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*The real life of Thomas Chatterton: a world  
discovered and devised*

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This thesis discusses the poetry of Chatterton by entering into his created world. By re-assembling, from various strands in the Rowleyan poetry and prose, the inner world of Thomas Rowley and his patron William Canynge, it seeks to highlight the poetry by speaking of it from the inside - it acquiesces with Chatterton's fictionalizing, just as, I have argued, Chatterton himself acquiesced with eighteenth century demands for such a fiction. This device allows me to offer a notion of Chatterton's portrayal of the relationship between Rowley and Canynge as one of subtle conflict, and to suggest that such a portrayal directly influenced the Rowleyan poetry, particularly 'Aella', where these conflicts emerge in the poetry most richly. After this central chapter on 'Aella' (Ch.5), the thesis is content to follow a more biographical mode, - discussing Walpole's dealings with Chatterton and shifting, with Chatterton's removal to London, to a more eighteenth century, London-based view, - but always keeping in sight that inner world which Chatterton had devised at Bristol and which could re-emerge at any time - as I have suggested it did in the 'Balade of Charitie', which I have argued as being written in London rather than Bristol.

*THE REAL LIFE OF THOMAS CHATTERTON -  
A WORLD DISCOVERED AND DEvised;*

*By Julie A. Briggs*

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presented in this thesis has not been submitted for any  
other degree and is the original work of the author.



1- 6 JUL 1989

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis attempts by a variety of techniques to enter into the imagined world of Thomas Chatterton, and sets out to view Chatterton's own fictionalizing by itself imitating the process of a fiction. The problem presented by Chatterton is still that of truth and lies, and of shaping an attitude towards them - even though the Rowley controversy is long over, and no-one, today, would seriously dispute the fact that Chatterton wrote the Rowley poems.

My problem at the outset was how to fit biography into the work without it *being* a biography. For the work to be a biography I felt would be too facile, since one of the things I have tried to suggest in this thesis is that Chatterton's art was itself highly conscious of the creation of biography, a development of strategies which explored creative and personal identity by biographical means: Chatterton was a young man engaged in writing his own biography, in presenting an identity to the world; he lived

in an age which had produced the *Life of Savage* and which would produce the *Life of Johnson* and Rousseau's *Confessions*; and yet he attributes his own thoughts on biography to a fifteenth century priest who belonged to an age which cared nothing for the conflicts and struggles and subtleties of the developing self, but only for chronicles, heroics, the march of history. "All accounts of medieval and Renaissance biography", says John O. Lyons in *The Invention of the Self: the Hinge of Consciousness in the Eighteenth Century*,

divide the subject into two: the lives of saints and the lives of princes. The methods of each are very much the same, for both are anecdotal and strive for the general rather than the particular, and are perfectly clear as to the moral of a life. Donald Stauffer calls these lives static, and explains the difference in this way: 'There is one difference immediate and arresting between the medieval conception of biography and our own. We consider the biographer not as one who generalizes, but one who individualizes. *Il ne classe pas; il declasse*. He seeks, and has sought since Boswell, not the ideal, but the characteristic. This eagerness for particulars would not have been easily understood by the early biographers. During the Middle Ages the office or position, rather than the individual frequently attracts the biographer'. (p.48)

When Chatterton places in Rowley's hands the pen which writes, at the beginning of his *Lyfe of W: Canyng* (*Works* I, p.228), 'To wryte of a Mannis Lyfe mote bee enowe to saie of somme he was ybore and deceased odher somme lackethe recytalle as manie notable matteres bee contayned

in their *Storie*', this is not really a medieval dilemma, but an eighteenth century one. Where Rowley is most 'alive' is in those very perceptions, movements, subtleties and shifts of emphasis and consciousness to which the medieval mind was actually indifferent. In my view, the conflict between the vast calm of history and the 'intricacies' - as Chatterton calls them in his letter to Thomas Cary (*Works* I, p.220) - of human relationships and events is central to the poetry. The eighteenth century was quite willing to ignore the lives of princes and noble merchants and to turn instead to the confessions of common criminals about to be hanged, whose final messages would be quite different from that of Sir Charles Baldwin:

The age had almost as insatiable an appetite for the lives of the obscure and infamous as it did for heroic couplets. There were lives of footmen, pirates, and bawds. These were still often cautionary tales, but before the final caution was reiterated a great deal of vicarious pleasure was retailed. One of the curious aspects of this growth is that the lives of the small, which had been so neglected as to be unrecorded, now became clamorously public, and many lives of the great became secret.

(John O. Lyons, *The Invention of the Self*, p.50)

My aim in this thesis is to show that where Chatterton's poetry is at its most powerful is

where the 'clamorously public' life of William Canynge's world engages with a feeling for the 'lives of the small', and that this feeling is expressed by Chatterton's creation, Thomas Rowley: it is Rowley he uses to let us see that Canynge's life is secret as well as public, and Rowley is the device for Chatterton's own developing desire to hunt this secret life out and bring it into view. The opening of 'Battle of Hastynges I' -

O Chrieste it is a Greefe to me to telle,  
How manie noble Erle and valorous knyghte,  
In Fyghtynge for Kinge Harrolde noblie fell:  
(*Works I*, p.27)

is a general lament for those fallen in battle; but the lament of the shepherds in 'Eclogue the First' is linked to personal sorrow, to particular meadows, and is a farewell to the actual ground and landscape of pleasure - 'the verie Shade of fayre dysporte'. (*Works I*, p.306)

I contend that this development into more subtle and complex work - that is, the whole development of Chatterton's poetic talent - arose partly from Bristol's attitude. In Chapter 3, 'The Unknown Knight', I suggest that the occasion in the printer's office, when Chatterton was

questioned about the account of the crossing of the old bridge, changed the direction of the poetry. It will thus be seen that I regard the development of Chatterton's poetry as involved directly with certain incidents in his life. Although this is perhaps always the case with poets, in Chatterton's the events have a symbolic appeal which is partly historical, and partly an artificial supposition imposed upon the existing evidence. The thesis takes as its basic device this imposition upon existing facts, in order to get closer to some notion of the 'truth' about Chatterton's poetry, but such a device would have been impossible before the real facts had been established, as they have been in Meyerstein's *Life*, for the biography, and in the work of D.S. Taylor for the chronology of the poetry. Not until the biography and the chronology have been composed can the anti-biography and the anti-chronology take place - that tendency which takes great delight in trumping facts with the shady underside of suggestion, in filling in the silences of biography, in hunting out Flaubert's parrot, and, in Peter Ackroyd's novel *Chatterton*, in giving Chatterton a faked death.

The thesis borrows from such a tradition, and is therefore poised between the

scholarly tradition and the twentieth century tradition of anti-biography, or the biography that can never be written. This is the point of the List of Characters and the Chronology at the beginning of the thesis - to establish the boundaries of the 'real life', so that transgressions of the boundaries could then be made with confidence - and another 'real life' suggested.

