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ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫХ МИСТИФИКАЦИЙ ТОМАСА ЧАТТЕРТОНА: *ФРАГМЕНТ И АНГЛИЙСКАЯ МЕТАМОРФОЗА*

LINGUISTIC PECULIARITIES OF THOMAS CHATTERTON'S LITERARY MYSTIFICATIONS: *FRAGMENT* AND *ENGLISH METAMORPHOSIS*

В статье рассматриваются некоторые специфические лингвистические приемы, использованные Томасом Чаттертоном в его литературных мистификациях с целью имитации средневекового характера создававшихся им текстов и придания благозвучности. Для достижения этой цели в статье исследуются как прозаические, так и поэтические примеры мистификаций Чаттертона. С помощью методов литературного, лингвистического и исторического анализа сделаны выводы об использовании Чаттертоном английского языка XV века в аспектах орфографии и способов версификации и изобретении им псевдосредневековых слов в попытке подражать средневековой литературе XV века.

К л ю ч е в ы е   с л о в а: *Чаттертон*; *имитация средневековых текстов*; *лингвистические маркеры литературной мистификации*; *псевдосредневековый стиль*; *среднеанглийские слова.*

The paper discusses some of the specific linguistic techniques employed by Thomas Chatterton in his literary mystifications in order to imitate the medieval character of the texts he created and to impart a sense of euphony. To attain this goal, the article examines both prose and poetical examples of Chatterton's mystifications. Using the methods of literary, linguistic, and historical analysis, conclusions are made concerning Chatterton's use of 15th-century English in the aspects of orthography and versification and his invention of pseudo-medieval words in an attempt to emulate 15th-century medieval literature.

K e y   w o r d s: *Chatterton*; *imitation of medieval texts*; *linguistic markers of literary mystification*; *pseudo-medieval style; Middle English words.*

Thomas Chatterton (1752–1770) was the 18th-century poet and mystifier who famously created a series of poems and writings (the Rowley poems) that he attributed to a fictional 15th-century cleric named Thomas Rowley. These works were written in a pseudo-medieval style and language, thereby initially convincing many of his learned contemporaries, such as Horace Walpole (1717–1797), William Barrett (1733–1789), and Alexander Catcott (1725–1779), just to name a few, that they were genuine 15th-century medieval texts. The initial success and furor with which the Rowley poems, along with some of Chatterton's prose pieces (on ecclesiastical subjects and the history of England), were received was caused by the sheer deficiency in many areas of philological knowledge at the time when Chatterton's mystifications appeared. For example, Horace Walpole, being an eminent writer, had a far less knowledge of the proper use of medieval words than Chatterton (who at that time was only a schoolboy). Only this can clarify Walpole's initially good opinion (which he expressed in a letter to the poet after having studied one of his mystifications entitled *The Ryse of Peyncteyne in Englande*) of Chatterton's "profound" understanding of Middle English. Hence this article presents an attempt to reveal certain linguistic characteristics and incongruities of some of Chatterton's "medieval" compositions, both in prose and poetical.

Prior to the linguistic analysis of Chatterton's mystifications, it is essential to emphasise the poet's motives for fabricating and disguising many of his own works as authentic medieval writings. As it can be summarized from the innumerable magazine articles, literary disquisitions on the subject of the Rowley poems, and multifarious editions of Chatterton's writings, the poet's motivations for faking his literary compositions as medieval can be outlined as follows: gaining recognition (Chatterton sought literary fame and recognition which he believed he could achieve more easily by presenting his work as the discovery of lost medieval texts); creative expression (the precocious youth enjoyed the creative challenge of emulating medieval language and style, thereby showcasing his talent and ingenuity); cultural fascination (the poet was influenced by the fascination in 18th-century England with medievalism and believed that presenting his work as medieval would resonate more with contemporary tastes and interests).

The craftsmanship and sophistication involved in Chatterton's creation of the Rowley poems as convincing 15th-century medieval texts, along with his innovative use of pseudo-archaic language and his ability to mimic medieval English, blending authentic medieval elements with those of his own creation, can still be of interest to those studying the evolution of

the English language and historical linguistics. Moreover, it is relevant in the context of modern mass culture associated with the phenomenon of «fakes» and similar artifacts of disinformation. Thus, the main purpose of this article is to analyse Chatterton's use of archaic language, to provide valuable insights into some linguistic features of his literary imitations and to offer some suggestions pertaining to Chatterton's methods of creating 15th-century pseudo-medieval texts, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of his literary genius and his place in literary history.

