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ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫЕ ФАЛЬСИФИКАЦИИ ТОМАСА ЧАТТЕРТОНА И ДЖОНА ПЕЙНА КОЛЬЕРА

LITERARY FORGERIES OF THOMAS CHATTERTON AND JOHN PAYNE COLLIER

В статье рассматриваются литературные фальсификации Томаса Чаттертона и Джона Пейна Кольера. На основе литературно-критического и сравнительно-исторического анализа сделаны выводы о возможном влиянии раннего творчества и методов поэтического самовыражения Чаттертона на фальсификацию Кольером ряда материалов и документов, имеющих прямое отношение к творчеству У. Шекспира. В статье также рассматривается феномен литературной фальсификации как один из распространенных способов, который был сознательно выбран Чаттертоном и Кольером для самоутверждения в английском обществе и в научных кругах.

Ключевые слова: Чаттертон; Кольер; фальсификация; мистификация; рукописи.

The paper discusses the literary forgeries of Thomas Chatterton and John Payne Collier. Using the methods of literary and comparative historical analysis, conclusions are drawn pertaining to the possible influence of the early poetical compositions of Chatterton, along with the ways of Chatterton's artistic self-expression, upon Collier's attempt to forge literary history and the legacy of Shakespeare. The article also dwells on the phenomenon of literary forgery as one of the widespread means to which Chatterton and Collier had to resort in an attempt to establish themselves in the English society and academic community.

Key words: Chatterton; Collier; forgery; mystification; manuscripts.

The most striking examples in the history of 18th century English literary forgery might be assumed to begin with George Psalmanazar (c. 1679–1763) whose made-up account of *Description of Formosa* was printed in 1704, and William Lauder (c. 1680–1771) who published his fraudulent claims (between 1747 and 1753) in an effort to prove that John Milton (1608–1674) was a plagiarist. These occurrences seem to launch a series of attempts by ingenious authors to forge literature. Such 18th–19th century authors as Horace Walpole (1717–1797), James Macpherson (1736–1796), Thomas

Chatterton (1752–1770), William Henry Ireland (1775–1835), John Payne Collier (1789–1883) and some others apparently constitute the links of the same chain where each link appears to have caused the succeeding one.

James Macpherson's ambitious literary forgery, *The Works of Ossian* (1765), along with Horace Walpole's initial concocted explanations concerning the "true" origin of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), came to exercise great influence over the career of Thomas Chatterton, just as Chatterton fashioned the destiny of young William Henry Ireland who, besides his other literary works, penned a pseudo-Shakespearean play *Vortigern and Rowena* (1796). Therefore, the success which attended the labours of each of these authors must have stimulated the made-up corrections in Payne Collier's annotated Shakespeare edition. Ultimately, the aforementioned spurious endeavours in English literature seem to have been stalled after the publication of the Shelly letters which were purchased (and subsequently published in 1852) by Edward Moxon (1608–1674) at an auction. Later it was revealed that those letters had been put in the sale by a William White, a bookseller, who in his turn had bought them from some Major George Gordon, a charlatan impersonating a son of Lord Byron (1788–1824). What impeded the further progression of the multifarious literary forgeries was the rapid development of scholarly editing, antiquarianism, historiography, graphology, etymology, and various means of chemical analysis to determine the authenticity of "new" materials. There have been some repercussions of the phenomenon of literary forgery in modern times though, namely when Ian McEwan (b. 1948–) deliberately penned (and later had to expound the motive therein) a fictional pseudo-psychological appendix, *A Homo-Erotic Obsession, with Religious Overtones: A Clinical Variant of de Clerambault's Syndrome*, to his novel *Enduring Love* (1987). The main purpose of this article is to demonstrate the different forms of literary deceit undertaken by Thomas Chatterton and John Payne Collier as the means of their artistic and scholarly expression and ways of seeking recognition from their contemporaries, as well as to indicate possible influences and connections.