Such confident transgression can only develop where there is an abundance of facts, and the biography of Chatterton is teeming with incidents which are acknowledged as symbolic - in the written biographies, these symbolic incidents are the learning to read from the French musical manuscript and black letter Bible, the discovery of the parchments, the suicide. But what such a tradition does is allow one to dispense with the famous anecdotes and replace them with others - the questioning in the printer's office, the picture of Mr. Catcott at the top of the steeple, and even to use the invented images and incidents and what they suggest - Rowley talking to Canynge, reading his Preface to 'Aella' at the Red Lodge, seeing the figure of the rich wicked Abbot of the 'Balade of Charitie' from the ante-room of the Red Lodge where he talks with

Canyngge, at the moment when, miles away and in another century, Horace Walpole writes his rejection and advice to Chatterton. The purpose of this transgressive device is to *suspend* certain facts and arguments and time sequences, for the duration of the written structure - and such a device is always highly conscious of its own limited confines - in order to get closer to the heart of the imagined world.

As I have argued, this is only possible where a high degree of certainty and sophistication has already been reached, and Chatterton scholarship is indebted to D.S. Taylor who, by examining the structure and chronology of the Rowleyan works in such detail, has made possible the idea that the 'real life' is less important than the imagined world; that the invented life is more 'real', imitation and forgery more real - and that in fact they serve to *unleash* the real, the creative. This unleashing is what happens in Peter Ackroyd's novel *Chatterton*, in the character of Harriet Scrope, who, a successful novelist, has 'stolen' many of her basic plots from another, older, less successful novelist. Her problem as a novelist had been that of plot, of having something new to say, but her discovery of the novels of Harrison

Bentley, neglected and dust-strewn in a second-hand bookshop, where she wanders by chance, solves her problem and sets free her voice again:

Where phrases and even syllables had once emerged as fragments of a larger structure which she could neither see nor understand, now she could make her own connections; she went on from sentence to sentence, as if she were carrying a lamp and moving from room to room in a large mansion. And she looked about her with wonder, sensing her ability to describe what she was seeing now for the first time. (p.102)

This is in keeping with Charles Wychwood's earlier reading aloud from the pamphlet on Chatterton supplied by St. Mary Redcliffe Church for the edification of tourists:

"Chatterton knew that original genius consists in forming new and happy combinations, rather than in searching after thoughts and ideas which had never occurred before'.....New and happy combinations. New and happy combinations. Does that mean", he asked..."that we just need to switch around the words?" (p.58)

It recalls also Chatterton's declaration about the 'Bristowe Tragedie' - "I found the argument and versified it". This could also be said of 'Aella', in which Chatterton 'versified' *Othello*. Indeed, Taylor writes in detail, in his book *Thomas Chatterton's Art*, of Chatterton's intricate borrowing from Shakespeare's play (pp.123-143). Yet Taylor believes that

Chatterton's comment to his mother about 'versifying' the story of Sir Charles Bawdin is 'demonstrably inaccurate' (p.81), because all Chatterton could have found to versify was the 'skeletal' facts, recounted in Bristol calendars, about King Edward's visit and the execution of the knights, and because the comment glosses over the fact that "everything essential to the poem's impact has been invented" (p.81). Taylor finds Chatterton's confession of authorship 'laconic to the point of injustice to himself': he thinks the statement undermines his 'invention' - a dismissal of a former point of creativity, rather than, as I would explain it - and so, by implication, Ackroyd - the simplest available answer to a question about authenticity: documents and written records are the excuse and framework for invention, which remains, like Harriet Scrope's novels, nevertheless 'original'.

Taylor de-mythologizes the Chatterton story by opposing the vagueness of the chronology of the Rowleyan works, and argues that such a vagueness has led to the - as he sees it mistaken - habit of talking about Chatterton's poetry as divided between 'admirable Rowleyan and regrettable non- or even anti-Rowleyan aspects' ('Chatterton: the Problem of Rowley Chronology

and its Implications', *PQ*, xlv1,268). This, he believes, lends credence to the

Romantic myth of the persecuted boy, appalled by eighteenth century rationalism and materialism, finding refuge from the brutal everyday of eighteenth century Bristol in Redcliffe Church and the Rowley dream. This myth, still close to the popular concept of a poet, ignored Chatterton's own vigorous participation in Bristol life, in eighteenth century rationalism and materialism... Rowley was not so much a dream of escape, perhaps, as a dream by which Chatterton hoped to conquer his eighteenth century world...

I have tried to convey this idea of Chatterton's close involvement with Bristol life and the importance of Bristol to the development of his poetry in my portrayal of the sameness and literary precocity of the city at that time, and Chatterton's increasingly impatient attitude towards it: I offer a view of the Rowleyan poetry which places the conflicts of his life within a heroic or lyrical mode, but in no way attempts to resolve the conflicts. Although there is an argument that Chatterton did not take his own life at all, but died from an overdose of calomel and vitriol taken for the cure of venereal disease, I believe that such a conflict led to despair in the end, and agree with Meyerstein that Chatterton was in a state to commit suicide almost at any time after leaving Mr. Lambert's

employment (Meyerstein, p. 438). I take the tone of his letters home as hectic bravado rather than serene confidence, and so end the thesis with Chatterton's visit to Mr. Cross the apothecary for his last strange paltry meal.

The theory that Chatterton did not commit suicide belongs to a different strand of the Chatterton story, one which the concentration of this work upon the workings of Chatterton's inner world of Rowley and Canynge renders peripheral to this thesis; it belongs to the view of Chatterton as the libertine, the Chatterton of the 'Memoirs of a Sad Dog' and of 'Journal 6th', where he distinguishes between the rake and the buck:

A Rake, I take it, is a Creature  
Who winds thro' all the folds of Nature

(Works I, p. 370)

Chatterton esteems this connoisseur of pleasure above the torpid baseness of the buck who

Serene with Bottle Pox and Whore  
He's happy and requires no more...  
The Buck as brutal as the name  
Invenoms every Charmers fame  
And tho' he never touchd her hand  
Protests he's had her at Command  
The Rake in gratitude for Pleasure  
Keeps Reputation dear as Treasure (Works

I, p. 371)

In 'Memoirs of a Sad Dog', Chatterton as 'Harry Wildfire' nevertheless gives an account of himself as a buck, who after a variety of adventures and reversals of fortune ends up as a hack writer in a similar position to Chatterton's own:

What could I now do? As to mechanic business I was utterly a stranger to it, and my soul disdained the livery of a slave. (*Works I*, p.661)

This is the language of contemporary libertinism and Patriotism, and provides, at moments, sudden insights into the poetry - for instance, the poetry arose at a time when everything seemed possible, and yet everything must be, literally, taken into account:

To make a little digression, I think this method of hiring for a month preferable to the wholesale bargains for life, and of mutual advantage to the keeper and kept, if that term will stand good in law, for a man may find it all rapture and love, without satiety; and in a few months play the same tune over again, with no decay of vigour.

('Memoirs of a Sad Dog', *Works I*, p.653)

However, this thesis approaches Chatterton's poetry through another route - by following the inner workings of the inner world itself, the

voice of Rowley rather than the voice of Harry Wildfire or Chatterton writing to Baker or Cary: both approaches are fictive, for Chatterton in these essays and letters was writing in a modish, consciously artificial style as libertine, Patriot, Bristol rake; these works are no *more* likely to reveal the 'real life' of Chatterton than the method I have used - which highlights and focuses on Rowley's own voice and aspects of his life in order to explore the poetry.

Presented by Chatterton with problems of genre and authenticity, my solution has been to impose a new artifice - in this case the relationship between Rowley and Canynge, their childhood, their gestures and conflicts - upon the existing structure. When presented with the problem of confession or denial, says Barthes, myth offers 'a third way out - a transformation.