Unequivocally, Chatterton's forte best revealed itself in the matters of antiquity which was in a way the result of his early fascination with Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400) and such authors (who wrote profusely on the history of Britain) as William Camden (1551–1623), Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1095– c. 1155), Raphael Holinshed (c. 1525–c. 1582), and Thomas Fuller (1608–1661). Engaged as he was with antiquities, Chatterton's mind naturally started to dwell in ancient English kingdoms peopled by mighty and long-forgotten sovereigns with their entourage of dukes, barons, knights clad in armour, long-robed monks, lonely scribes, obscure bards, wealthy merchants and fair ladies. John Milton (1608–1674) described the mood of the period in the following way:

> ...And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
> With mask and antique pageantry;
> Such sights as youthful poets dream
> On summer eves by haunted stream [1, p. 69].

Chatterton's imaginary world also fashioned towering castles with elaborately designed banners, steep Gothic cathedrals with stained glass windows, medieval church music, ancient tombs with monuments and statues of dignified and notable leaders. Consequently, "… it became natural to Chatterton, revelling as he did in conceptions of the antique, to draw on an ancient-fashioned suit of thought, and make use of antique forms of language" [2, p. 49].

David Masson (1822–1907) in his meticulously written biographical and critical essay, *Chatterton: A Story of the Year 1770* (1873), clearly states that "Whether, in the composition of those poems, it was Chatterton's habit first to write in ordinary phraseology, and then, by the help of glossaries, to translate what he had written into archaic language, or whether he had by practice become so far master of ancient words and expressions as to be able to write directly in the fictitious dialect he had prescribed for himself, certain it is that, <...> he either was whirled into the archaic form by an irresistible instinct, or deliberately adopted it" [Ibid, p. 270].

Keeping the preceding statement in mind, let us consider (in terms of orthography) the following excerpt from one of Chatterton's mystifications, entitled *Fragment* (which is the alleged Rowley elaboration on the nature of Man, God, and the Holy Trinity) as it was first printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for April, 1782, more than ten years after Chatterton's death:

Havynge whylomme ynn dyscourse provedd, orr soughte toe proove, the deitie of Chryste bie hys workes, names, and attributes, I shall in nexte place seeke to proove the deitie of Holye Spryte. Manne moste bee supplyedd wythe Holye Spryte toe have communyonn ryghtfullye of thynges whyche bee of Godde <...> [3, p. 177].

It should be added that this fragment had the following note attached by the editor, informing the readers that "... [it] has been produced as a transcript from a sermon by Thomas Rowley, Priest, of the fifteenth century. There being little reason, however, to suppose that Chatterton, who apparently forged all other pieces attributed to this occult personage, could be the immediate author of such a performance... " [Ibid, p. 177].

Firstly, what immediately catches attention is Chatterton's erroneous use of the perfect participle in the first sentence: in Middle English, there were only two types of participles: past and present, and Chatterton used the correct conjugation of the verb *have* which is *havynge*, or *having* (the early English suffix was *-ende*, which resulted in *-inge*), but the perfect participle construction *havynge provedd* (*having proved*) could not have been used in the 15th-century English.

Secondly, instead of the correct spelling of the Middle English preposition *ynne* (sometimes spelled as *in*, *ine*, *inne*, or *innen*) in the meaning of «within», or «in» [4, p. 259], Chatterton made use of the incorrect form *ynn* throughout the whole fragment.

Thirdly, the word *dyscourse* (in the meaning of «ratiocination», «conversation», or «speech»), in accordance with Middle English orthography, should have been spelled as *discurse*, or *discors*. Furthermore, the archaic Middle English adverb *whilom* (meaning «formerly», «at times», or «erstwhile») which had such alternate spellings as *whilum*, *whylom*, or *wylem* [Ibid, p. 545], was misspelled by Chatterton as *whylomme*.