In contemporary literary studies, there is still no established consensus concerning the terminology behind various types of literary forgeries. Furthermore, many scholars (primarily English) really make no pronounced distinction between such terms as *literary forgery* and *literary mystification* and use these terms synonymously. In Russian literary scholarship, the term *literary mystification* was first introduced by Y. Lann (1896–1958) in his famous work *Литературная мистификация* (1930) where Lann defined one type of literary mystification as the author's forgery of the whole literary

composition and attributing it to either fictitious or a well-known author [1, p. 12]. The Russian literary scholar Irina Popova, in her dissertation abstract *Литературная мистификация в историко-функциональном аспекте* (1992) defines literary mystification as a type of message from a fictitious author for the purposes of aesthetic experiment which involves the creation of a whole new text which is attributed to another person [2]. All in all, it seems possible to differentiate the term *literary forgery* from the term *literary mystification*. The term *literary forgery* can be thus applied to intentional attribution of literary works (statements, comments, or corrections) to well-known authors or purposeful alteration of extant materials. And the term *literary mystification* may be used to describe *a special kind of stylization in an effort to create a completely new literary composition which is subsequently attributed to a fictitious author*.

Truly, there was a drastic distinction between the literary forgeries of Chatterton and the editorial forgeries of Collier, i.e., the former created a pseudo-medieval language and attributed his best verses to the invented cleric, Rowley, as the method of his poetic expression, and the latter, in his forgeries, did his utmost to present the corrections to the already existing materials (Shakespeare's plays) as authentic. Consequently, for the purposes of distinction, Chatterton's literary misadventures will be referred to as mystifications, and Collier's clandestine endeavors to emend the plays of Shakespeare will be referred to as forgeries.

It seems possible that Macpherson's mystification exercised some influence upon Chatterton. When the former published *The Highlander* (1758) in simple English, nobody within the literary circles of that era paid any attention to it and it fell into oblivion. It was not until he had arrayed the poem in the reminiscent images of the distant past that the public ear was arrested by the beauty that the poem induced. In other words, "...the public declined his verses until he showed that they were covered with the dust of antiquity. These examples could not be without effect on the Bristol boy, begrimed with the parchments extracted from the muniment room of St. Mary Redcliffe" [3, p. 15]. Chatterton, in his adolescent years, saw that some of the good verses of those times (the times with a high cultural demand for reviving the works of the poets of the far-off past) drew very little attention from his contemporaries, while some verses, if disguised to look old, were likely to extort universal admiration. But, unfortunately, the fictitious Saxon priest (Rowley) to whom Chatterton attributed his verses did not arouse the same level of national admiration as the fictional warrior (Ossian), although in terms of literary skills and "authenticity" Chatterton might be superior to Macpherson.

The great mainspring of Chatterton's success in producing Rowley lies in the fact that he gave all his spare time to the task. His other poems (the poems which were not intended for any mystification purposes) were occasional verses composed for mere entertainment or to please a friend. Yet, their artistic merit deserves consideration. His *Contemplation* (1769) suggests the influence of Thomas Gray (1716–1771), and his *African Eclogues* (1769) are reminiscent of William Collins (1721–1759). However, rather than simply drawing from his already established experience as a poet (Chatterton's first attempt in verse, *On the Last Epiphany*, was published in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* in 1763) and present his poems as his own creation, he resorted to the path of literary mystification.

Chatterton knew, from the example of Macpherson, that the older a thing was made to be, the more likely it was to be lauded by the public, and Chatterton's manifest design was to turn Rowley into money, on the score of his antiquity.

But the fact is, the great excellence of the Rowley poems does not consist in the plot or in the ideas which the author derived from history, but in the finish and the execution. The artistic beauty of the Rowley poems is revealed and presented through excellent similes, the harmonious flow of diction (Chatterton, on one occasion, suggested that the Rowley poems should have been listened to rather than read), the wording, and the forms of the metrical structure.