The words 'myth' and 'fiction' therefore abound, and deserve some clarification. I have used the word 'myth' throughout the thesis when referring to the larger landscape of Chatterton's art and contrived world - myth includes the meadows of St. Mary Redcliffe, the lumber-room of the Church where he found the documents relating to Canynge, and the whole history of the friendship of Rowley and Canynge. A myth, for

the purposes of this thesis, is a completed and invulnerable world -- it is represented by those actual documents which Chatterton found in the lumber-room - complete in themselves, but open to suggestion. Fiction, by contrast, I have taken to mean embryonic myths, tentative, scarcely-thought-out: for instance, when Chatterton demonstrates the antiquating of documents for Edward Gardner (see below, p.38), he is not at all sure where such a demonstration will lead, but every act of this kind in the creation of Chatterton's reputation has an effect upon the waiting world of the myth, as in the words of Charles Wychwood, in Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton*, who declares that "the real world is just a succession of interpretations. Everything which is written down immediately becomes a kind of fiction" (p.40). And after such an interpretation - Rowley's image of himself and Canynge riding the steed of poetry rather than the cart-horse of history and heraldry, or Walpole rejecting Chatterton's appeals for patronage - the myth can be viewed from a different angle.

Linked to the notion that Chatterton did not commit suicide is the belief - expressed most

strongly by D.S. Taylor in *Thomas Chatterton's Art* and his article 'Chatterton: The Problem of Rowley Chronology and Its Implications' -- that 'An Excolente Balade of Charitie' was not composed just before Chatterton's death, but in April/May 1769 with the last Rowleyan writings. Taylor sees the 'Balade' as the culmination of a mode which included 'Onn cure Ladies Chirch' and 'The Gouler's Requiem'; he believes that Chatterton's sending home for his Rowleyan glossary on 30 May 1770, which has been the main argument for the later dating of the poem, was done merely in order to write the glossarial notes before sending the poem to the *Town and Country Magazine*. As with the suicide, it is impossible to know; but I believe it unlikely that Chatterton should send for glossarial notes for a poem which he was not in the midst of devising: his pedantry, I suggest throughout, was inseparable from his passion. I have tried to resolve the problem of the dating of the 'Balade' by placing its genesis within *Rowley's* consciousness much earlier. I imagine Rowley having a vision of the rich Abbot while talking to William Canynge. I see the 'Balade' as occupying very much a fixed landscape - the landscape of 'myth' rather than 'fiction' - which

can appear and re-appear throughout the poetry's development. More than any other poem it is 'open to suggestion'.

In quoting some of the poetry, I have occasionally modernized the spelling. My reason for this was to withdraw *textually* from the myth, but to remain within it *actually* and thus to give a brief glimpse of the work from a different angle: for instance, on p.209, the modernizing of two lines from 'Aella' about the steed and the cart-horse comes at a point where I have been discussing Chatterton's feelings of horror at the possible collapse of his imagined world, and therefore the lines are delivered stripped of their Rowleyan spelling, to stress the starkness of the moment of discovering that one's life has no props.

Wherever modernization takes place I indicate by asterisk.

## OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The thesis begins, in the first chapter, with a largely apocryphal anecdote related about Chatterton - that of the walk in St. Paul's with a friend, and the sudden collapse of Chatterton into a freshly-dug grave. I have chosen to name the friend, using the character described in Rayne Kruger's novel - the name of 'Aaron Crucifix'. The chapter is intended to show the total arbitrariness of 'Fame' - that angel whose trumpet-call Chatterton longed to hear, - and to stress the fragility of eighteenth century imagined worlds - Aaron Crucifix warns Chatterton that if he is in London long enough he will hear plenty of buildings 'collapsing about his ears' (see below, p.5). A further intention of the chapter is to stress this fragility and arbitrariness by placing Chatterton himself as the lesser 'character' of the chapter - to give the title of the chapter and the words of doom and the physical description to Aaron Crucifix, and to prepare the reader for a basic idea of the thesis - that whatever is claimed to be the central idea, within biography, or poetry, or criticism - is open to constant questioning and

re-adjustment. Aaron Crucifix is intended as a symbol of this possibility, by being a kind of 'double' of Chatterton, thus establishing a motif of the thesis, which culminates in the final chapter where the Abbot of the 'Balade of Charitie' is both Walpole and Rowley.

Chapter two begins with the 'lumber-room', the place of conception for the Rowleyan poems, where the actual chests and documents were found, and argues that this particular birthplace has much to do with the strange mixture of 'pedantry and passion', as I put it elsewhere, surrounding Chatterton;- it discusses the idea of the poetry as a 'demented acquiescence' to the demands of the time rather than as an act of rebellion, and places Chatterton's two early poems, 'Apostate Will' and 'Sly Dick' within this discussion. The 'Balade of Charitie' and 'Aella' are placed against the background of the literary and fashionable life of Bristol. A link is made between Rowley's position and Chatterton's - Chatterton endows Rowley, I suggest, with his own sycophantic and yet secret nature, he sees his character as imposed upon by the same demands of duty and respect. The chapter tries to understand the process whereby the problems which beset Chatterton - about Bristol and fashion and

writing fame - became assimilated into the art of Rowley, his *alter ego*, and thereby became ennobled and of more importance; and to suggest to the reader that the poetry of Chatterton sprang from two sources - from a developing inner world, and from the hectic, bombastical, unsatisfactory world of eighteenth century Bristol.

In Chapter three I turn to an actual occasion - that of the questioning of Chatterton in the printer's office of *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, where the Rowleyan 'Bridge narrative' had appeared. This was a definite event for Bristol, in October 1768, and a landmark for both Chatterton's outer reputation and his inner world. I argue that after this occasion the poetry and Chatterton's own life was changed irrevocably; that it was Bristol, as much as Chatterton, which decided what was to become of Rowley, and links the decisions made about the poetry with Canynge's commission to Rowley to collect drawings from nearby churches, and his dismissal of the idea of Rowley's visit to Rome.

Chapter four begins with Canynge's letters to Rowley, based on the letters in the 'Lyfe of W:Canynge' in *Works I*, pp.229-33. I have modernized the spelling and made additions to the

text, in an attempt to withdraw from the mood of the creative world so that the letters can be read fluently, as documents; and then in the second half of the chapter I try to do the opposite - to return again to the heart of the created world by means of Rowley's consciousness, his thoughts about Canynge and his own place within Canynge's Court.

In Chapter five I discuss 'Aella' at length, arguing that what the content of the poem is ostensibly saying is throughout the work either denied or re-adjusted by constant shifts of emphasis. Chapter six deals with Walpole's part in Chatterton's career, and seeks to chart the gradual development of their correspondence: in Chatterton's increasingly disillusioned eyes, Walpole moves from being 'the Maecenas of his time' to the 'Baron of Otranto'. I link Walpole's act of writing to Chatterton, advising him to continue in the occupation suited to his circumstances before aspiring to studies 'consonant to his inclinations', with the conception by Rowley of the rich Abbot in the 'Balade of Charitie' (p.170). The rest of the chapter describes the situation in Bristol during the months leading up to Chatterton's escape from Lambert's - from March to April 1770 - and offers

a possible picture of the strange friendship between Chatterton and the surgeon William Barrott.