And last but not least, Chatterton seemed to be unaware of the proper Middle English forms of the verb *prove,* such as *prouen, preuen, preuede, proued, preued, preve,* or the Old French form *prover* [Ibid, p. 376] and used erroneous variants *provedd* and *proove*. Consequently, out of the first five medieval words used in the *Fragment,* four were misspelled by the poet.

Proceeding with the linguistic analysis of the *Fragment*, the unnecessary doubling of consonants can be highlighted, namely Chatterton's incorrect use of the conjunction *orr*, instead of *or* and *oðer* [4, p. 352]. A number of other instances of wrong orthography can be listed here, i.e., *deitie* instead of *deiete*, *diete*; *Chryste* instead of *Christe*, *Crist*, *Christ*, or *Cristys*; *hys* instead of *his*, *hyse*, *hes*, or *hise*; *seeke* instead of *seke*; *holye* instead of *holy*, *holie*, or *holli*; *spryte* instead of *sprit*, *sprite*, or *sprete*; *bee* (in one instance) instead of *bi*, or *bie*; *wythe* instead of *with*, *whithe*, *witht* or *wit*; *communyonn*, instead of *communyoun*, *comunyoun*, or *communion*; *ryghtfullye* instead of *ryghtfulle*, *ryghtfull*, or *rihtful*; *whyche* instead of *which* [5].

Nevertheless, Chatterton's *Fragment* did display an array of authentic 15th-century medieval English words, for instance, *soughte*, *bie*, *toe*, *names*, *attributes*, *nexte*, *manne*, *moste*, *Godde*, and his knowledge of the formation of the old genitive plural for nouns was correct, as in *workes* and *thynges*.

Actually, the incongruities of spelling can be traced throughout Chatterton's literary mystifications. The results derived from the philological analysis of the language show that "… the genuine old English words, correctly used, occurring in the Rowleian dialect [Chatterton's pseudo-medieval language], amount to only about seven percent of all the old words employed" [6, p. xix]. Consequently, it can be rightly asserted that although Chatterton was an ingenious poet and writer, his knowledge of Middle English was quite limited.

The next thing to consider will be to analyse some of Chatterton's deliberate adaptations of archaic language for the purpose of creating rhymes in his own poetry which he attributed to Thomas Rowley. His *English Metamorphosis* (first printed posthumously in Tyrwhitt's edition of 1777) can offer some interesting examples in this regard. Here is a specimen of *English Metamorphosis* as it was published in Walter W. Skeat's *Poetical Works of Thomas Chatterton* (1872):

> Soft-bounding over swelling azure reles,
> The savage natives saw a ship appear,
> An unknown tremor to their bosom steals,
> Their might is bounden in the frost of fear.
> The headed javelin hisseth here and there,
> They stand, they run, they look with changeful eyne,
> The ship's sail, swelling with the kindly air,
> Runneth to harbour from the beating brine [Ibid, p. 105].

Chatterton's rhymes such as *appear–fear*, and *there–air* seem to be sufficiently correct, but his rhyme *reles–steals* looks odd. The poet used the Anglo-French noun *reles* as a substitute for the noun *wave* to rhyme it with the verb *steals*. But the Anglo-French word *reles* does not even have the meaning of «wave», i.e., its intended meaning has always been «relaxation», «forgiveness», and also «taste», and «odour».[1] Why Chatterton thought of *reles* as *waves* would never be known, but one thing is certain: *reles* rhymes with *steals*. Chatterton's rhyme *eyne–brine* is correct, and he had to settle on one of the variations of the Middle English word for «eye» of which the accepted forms include such examples as *eie*, *eien*, *eyen*, *eyn*, and *eyne*.

Further in the poem are these lines:

Him followed eftsoons his compeers, whose swords
Glistered like burning stars in frosty nete,
Hailing their capitain in chattering words
King of the land, whereon they set their feet [6, p. 105].

Here Chatterton's rhyme *swords–words* is perfectly acceptable, but he purposefully altered the spelling of the word *night* into *nete* so that to rhyme it with *feet*. The word *nete* is a corrupted variation of the West Saxon word *neaht* and the Anglian word *neht*, and was purely Chatterton's invention.