Chatterton's biggest mistake was to assume that his celebrated Saxon priest could read Homer (c. 8th century BC) before the alphabet of the language in which Homer wrote was known in those lands. Chatterton's Rowley mentions Homer by name in the poem *Battle of Hastings* first published posthumously in London (1778) by T. Payne and Son. The following is the corresponding extract from *Battle of Hastings* as it was published in Walter W. Skeat's *Poetical Works of Thomas Chatterton* (1872):

...And round about the rising waters lave,
And their long hair around their bodies flies;
Such majesty was in her port displayed,

To be excelled by none but Homer's martial maid. [4, p. 175].

Among Chatterton's other mistakes was his inclination to freely borrow expressions and models of versification used by Edmund Spenser (1552–1599), John Dryden (1631–1700), Alexander Pope (1688–1744) and William Shakespeare (1564–1616).

Nevertheless, it definitely came as a surprise to the English men of letters that a youth of seventeen could have arranged the materials and drawn the plan of the Rowley poems himself; for in that case "...the suitability

of the language to the ideas, the splendor of the imagery, the music and polished elegance of the rhythm might very naturally be supposed to have flowed spontaneously from the fervor of [Chatterton's] intellectual creation" [3, p. 18]. In the time of Chatterton, very few people would argue that the young poet could completely change the language of a mediaeval bard in "...so an eminent manner as to entitle him [Chatterton] to take his place among the first classics of his country" [3, p. 18].

The literary mystifications of Chatterton and Macpherson might have suggested to John Payne Collier (1789–1883) how easily the public may be deceived by the application of the same processes to Shakespearean records and documents. Indeed, some literary scholars of those times, namely Clement Mansfield Ingleby (1823–1886) and Samuel Weller Singer (1783–1858) associated the deceitful literary productions of Collier with those of Chatterton and Macpherson.

The mode in which Shakespeare's plays were printed, without the consent of the author, resulted in a wave of confusion. It is simply impossible to know, in the absence of the original manuscripts, where the genuine Shakespeare ends and where fabrication begins. Heminge and Condell, in their 1623 first edition of Shakespeare, relied on the imperfect manuscript stage copies, which had been depraved by the alterations of the players, and changed for the purposes of theatrical representation. The aforementioned facts seemed to infuse Collier with a desire to forge "corrections" to Shakespearean texts that would correspond to his own "proper" reading of them and to be commemorated as a scholar of the highest esteem.

Mr. Payne Collier, in 1845, in one of London's book shops, stumbled upon an old folio of Shakespeare's plays printed in 1632. In that folio, on the margins, Collier discovered loads of manuscript notes emending the text in such a manner as to establish and ascertain clearly to the world the authentic reading of Shakespearean plays (the controversy of the correct reading of Shakespeare's texts and their authenticity was just as relevant at the time of Collier as it is today). The writing seemed to be the old text of the 17th century, many passages were erased from the text, and stage directions were inserted here and there, which suggested that the folio might have been used for stage purposes in the early part of the 17th century. Collier might have reasoned that some theatrical manager, whom Collier called the "Old Corrector", seeing the errors which had appeared in the text through the inaccurate publication of the plays and the mistakes of inadequate printers, undertook the task of restoring, with the help of those marginal notes, the way those plays should be read in the absence of the original manuscripts.

The name of Perkins on the fly-leaf of the folio, identical with that of a famous actor of the period, corroborated the suggestion that the marginal notes were authentic. The marginal notes were at once published by way of supplementary volume to Collier's previous edition, *Memoirs of the Principal Actors in the Plays of Shakespeare* (1846), and were eagerly received by the public. Furthermore, Collier boldly announced a new coming edition in which they were to be incorporated into the text. In his later *Early Manuscript Emendations of Shakespeare's Text* (1852), he mentions those marginal notes in the following manner: "There was hardly a page without emendations of more or less importance and interest, – and some of them appeared to me highly valuable. The punctuation, on which of course so much of the author's meaning depends, was corrected in, I may say, thousands of places" [5].