Chapter seven begins with Chatterton's letter home to his mother - dated April 26, 1770, and ends in July of the same year, when he moved out of his lodgings in Shoreditch to the garret in Brooke Street. I try to place, and renew my emphasis on, the importance of Bristol in Chatterton's poetry, and in particular the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe, by looking at the city from the point of view of London. This is the view taken by Chatterton in his letter to Thomas Cary of 1st July, 1770, which I explain as being crucial to Chatterton's own thoughts about his work, his ambivalence in the letter about the church's 'minutiae of Ornaments' in which a 'Great Genius' is 'lost' (p.220).

Chapter eight concludes the thesis by drawing its various strands together. It discusses Canynge's avoided marriage, and the part played by Rowley in this; it points out how, afterwards, the lives of Rowley and Canynge slid to a peaceful end; in keeping with my emphasis on Chatterton's fictionalizing, the chapter brings out how Rowley, Chatterton's imaginative other self, thought of Canynge's 'Lyfe' after the

Mayor's death; it focuses, too, on the way Walpole thought of Chatterton after hearing of his suicide. It places Chatterton's Rowley poems within the context of eighteenth century forgery and fiction, and suggests that they belong to an emerging sense of a differing attitude towards literary genre; I discuss the 'Balade of Charitie' as it relates to Walpole and late eighteenth century patronage, and argue that the battle with Walpole was one of contending fictions which must fight for survival within a new literary landscape; and I end with the notion that the idea of 'discovery' and 'creativity' were precariously balanced desires within Chatterton's poetry, and that the prevalence of one over the other destroyed him.

I have tried to pervade each chapter with an atmosphere and also a definite setting, which sets the boundaries as well as the ambience of each chapter: chapter one is dominated by the churchyard near St. Paul's, chapter two by the lumber-room, chapter three the printer's office, chapter four is set in Rowley's house on the hill, chapter five in the Court of the Red Lodge where the tragedy of 'Aella' is being performed; chapter six in Walpole's house in Arlington

Street, chapter seven in the streets and coffee houses of London, but looking backwards to Bristol, especially to the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe. And chapter eight has a mixture of landscapes - fifteenth century Bristol, eighteenth century dinner parties, St. Godwin's convent where the rich Abbot spurred his palfrey over the plain, - and ending with the apothecary shop near Chatterton's garret in Holborn.

## PREFACE 1

On an August day in 1770, a young man of seventeen retired to his room - a shabby garret room over a saque-maker's in Holborn, London - swallowed arsenic, and died. The young man's name was Chatterton, and with this rash action the house of Chatterton was no more; for he was an only son, and his sister, Mary, died in a mad-house a few years later, having borne no children which survived.

Thomas Chatterton had been a lawyer's clerk in Bristol, but had a taste (as don't they all) for more elegant studies, and so broke his apprenticeship (as many did) to run to London, in order to make his fortune by means of Literature (which he did not); or else, he boasted to his fellow apprentices, he would found a new religious sect or something of that sort; or he would take a pistol to his head and die dramatically. To tell the truth (though he hardly ever did),

Thomas Chatterton was not over-nice about how he made a mark in the world, so long as he did so with a flourish, and so long as it was quackery of some sort.

But his life was not his own. There was another story, and other lives, hovering around it, which he had partly created, and partly discovered; just as in time to come others would encounter his life - underneath an archway perhaps, as they sauntered home in a desperate state - and would be changed irretrievably.

There was a myth before the myth began,  
Venerable and articulate and complete.

From this, his story springs.

## PREFACE 2

In beginning a study of Chatterton, one first of all encounters pile upon pile of dusty biographies, and the feeling one experiences in the reading of these is that of intruding upon a story long since finished, and stumbling across controversies and feelings intense in their day, now forgotten. There is a feeling - no stronger, perhaps, than that which accompanies the writing of all such works - that the world, with its present controversies, its present scandals and tragedies and concerns, - can get along very well without this old, old story. There is a shivering verger still in the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe, and he agreed to show me the muniment room over the north porch, not exactly with reluctance - for he was extremely obliging - but with a slight feeling of unease, as though there were no point in going over that ground again, and that the past is best forgotten.

Canynge's two tombs he was eager to show me, but the muniment-room, where five chests still remain (I think I counted five - I was expecting six; the story of Chatterton is confused and confusing as to chests, keys and years); filled, he told me, with the unused authorized versions of the Bible; - the muniment-room was too strange a place, too suggestive still of dubious fictions, and too evasive, even after two centuries, of all the efforts of the authorities of Bristol to contain it - for the verger to be quite at ease there. Besides, it was a cold February day, there was snow on the ground, and on such a day, said the verger, the muniment-room was the coldest place in Bristol. I looked at the chests, I wandered idly over to the window and gazed across the street to where Chatterton's house stood, with a plaque on it (though it was not his house really, but only one wall of it, and very silly it looked, propped up stiffly against the other building, which perhaps - I thought I had read somewhere - was the old school-house). I followed the verger down the cold winding steps and left the Church and walked through the churchyard where Chatterton used to lie

and dream, where Rowley dreamed of 'Truth', and out into the February sun. Everything was in tatters and fragments; nothing in the whole world was certain. Where was Master Canynge's coffer? Why were there only five chests? Or perhaps I had misunderstood, and there were five chests, and six keys?

Quite obviously something was seriously amiss. It was ridiculous to begin researching for a thesis in such a state of dreamy idleness. A visit to Bristol, said a hovering spirit of a gentleman, in a black gown and a cross expression and a most correct manner - a visit to Bristol, and you cannot even ascertain whether there are five chests or six; you have not even established whether that house there (and he tapped at the odd building with the transported wall propped up against it) was Chatterton's house, or his school; whether the Christian name of his employer Mr. Lambert was John or James. You must cease this dallying in churchyards at once, and go back to the dusty biographies; you must go back to Meyerstein's *Life of Chatterton*; you must go back...

But should one go back to 1752, when Chatterton the poet was born, or to 1727,

when the muniment-room was first invaded by the churchwardens, or, - and here the black-gowned gentleman, who had been nodding approvingly, begins frowning and tutting again - to 1432, when Thomas Rowley, a priest and a poet, was commissioned by his patron, William Canynge, Mayor of Bristol, to collect drawings and poetry from the churches round about, and to bring them back to Bristol to enliven the evenings at Canynge's Court, the Red Lodge, which Canynge was turning into a freemason's lodge, of which Rowley, whose talents had been neglected before Canynge's reign, was to be an honoured member; or should one go back even before that - to the time when William Canynge and Thomas Rowley had been boys together at Bristol, and had been fellow scholars at the White Friars? And here the carping scholarly gentleman twitches his black gown impatiently, and turns away, and gives me up for lost. As he goes a dark shadow falls over the churchyard, everything seems more muddled and hopeless than ever, but just as suddenly it is gone, and everything becomes - though no less muddled - brighter and freer without his presence, and the sky is cold and bright over

St. Mary Redcliffe; and I can go back as far as I like, and hold on to that feeling which overpowered me at first, as I stood in the muniment-room with the verger; - that everything is in fragments, and that everything is like a story; that the chests are part of the story, and the verger is a story (I have never seen, or thought to see him, since), and that I am interrupting a story at the same time as becoming part of it; and that Thomas Chatterton, even though he created the story, interrupted it too, where it lay bare-boned in the muniment-room, a sleeping fiction.