In another passage are the following lines:

A tie of love, a daughter fair she hanne,
Whose budding morning shewed a fair day,
Her father Locrine once a holy man [Ibid, p. 107].

The rhyme *hanne–man* is yet another invention of Chatterton: instead of such proper forms of the verb *have* as *had*, *hade*, *hadden*, or *han*, the poet corrupted Middle English grammar to create the form *hanne*.

Indeed, throughout *English Metamorphosis* one can find copious instances of how resorting to archaic or pseudo-archaic words can really be of help in creating rhymes. These examples include such rhymes as *mees–cliffs*; *gye–espy; sle–lea; parament–intent*; *fage–rage*; *sleen–queen*; *fate–regrate*; *knight–pight*; *skies–emprize*; *gye–espy*; *wight–might*; *bismare–heavenwere*; *sle–lea*; and *light–hight* [Ibid, pp. 104–109]. All in all, it can be observed that Chatterton made no mistakes in the rhyming per se; from the standpoint of versification, everything was correct, but he altered words and their forms for the purposes of versification.

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[1]From hereon, all the subsequent clarifications pertaining to the meaning and spelling of Middle English words are given with the reference to *A Concise Dictionary of Middle English from A.D. 1150 to 1580*, Dodo Press, 2009.

The results obtained from the philological analysis of Chatterton's *Fragment* and *English Metamorphosis* suggest that the technique employed by the poet was the following: he would write out words directly from the then available glossaries and dictionaries and use those words correctly; he would use a medieval English word but assign a totally new meaning to it (as with *reles* to mean «waves»); he would take a Middle English word but change its spelling by the doubling of final consonants (as with *orr*, and *communyonn*) or by altering its ending (as with *deitie, holye,* or *ryghtfullye*); he would change the spelling of the word at will (as with *nete*, *whyche,* or *mees*) to comply with the rhyming pattern; if he was simply unaware of the intended meaning and the spelling of a Middle English word, he did not bother to check it and made use of the variant which best suited his fancy.

To conclude, it can be stated that in his spurious endeavours to emulate medieval authors of the 15th-century, Chatterton created his own pseudo-medieval language, i.e., the Rowleian dialect, which was mainly the result of his reliance on the then available *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum* (1709) edited by John Kersey (c. 1660–c. 1721), and Thomas Speght's second edition of Chaucer (1602). Walter W. Skeat (1835–1912) in his *Essay on the Rowley Poems* (1871) authoritatively states that Chatterton "… employed *no old words whatever but such as are contained in Kersey or Speght*; the only exceptions to this rule occurring in the case of a few words which he *modified or invented*" [6, p. xxxiii]. In summary, the linguistic markers of literary mystification employed by Chatterton in his *Fragment* and *English Metamorphosis* can be outlined as follows: the adaptation of archaic orthography; the purposeful modification of words; the deliberate creation of pseudo-medieval words; the use of genuine Middle English words. These linguistic features contributed to Chatterton's deliberate creation of texts that were meant to appear as though they were from the medieval period, and to making his own poetic works sound antique.

What has been stated above should not serve as a belittlement of Chatterton's immense contribution to English literature, his influence on Gothic revival and later writers and poets such as the Romantics. Chatterton's significance lies in his role as a poet and a mystifier who was in possession of a "…wonderful originality, and how he combined with this originality a special faculty of reproducing all that he had learnt so as to set it off to the best advantage" [6, p. xli]. This has always fascinated scholars for its implications on literary authenticity and creativity.

The fact that Chatterton was the author of the Rowley poems is as certain as that *Vortigern and Rowena* (1796) was penned by William Henry Ireland (1775–1835), and *The Works of Ossian* (1765) was the production of James Macpherson (1736–1796). This fact, however, should never become an impediment to further studies of Chatterton, especially in the context of comparative literature and historical language reconstruction. Viewing Chatterton's literary mystifications alongside other literary hoaxes and forgeries can offer a comparative perspective on literary deception across different periods and cultures and provide the basis for further research, especially in Belarusian literary criticism which has not yet addressed the problem of literary mystifications, including those of Thomas Chatterton, and their linguistic peculiarities.

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