot be enunciated and discussed in a vacuum, for it is the upshot of our dominant cultural and social conditions. Therefore, the notion is exhausted with respect to realism’s representational and modernism’s anti-representational views. This view is firstly a reaction against realist 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. Advertently and intentionally paradoxical, then, postmodernist re-presentation is neither of them whilst at the same time encompassing the two. Thus, in what follows postmodernist modes of reference, herein referred to as postmodernist re-presentation, having arisen in the wake of postmodernist metafiction and resulting in the problematisation of the representation of reality, is addressed and demarcated with respect to realism’s representational and modernism’s anti-representational modes of reference.

Moreover, by postmodernist re-presentation I mean the problematisation of the representational as well as anti-representational views through an ironic and parodic re-presentation, keeping both views in a crisis. It is a representation of multiple varieties which “uses and abuses,” establishes and “subverts” what it strives to contest, question and challenge (Hutcheon 1988, 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 of this simultaneously. Postmodernist re-presentation 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 conventions. Nor does it naïvely accept them. It is not a rejection, as some of postmodernism’s detractors may claim, of what is known as grand-narratives whose aim is to naturalise, universalise, generalise and totalise (Hutcheon 1988, x). It is but a means of questioning

them. It makes attempts to de-totalise and “de-naturalize” what we have always thought of as “natural” as a means of divulging to the reader that they are nothing but “cultural” constructs (Hutcheon 2000, 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. Be they of realism or of modernism, it plays the conventions off against each other in order to question and problematise any possibility of representation of reality.

In metafiction, realism’s apparent 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 states, “[t]here is nothing natural about ‘the real’ and there never was” (2000, 33). Postmodernist re-presentation, that is metafiction by implication, does not reject the existence of the real. Nevertheless, it discloses that such representation is a cultural, not natural, product *made* through representations, hence, problematic. It, therefore, designates the concept of *process*, that is, the process of constructing and perceiving these apparently real natural *truisms*.

In fact, within postmodernist re-presentation, realism’s apparently unproblematic natural transparency “makes explicit the implicit problematic of realism” (Lodge 1955, 154). This is made possible through re-presenting the process of fiction-making:

Any text that draws the reader’s attention to its process of construction by frustrating his or her conventional expectations of meaning and closure problematizes more or less explicitly the ways in which narrative codes—whether “literary” or “social”—artificially construct apparently “real” and imaginary worlds in the terms of particular ideologies while presenting these as transparently “natural” and “eternal.” (Waugh 1986, 22)

Not only is the ability of novel in reflecting reality challenged, but also liberal humanist notions such as universality, originality, authority and the natural as fixed and sacred. Besides, postmodernist re-presentation contests liberal humanism’s attempt to separate the artistic from the real. It does so by making manifest the paradoxes in the integration of the aesthetic and the

real (Hutcheon 1988, viii), be it political, historical or social. Moreover, a composite of contradictory notions as it is, postmodernism problematises realism's objectivity, (as well as modernism's) unity and closure through conflation of aesthetic formal self-reflexivity together with historical backgrounds. Hutcheon observes "[w]hat postmodernism does is to denaturalize both realism's transparency and modernism's reflexive response, while retaining (in its typically complicitous critical way) the historically attested power of both" (2000, 32). Paradoxically as it may appear, it adverts to its referentiality and auto-referentiality at the same time. Therefore, resolving these contradictions, an action in which realism seeks solace, is abandoned. This is best done in the conflation of the historical and the fictive.

Thus, it is a re-presentation of representation. In other words, as the hyphen in the term re-presentation suggests, it stops to re-think, re-examine, re-view, re-consider, re-meet, re-visit, re-read, re-work and re-present (to present again but ironically and critically) the representation of reality. Re-presentation, accordingly, imitates in order to question what it imitates to make the reader aware that any representational view of art is problematic. As Hutcheon argues, it "is less a departure from the *mimetic* novelistic tradition than a reworking of it" (1980, 5 emphasis added). For that reason, to claim that a novel is an artistic production which has nothing to do with our life and the external reality, as in modernism, is a fallacy due to its very paradoxically imitative characteristics. Closely related to this example is postmodernist re-presentation's preoccupation with respect to two levels. The first is its aesthetic engagement with language. The second is its referentiality, worldliness. Hutcheon 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" (1980, 7). Therefore, it calls upon readers as a co-creator of the work in the process of creation initiating them into the act of writing. The former marks postmodernism's autonomy and auto-referentiality or what is known as modernism's anti-representation, whereas the latter subverts it by marking its mimetic relation to the real world:

[I]n all fiction, language is representational, but of a fictional "other" world, a complete and coherent "heterocosm" created by the fictive referents of the signs. In metafiction, however, this

fact is made explicit and, while he reads, the reader lives in a world which he is forced to acknowledge as fictional. (Hutcheon 1980, 7)

Put briefly, postmodernism's 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 real life, and thus, the problematisation of the representation of reality.

In addition, since many references are made to acknowledge its status as a creative, imaginative, constructed artefact, metafiction creates its own independent world. Nevertheless, it is not anti-representational as modernism claims; however, its referent is artistically created within the fictive world. Its "representation is of a fictive referent" (Hutcheon 1980, 97). Thus, it does refer to itself. It is a mirror held up no longer to nature but to itself. Consequently, any desperate attempt to assess it in terms of its truth value will be of no avail. To do so is to treat the work of art as anything but artifice (Hutcheon 1980, 95). For, metafiction is constantly aware of its status as artifice. Distracted about the combination of the fictive and the real, traditional readers (readers of the realist novel), as is their wont, fail in their attempt to interpret a literary work as direct access to reality. Hence, postmodernist re-presentation imparts the process of its own creation through which meaning is created, that is, constructed to the reader.

In addition, there is a distinction between realism's view of art as a product and postmodernism's as a process. In the former, the traditional reader, as it is expected, comes to recognise "the products being imitated" to acknowledge similarities they make to the real life (Hutcheon 1980, 38), that is, verisimilitude. This is suggestively referred to as "a mimesis of *product*" (Hutcheon 1980, 38) in which the attention is drawn not upon the process through which reality is made but upon the reader's *passively* accepting its semblance to the real life and experience. Often ignored or depreciated, by contrast, has been "a mimesis of *process*" (Hutcheon 1980, 39) which in metafiction is of cardinal significance. Accordingly, postmodernist re-presentation implies and necessitates acknowledging the process of construction. In other words, this process involves assembling the artistic materials together in an especial order (artistically) determined by the writer by disclosing and exposing the techniques (narrative techniques or strategies) as well as the process of reading. This constantly

keeps 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 involving narrative techniques and strategies.

Closely related to metafiction's involvement with its own construction process is the dichotomy of telling and showing. Realism and modernism show, whereas postmodernism tells. Waugh compares metafiction with modernism in that "modernism pursued impersonality ('showing'), such contemporary metafictional texts pursue Personality, the ironic flaunting of the Teller" (1986, 131). This implies two points. First, metafiction is a telling, rather than showing. Second, it is fictive and imaginary. Paradoxically, through telling it exposes its own fictionality and autonomy.

Moreover, modernism's aesthetic autonomy has its root in modernity's concept of human identity. The concept is in turn derived from "liberal humanism" and "capitalism" (Hutcheon 2006, 120). It assumes "human" as an independent "unique, coherent, rational, autonomous identity" (Hutcheon 2006, 120) which is the only determinant of meaning. Correspondingly, modernism decrees the idea of artist as an autonomous disinterested impersonal "catalyst" (Eliot 2000, 35) who, as the source of meaning, creates an aesthetic autonomous work through formal manipulation of materials. Nonetheless, poststructuralism confutes this credo by proclaiming language as the constructor of human identity. Poststructuralism states that identity and meaning are formed in a system of differentiation which implies dependence as opposed to autonomy. As Umberto Eco 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 . . ." (1994, 221). In the same way, one cannot postulate an imaginary work of art as a self-sufficient, independent world.

Nevertheless, metafiction indicates both aesthetic autonomy through self-reflexivity and language but not the individual as a meaning-granting significant indicator by subverting humanism's notion of autonomous identity. It self-reflexively has one eye to its own form suggesting fictionality and the other to historical events, references to the empirical life. Rejecting the text as totally autonomous, Hutcheon says "[t]he most extreme autonomous universes of fantasy are still referential; if they were not the reader could not imagine their existence" (1980, 77). To