I interrupted the story, and this thesis begins, at the point where, in the eighteenth century world, Thomas Chatterton first makes the story of Rowley public; and, in the Rowleyan world, at the point where Canynge becomes Mayor after the death of his father, and sends Rowley to collect drawings for his Court. A public voice, then, for both Rowley and Chatterton, marks the boundaries of this written fragment. But I would like to stress now - later on it becomes difficult - that I have interrupted an old story with a history and a tradition;

- years and years of intrigues and happenings stretch beyond that commission given to Rowley, and beyond the pages of this book; within those written fragments which have been passed down and preserved, some dates are given, and many of them conflict; and between the dates and the conflict lie years and years of silence. The conflicting historical dates have been appropriated by the writers of histories, but it is in the silences, the hidden conflicts, the ungraspable moments that the secrets of this story lie, and that is why the little carping gentleman had to be banished. Amidst all the seizing of facts and appropriating of documents which pervades the story of Rowley and Canynge, there remains something which cannot be appropriated, which is the pure intangible self-sufficiency of poetry, like a lover's youth which we have not shared, and which forever eludes us, however we may hear it spoken of reminiscently, or catch it momentarily in fleeting expressions. We can only hold on to certain hints and instincts in order to create our own fictions: and so I have taken as a central feature of this thesis the differing attitudes of Rowley and

Canynge towards poetry. Rowley was a poet, and poetry was his deep concern; Canynge was a merchant prince, and poetry was what he turned to when all else failed him.

Eventually, at the end of his life, it became an ideal, but the world of poetry, which was all in all to Rowley, was a world of loss to Canynge. Both views have their beauty, and the poetry of Chatterton, I have tried to suggest, is affected by this slightly jarring element in the friendship of Rowley and Canynge; that their tensions, and the difference between the world of loss, which was Canynge's, and the world of denial, which was Rowley's, are echoed in the dilemma played out in 'Aella' and 'The Ballad of Charity', and are not unconnected with the tragedy of Brooke Street.

In order to hold the world of Rowley and the world of eighteenth century Bristol together, and also to avoid a lot of biographical detail in the text, I have prepared a parallel chronology of the two worlds, showing where certain incidents within the two fictions coincide, and stressing important or symbolic episodes; and

also a list of characters from the different worlds.

I would like to thank my supervisor, David Crane, for his unfailing encouragement and generosity, and his approval and help in banishing the little carping gentleman, who is a difficult creature to budge without friendly support; my thanks go also of course to the verger at St. Mary Redcliffe.

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

BRISTOL-EIGHTEENTH CENTURY:

THOMAS CHATTERTON, a lawyer's apprentice

MR WILLIAM BARRETT, a surgeon/historian (1)

MR. GEORGE CATCOTT, a pewterer (2)

THE REVEREND ALEXANDER CATCOTT, his brother  
(3)

MR. HENRY BURGUM, George Catcott's partner in  
pewtering (4)

MR. JOHN LAMBERT, a Bristol attorney, employer  
of Thomas Chatterton (5)

MRS. LAMBERT, his mother

MRS. CHATTERTON, the apprentice's mother (6)

MARY CHATTERTON, his sister (7)

THOMAS CARY  
THOMAS TIPTON  
THOMAS CAPEL  
THOMAS PALMER  
JOHN RUDHALL  
WILLIAM SMITH  
PETER SMITH

Bristol rakes,  
members of the  
'Juvenile  
Society', and  
friends of  
Chatterton. (8)

JOHN BAKER, a friend in America (9)

JAMES THISTLETHWAITE, a Rival Poet (10)

MARIA (POLLY) RUMSEY  
ELEANOR HOYLAND  
MISS SANDFORD  
MISS SUKEY WEBB  
MISS THATCHER  
MISS SINGER

Bristol belles (11)

BRISTOL-FIFTEENTH CENTURY:

MR. WILLIAM CANYNGE, Merchant and Mayor of  
Bristol (12)

THOMAS ROWLEY, priest of St. John's in  
Bristol, poet, and protegee of Canynge (13)

ISCAM

GORGES (14)

LONDON-EIGHTEENTH CENTURY:

MR. HORACE WALPOLE, a gentleman of letters  
(15)

MR. WILLIAM BECKFORD, Lord Mayor of London  
(16)

JACK WILKES (17)

MRS. BALLANCE, a cousin of Chatterton's , and  
his first landlady in town. (18)

MRS. ANGEL, landlady at 39 Brook Street

MR. EDMUNDS AND MR FELL (20)

AARON CRUCIFIX

## LIST OF CHARACTERS - NOTES

1. Born in 1733 at Motton in Wiltshire, William Barrett qualified as a surgeon at the age of twenty-two, and began his profession at Bristol, where he soon conceived the idea of writing a history of the city. In the course of writing this, he came across Thomas Chatterton, the 'discoverer' of ancient documents relating to the city, and Barrett's History of Bristol and his own life became intertwined with Chatterton's fate. Various of the Rowleyan writings, including Canynge's 'The World' and 'Happiness', and 'The Ryse of Peyncteynge in Englande', were included in his History, which was greeted with ridicule when it was finally published in the spring of 1789. Barrett was overcome by disappointment at the neglect of his life's work, and died six months after its publication. "I am sorry, very sorry for what you tell me of poor Barrett's fate", wrote Horace Walpole to Hannah More; "though he did write worse than Shakespeare, it is great pity he was told as it killed him". See William Barrett, *The History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol* (Gloucester 1982), Introductory note; and J.H. Ingram, *The True Chatterton* (1910), pp.128-133

2. George Symes Catcott was born in 1729 in Bristol, served an apprenticeship with a Mr. Cox, and in 1765 went into partnership in the pewtering business with Henry Burgum, paying £3000 into the business. He was notorious in Bristol for his foolhardy and heroic deeds, such as climbing the steeple of St. Nicholas' Church in the early hours of the morning, and crossing the loosely constructed new bridge at Bristol before it was opened to the public. He cultivated the friendship of Thomas Chatterton after the appearance in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* of Chatterton's own 'Bridge narrative', which caused at least as much of a sensation as Mr. Catcott's, if of a different order. He was probably responsible for introducing Chatterton to Barrett, and received much Rowleyan poetry. After Chatterton's death he was a staunch Rowleyan, and as such welcomed Dr. Johnson and Boswell to Bristol in 1776. He was an eccentric, holding conversations with a dead dog, and keeping by him all his teeth as they rotted, writing on the box where he placed them, 'My teeth to be put in the coffin with me when I die'. See Meyerstein, pp.135-138; also Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (1907), p.632

3. The Reverend Alexander Catcott, elder brother of George Catcott, was the Vicar of Temple Church in Bristol, and appears to have been the only person in Bristol who thought Chatterton the author of the Rowley poems. He befriended

Chatterton after the 'Bridge narrative', but soon grew tired of his satiric tongue and eccentric behaviour, and eventually banished him from his house after he wrote the 'Epistle to the Revd. Mr. Catcott', ridiculing his 'Treatise on the Deluge'. Daniel Wilson wrote : 'he was a man of very different character from his brother; a clergyman and a scholar, with scientific tastes and literary aspirations to which he still owes some remembrance... According to a contemporary, "he considered poetry to have an idle, if not an evil tendency; and was so far from regarding the Rowley specimens of antiquity with an eye of pleasure or curiosity, that he condemned his brother for misspending his time in attending to them"'. See Daniel Wilson, *Chatterton: A Biographical Study* (1869), pp. 191-202. Also Meyerstein, p. 135