It was not until Collier had published his last edition, together with his emendations, that English critics commenced to worry and began to inquire into his authority to interpret Shakespeare. It was then apparent that most of the words introduced were either of a very modern origin or were used in a sense which had only been applied to them during the 19th century. It was also discovered that "...many archaic words had been ejected from the text as unmeaning, which in Shakespeare's day were pregnant with the sense he intended to convey. On a close inspection of the folio itself, it was found that the antique calligraphy had been imitated in pencil, upon which the ink had been laid, and then the pencil marks erased. The ink also seemed to have been mixed with iron rust, to impart to its strokes the appearance of age; for when chemically examined, it yielded to the first solvent, which hardly would have been the case had it not been recently laid on" [3, p. 21–22]. There were some literary critics, like Ingleby, who went as far as to proclaim "...the extraordinary resemblance between Mr. Collier's writing and that of the "Old Corrector"" [as cited in: 6, p. 274].

There is a striking similarity between Chatterton's endeavors to create the physical proof of, along with an aura of antiquity around, his invented medieval priest (Chatterton had something resembling a chemical laboratory in his garret room, where he took his time to antique his literary compositions by writing upon old vellum, adding ochre and iron rust to the ink, holding the written poems over the candle fire and even rubbing them with dirt to make them appear old), and Collier's ingenious attempts to spice up his editorial work concerning the writings of Shakespeare with the actual evidence which could be looked at and analyzed, i.e., the handwriting of the "Old Corrector" himself.

Putting these facts together, it seems evident that these marginal notes had been concocted with a view to present Shakespeare to the English public in a new form. Had Collier published only those notes the way he claimed they came into his possession (and some scholars, like Alexander Rivington, really believed them to be authentic while others, like Ingleby, believed the opposite), it would have been merely regretful because Collier might have gone to posterity as the unsuspecting victim of a fraud (there is no definite agreement concerning what those notes really were), but Collier made a decision to emend those notes further and profited from the sales of his later works into which those notes were incorporated.

Collier was indeed a prolific Shakespearean scholar, and his eight-volume edition of the *Works of William Shakespeare* (1842–1844) made him a leading Shakespeare expert, but his scholarly achievements and good reputation were basically destroyed by his abundant use of forged emendations to Shakespeare's texts. Moreover, Arthur Freeman and Janet Ing Freeman noted (in their *John Payne Collier: Scholarship and Forgery in the Nineteenth Century*) his numerous attempts to falsify other historical records and documents (namely, deeds and letters supposedly written by Shakespeare), and made the unequivocal statement that "...the fabrication or forgery of citations and sources, alternative readings with a bogus cachet, old provenance, and reports of "lost" texts, and the like – is really a sub-species of literary and historical fakery, but one little studied in its own right; it is of course especially relevant to John Payne Collier" [7, p. 179]. The aforementioned authors described some of Collier's forgeries as "...inventions pure and simple for which no documentary evidence survives" [7, p. 193].

To conclude, it seems obvious that literary forgery was one of the dubious and somewhat popular means of poetic and scholarly expression to which certain individuals had to resort in their endeavors to establish themselves in the English society and scientific community both in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some succeeded and achieved literary fame, recognition, and became household names, i.e., Horace Walpole and James Macpherson; others, i.e., Chatterton, Ireland and Collier, had their reputations severely undermined and their own compositions belittled. For instance, Chatterton's style, his array of very unusual English words and phrases to convey the spirit and atmosphere of medieval England, gained popularity and launched the age of romanticism only after his tragic death.

Thomas Chatterton and John Payne Collier were, unequivocally, driven by the desire to attain fame and recognition from their literary and scholarly fabrications, and were perfect examples of tremendous personal ambition and self-aggrandizement gone awry. At the same time, there is no denying

the fact that the former, with his Rowley poems, was a master poet whose literary style has become an immense contribution to English poetry and literary culture in general, and the latter was definitely an editor of considerable intellectual sagacity, who had chosen Shakespearean literature as his main field of literary research and who was directly interested, by the publication of “new” materials, in keeping this subject before the world.

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Поступила в редакцию 31.01.2024