4. Henry Burgum, born in 1739, rose from being an apprentice to an apothecary in Bristol, to having his own pewtering business, and being President of the Grateful Society in that city. He later in life fell into financial problems and quarrelled with his partner, George Catcott, but recovered, thanks partly to the loyalty of his fellow Bristolians, and died at his house on the Parade in 1789, aged fifty. His part in the Chatterton story is merely that of dupe, for he received from Chatterton 'An Account of the Family of the De Burgham's, from the Norman Conquest to this time', in which it was proved "that he was descended from Simon de Leyncte Lyze, alias Lenliz, in the reign of William the Conqueror, who married Matilda, daughter of Waltheof, Earl of Northumberland, Northampton, and Huntingdon, of Burgham Castle, in Northumberland" (Dix, pp. 19-20). For this he gave Chatterton five shillings. In a second part of this pedigree, was included a poem, 'The Romaunte of the Cnyghte' by one 'John de Bergham', "the greatest ornament of his age". Mr. Burgum was so delighted with this proof of the genius of his illustrious ancestor, that he presented the young 'discoverer' with another five shillings. He was later, however, to be very disappointed, on presenting his pedigree to the herald's: "the very Heralds of March and Garter unspeakably surprised and mortified the half-enobled Mr. Burgum, by informing him that the whole was a hoax, by that prodigy of genius the Bristol boy, Thomas Chatterton". See Dix, pp. 17-23. Also Meyerstein, pp. 147-150

5. Chatterton was apprenticed to Mr. John Lambert in July 1767. Mr. Lambert has suffered much in the various recountings of Chatterton's story, but if we take the facts as bare as we can find them, we learn from Meyerstein that "John Lambert, gentleman, at the time Chatterton made his acquaintance, was 28, bore arms gules, a chevron, had a mother and, less certainly, a wife living with him, and was later to come into an estate, Pen Park... He is described,

later in life, as a kindhearted man, who read a great deal". (Meyerstein, p. 67)

6. Sarah Young, of Stapleton, married Thomas Chatterton at Chipping Sodbury in 1749. Just over three years later she was widowed, and left with a daughter, Mary; her son Thomas was born three months later, on November 20 1752. The widow lived at first in the school-house in Pyle Street where her husband had been schoolmaster, until, the new schoolmaster needing the rooms, she removed to a house on Redcliffe Hill, becoming a seamstress and keeping a small dame school. She died on Christmas Day 1791, aged sixty-one. See Meyerstein, pp. 10-11 and p. 489

7. Mary Chatterton (1748/9-1804) is responsible for many of the childhood anecdotes about her brother. She married in 1777 one Thomas Newton, a glasscutter. "Early in the autumn of 1783, within nine days of one another, Thomas and Mary Newton buried their two little boys, Thomas Chatterton Newton... and Isaac Henry Newton...; a baby daughter Marianne was left to the couple" (Meyerstein, p. 474). Another daughter died in infancy in 1785, as did Mrs. Newton's husband (Meyerstein, p. 477). Marianne survived her mother by three years, dying unmarried in 1807, at the age of twenty-four.

8. Most of these boys were apprentices in Bristol, and shared with Chatterton the same precocious literary aspirations common to Bristol and the times. Meyerstein says that Palmer, Capel and Tipton, apprentices to a jeweller who shared premises with Mr. Lambert, spent many evenings with Chatterton, "consulting him on literary projects, and preparing contributions for magazines and Bristol newspapers" (Meyerstein, p. 70). Rudhall witnessed the 'antiquating' of a parchment (Meyerstein, p. 119). William and Peter Smith were brothers. Chatterton was more particularly the friend of William, and read aloud to him Rowleyan pieces in front of St. Mary Redcliffe Church (Gregory, p. 45). Peter Smith committed suicide in August 1769 (Meyerstein, p. xv). Thomas Cary was at Colston's school at the same time as Chatterton, and was apparently at one time as Chatterton's "second self". Chatterton wrote to him from London (*Works I*, p. 640), and he wrote an Elegy for Chatterton after his death, which appeared in the *Town and Country Magazine* for October 1770. (Meyerstein, pp. 30-31). For the Bristol Juvenile Society, see Ch. 2, n. 20 and n. 21

9. John Baker, a schoolfellow of Chatterton's at Colston's, was bound apprentice to a merchant in New York, and the two friends kept up a correspondence. See *Works I* pp. 165, 173, & 256. Chatterton wrote love verses for Baker,

who then transcribed them for the young lady with whom he was in love, an Eleanor Hoyland at Bristol. See Ch.3,n.6

10. James Thistlethwaite was a poet and member of the Juvenile Society, and to him we are indebted for accounts of Chatterton's apparent lack of interest in literary matters while at Colston's school, "apparently possessing neither inclination, nor indeed ability, for literary pursuits" (Dix, p.9); also for the early composition of 'Elinoure and Juga', which Thistlethwaite said he saw as early as 1764 - (Dix, pp.15-16). He was a firm Rowleyan; he was apprenticed to a stationer in 1765, and there is a story, originating from Michael Lort, that he travelled to London at Chatterton's death - "When C lay dead in his room some young fellows of his acquaintance came to see the corpse. Among these Cross believes was one Thistlethwaite a Bristol poet". See Meyerstein, p.443

11. The names of these girls are scattered throughout Chatterton's poetry and correspondence. See *Works I*, pp.158-166; p.571; p.649. Mrs. Edkins, an intimate of the Chatterton family, (see Daniel Wilson, *Life*, p.8), said "His female intimates were many, and all very respectable... He talked like a lover to many, but was seriously engaged to none" (Dix, p.315). His sister later tried to defend her brother from the charge of promiscuity brought against him by his detractors, in her letter to Sir Herbert Croft: "The dear unhappy boy had faults enough, I saw with concern he was proud and exceedingly impetuous but that of venality he could not be justly accused with" (*Love and Madness*, p. ) But the picture which remains most vivid from her testimony is that of the poet "walking the Colledge green with the young girls that stately paraded there to shew their finery". (*Love and Madness*, p.164 )

12. William Canynge was the younger son of a citizen of Bristol, and always showed great promise of learning and virtue, in which he differed from his father and older brother Robert, who thought of nothing but profit. He succeeded to his father's property on his death and that of his brother, and soon afterwards married. However, his wife dying in childbirth soon afterwards, Canynge resolved to assuage his grief by setting up a freemason's lodge at the house where he had been born, the Red House in Bristol, and devoting it to poetry and austerity. His devotion to his wife's memory was such that he refused the proposal of a great marriage put to him by Edward IV, and went into holy orders solely to avoid it. He was five times Mayor of Bristol, but after taking orders he retired to the Abbey at Westbury, and spent the remaining eight years of his life there. He died on November 7th, 1474, and in the Church of

St. Mary Redcliffe he has two tombs, one showing him as Mayor of Bristol, beside his wife; and one in his later character as Dean of Westbury. See Gregory, pp. 145-7; and Charles Edward Russell, *Thomas Chatterton, the Marvellous Boy: The Story of a Strange Life 1752-1770* (1909), p. 10

13. Thomas Rowley, priest of St. John's in Bristol, was born at Norton-Malreward in Somersetshire, and educated at the convent of St. Kenna, at Keynesham. He was confessor to the two elder Canynges, William's father and brother, who neglected him, except that Robert Canynge, at the request of his brother William, bequeathed Rowley one hundred marks in his will. Rowley and William Canynge had spent some part of their childhood together, and on the death of his brother and father Canynge employed Rowley to travel through England, collecting drawings for the Red Lodge, which Rowley did so effectively that Canynge rewarded him with a purse of two hundred pounds, and promised him that he should never again be in want. On his return from his travels, Rowley became the chief poet at the Red Lodge, and many of his poems were a celebration of the life of his patron, and an idealization of their youth and friendship. He played a part in Canynge's avoided marriage (see Chronology) and retired with him to the College at Westbury, where he survived his patron and collected together fragments for a Life of Canynge. See Gregory, p. 143; Charles Edward Russell, *Thomas Chatterton, the Marvellous Boy*, pp. 1-12; and Meyerstein, pp. 156-170. Also *Works I*, pp. 51-56 & pp. 228-235

14. John a Iscam and Sir Thybbot Gorges were also members of the freemason's lodge, and contributed to some of Rowley's work. See Meyerstein, pp. 161-2

15. In March 1769, Chatterton applied to Horace Walpole sending him a copy of the Rowleyan 'Ryse of Peyncyteynge yn England'. At first Walpole, ignorant of Chatterton's circumstances, wrote back favourably, but on consulting Gray and Mason, who assured him the work was a forgery, and also after discovering that Chatterton was a lawyer's apprentice who disliked his trade, he ignored Chatterton's letters while he set out for France. On his return he received a very bitter letter from Chatterton, resenting his neglect, and, after partly writing a letter back, he abandoned it and merely returned Chatterton's manuscripts. He was later accused of being responsible for Chatterton's suicide, and was driven to writing a defense of his behaviour towards the poet in the *Letter to the Editor of the Miscellanies of Thomas Chatterton* in 1777; for it was in the preface to this edition of Chatterton's poetry that the accusation against him had been made. See Ch. 6. See also Walpole, *Letter*, pp. 122-134

(vol. 16)

16. The immensely rich 'Sugar-King' of the West Indian trade, the radical Lord Mayor of the City of London, who in 1770 delivered an unprecedented 'Remonstrance' to King George III in support of Wilkes (Meyerstein, p. 367). Beckford died unexpectedly in June, 1770, and Chatterton, who had been pinning great hopes on an audience with the Lord Mayor, and hoping to rise through a different kind of patron than Walpole, declared he was 'ruined'. See Ch. 7, p. 228

17. John Wilkes had been arrested in 1763 for a publication in No. 45 of the *North Briton*, in which he had severely criticized one of the King's speeches. He was released a few days later owing to his privilege as Member of Parliament, and became a popular hero. In January 1764 he was expelled from his seat in the House of Commons by a vote which declared he was a seditious libeller, and was put on trial before the Court of Queen's Bench. He escaped his sentence by fleeing to France. By the time Chatterton came to London, "this squint-eyed personage, known up to that time only as a profligate wit about town, who lived on his wife's money, and fascinated other women in spite of his ugliness, had now been for six years the idol and glory of England". (David Masson, *Chatterton: A Story of the Year 1770*, (1874), pp. 2-10)

The coarse, notorious figure of Jack Wilkes, and the more remote, exalted aura of the Lord Mayor, offered two aspects of that Fame so dear to the hearts of Chatterton and his Patriot friends in the Bristol Juvenile Society.

18. On first arriving in London, Chatterton lodged with Mrs. Ballance, a relative of his mother's, in the house of a Mr. Walmesley, a plasterer. Dix, p. 287

19. On quarrelling with Mrs. Ballance, and also perhaps tiring of the lack of privacy in her lodgings, Chatterton removed to a Mrs. Angel's, a Sackmaker, at Brook Street, Holborn. Dix, pp. 287-8

20. William Edmunds, editor of the *Middlesex Journal*, which published Chatterton's 'Decimus' letters; and Isaac Fell, editor of the *Freeholder's Magazine*, which published 'The Consuliad', and parts of 'Resignation'. See Meyerstein, pp. 301, 326, 361-2. Also Ch. 1 n. 7

## CHRONOLOGY

### ROWLEY'S WORLD

1413 - Rowley's birth at  
Norton Malreward

1413 - Birth of Canynge, later  
celebrated by Rowley as an  
occasion promising glorious  
fame - 'I saw him eager  
gasping after light'. (3)

1418> Education of Canynge and  
Rowley at the White Friars,  
Bristol - great friendship and  
learning. (5)

1430 - Death of Canynge's  
father and brother. Canynge  
inherits their wealth. (7)

1431 - Canynge's marriage to  
Joanna Young

1432 - Death of Canynge's wife  
(9)

### CHATTERTON'S WORLD

1727 - The muniment room over the  
north porch of the Church of St. Mary  
Redcliffe, Bristol, is invaded by  
the churchwardens in search of  
documents pertaining to the church.

c.1748 - Mr. Chatterton, the local  
schoolmaster, appropriates some of  
the documents which are left, of no  
apparent use. (1)

1752 - Death of the schoolmaster  
- Birth of his son, Thomas  
Chatterton. (2)

c.1757 - Thomas Chatterton first  
exhibits a desire for fame, by  
telling his mother that upon a gift  
of a Delft cup, he would like  
inscribed 'an angel with a trumpet,  
to blow his name about all over the  
world'. (4)

1757 - Thomas Chatterton goes to  
Pyle Street School, and is returned  
home as a dullard (6).

1760 - Chatterton comes across an old  
musical manuscript in French, with  
illuminated capitals, and 'falls in  
love' with it. He learns to read,  
and reads voraciously. (8)

August 1760 - Chatterton enters  
Colston's School with great  
enthusiasm

Sept. 1760 - He realizes he will  
learn nothing there. (10)

1432 - Canynge sets up a freemason's lodge at the Red House, Bristol, and sends Rowley to collect drawings from nearby churches (11)

Rowley travels through the countryside and is apart from the activities of the Red Lodge. He is busy collecting drawings for Canynge, although Canynge writes to him about the Lodge's developments. (14)

1432 - Rowley is summoned by Canynge to Bristol, to celebrate the laying of the first stone of the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe with an interlude, which Rowley must write. (16)

1432 - The performance of 'Aella' (18)

Chatterton remains aloof from the freemasonry at Colston's, literary gatherings organized by a kindly usher called Thomas Phillips (12)

1761 - Chatterton discovers some of those ancient papers appropriated by his father. They are being used by his mother for menial household tasks. He tells her she has unveiled 'a treasure... and he was so glad, nothing could be like it'. He often tells her afterwards, 'I have a work in hand'. (13)

1764 - Chatterton writes 'Sly Dick', in which the 'treasure' is realized in poetry. He begins to write poetry continually, and his family note that he is much happier, though remote and abstracted, and spending much time alone in the lumber-room, with the discovered parchments, and with lead, ochre and candles. (15)

Friends begin to hear stories of the 'Rowleyan' poetry, and are occasionally treated to demonstrations of how to 'antiquate' parchment, or to renderings of Rowleyan compositions. (17)

Chatterton reads aloud selected compositions of Rowley, to William Smith, in the churchyard of St. Mary Redcliffe. (19)

July 1767 - Chatterton leaves Colston's and is apprenticed to Mr. John Lambert of Bristol, an attorney. He despises both Mr. Lambert and his trade. (20)

Sept. 1767 - The new bridge is being built at Bristol. Mr. George Catcott, pewterer and Bristol eccentric, crosses the bridge while

it is still unstable, to prove his daring. (21)

Oct. 1768 - Chatterton sends the Rowleyan 'The Mayor's first passing over the old Bridge' to *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, to assert the superiority of Rowley over modern Bristol and the absurd bombast of Mr. Catcott. (22)

No-one is more delighted with this 'antique' discovery than Mr. George Catcott himself, and Bristol seeks out Chatterton, and a meeting is arranged at which Mr. George Catcott is present. Chatterton is questioned about his 'discovery' and he confesses about the treasure of the muniment room, but not to being the author of the treasure, which indeed Bristol would not want to hear, and possibly would not believe. (23)

'The Unknown Knight' (24)

At this point, the public and the private, the notion of creativity and discovery, always rather precariously balanced, merge further together.

Oct. 1768 - Chatterton meets Mr. Barrett as a result of the 'bridge narrative' controversy, and gives him Rowleyan productions for his *History of Bristol*.

1461 - King Edward IV visits Bristol

Mar. 1769 - Chatterton writes to Horace Walpole, asking for his patronage

1461 - The death of Sir Charles Baldwin (25)

Mr. Walpole rejects his advances, and advises diligence in his trade until he has made his fortune.

Thomas Chatterton, being rejected by the larger literary world, hankers

after it more and more, and sends satires and essays to the London papers, many of which are accepted. (26)

April 1770 - Chatterton leaves a suicide note for his employer, Mr. Lambert, to find. Mr. Lambert shows Mr. Barrett, who lectures Chatterton severely. (27)

1461 - Canynge avoids a political marriage, arranged for him by the King, by enlisting Rowley's help, and taking Holy Orders. (28)

April 1770 - Chatterton leaves a 'Last Will and Testament' to be discovered by Mr. Lambert's mother, and this time succeeds in breaking his apprenticeship. (29)

1467 - Canynge and Rowley retire to Westbury, where they spend the rest of their lives (30)

He leaves Bristol for London, staying at first with relatives in Shoreditch, then removing to a garret in Brooke Street, Holborn.

Aug. 1770 - Chatterton swallows arsenic and dies. (31)

1474 - Death of Canynge

Rowley's 'Life of Canynge'.

## CHRONOLOGY-NOTES

1. "Over the north porch of Redcliffe Church, which was founded or rebuilt, in the reign of Edward IV by Mr. William Canynge, a merchant of Bristol, there is a kind of muniment-room, in which were deposited six or seven chests, one of which in particular was called *Mr. Canynge's cofre*. This chest, it is said, was secured by six keys, intrusted to the minister, procurator of the Church, mayor, and churchwardens, which, in process of time, were lost.

In 1727, a notion prevailed, that some title-deeds and other writings of value were contained in *Mr. Canynge's cofre*; in consequence of which, an order of vestry was made that the chest should be opened under the inspection of an attorney, and that these writings which appeared of consequence should be removed to the south porch of the church. The locks were therefore forced, and not only the principle chest, but the others, which were also supposed to contain writings, were broken open. The deeds immediately relating to the church were kept, and the other manuscripts were left exposed, as of no value.

Chatterton's father, having free access to the church, by means of his uncle, the sexton, carried off, from time to time, parcels of parchments for covering copy-books and Bibles". *Thomas Chatterton: Poetical Works... to which is prefixed a life of the author* (Edinburgh, 1795), p. 300.

2. Meyerstein, pp. 10-11.

3. 'The Storie of Wylliam Canynge', ll. 273-4, in *Works I*, p. 245.

4. "His sister.. remarks, that he very early discovered a thirst for pre-eminence, and that even before he was five years old, he was accustomed to preside over his playmates. To the same purpose, it is said, that when very young, a manufacturer promised to make the family a present of some earthen ware, and that on asking him what device he would have painted on his; - 'paint me', said he, 'an angel with wings and a trumpet, to trumpet my name over the world'". *Thomas Chatterton: Poetical Works* (1795), p. 298.

5. Meyerstein, p. 165..

6. "At the age of five years, he was committed to the care of Mr. Love, who had succeeded his father in the school in

Pyle-Street; but either his faculties were not yet opened, or the waywardness of genius incapacitated him from receiving instruction in the ordinary methods, and he was remanded to his mother, as a dull boy, and incapable of improvement". *Thomas Chatterton: Poetical Works* (1795), p. 297.

7. 'A Brief Account of William Cannings', in *Works I*, pp. 51-2,

8. "Mrs. Chatterton was rendered extremely unhappy by the apparently tardy understanding of her son, till he *fell in love*, as she expressed herself, with the illuminated capitals of an old musical manuscript, in French, which enabled her, by taking advantage of the momentary passion, to initiate him in the alphabet. She taught him afterwards to read from an old black-lettered Testament, or Bible". Gregory, p. 4.

9. 'Lyfe of W: Canynge - by Rowlie', in *Works I*, pp. 229-30.

10. Chatterton entered Colston's school on the 3rd. August, 1760, at the age of seven years and nine months. "'Here', said he, exultingly, 'I shall get all the learning I want': but the young enthusiast had not long been an inmate of the establishment before he became wearied and disgusted with the monotony of his scholastic duties, which were such as to qualify him for a trade; and asserted that 'he could not learn so much at school as he could at home, for they had not books enough there'". Dix, pp. 7-8.

11. 'Lyfe of W: Canynge', in *Works I*, p. 230-1.

12. Thomas Phillips had been a pupil at Colston's, and during Chatterton's time there he was senior boy and usher (Meyerstein, p. 49). Chatterton and he were friends, and Chatterton wrote an Elegy for Phillips on his early death in 1769 (*Works I*, p. 383). But to Phillips' literary gatherings at Colston's he remained conspicuously remote: he "appeared altogether as an idle spectator of these poetical contests... he apparently possessed neither inclination nor ability for literary pursuits" - Gregory, p. 9.

13. Gregory, pp. 35-6; also Dix, p. 6 - "he would refuse to take any thing but bread and water, alleging as his reason, that 'he had a work in hand, and he must not make himself more stupid than God had made him'",

14. 'A Brief Account of William Cannings', pp.52-3.

15. 'Sly Dick', (*Works I*, pp.2-3) receives a vision which promises him unlimited treasure 'within the Garret's spacious dome' where there is 'a well stor'd wealthy room' (ll.17-18). The feeling conveyed by the poem towards this treasure is a mixed one of innocence and plenty ('sparkling Stars bedeckt the Sky', l.2), and also mischief and meanness - ('A noble Purse rewards thy pains, / A Purse to hold thy filching Gains'; ll.23-4). Chatterton's sister wrote that "he had been gloomy from the time he began to learn; but, it was observed, that he became more cheerful after he began to write poetry" - *Love and Madness*, p.162.

16. "The Londe ys boughte the Maconnes hyred and alle thynges ynne readynesse. nowe for a wondrous Pyle to astounde the Eyne. Penne anne Entyrlude to bee plaied uponne laieyng the fyrste Stone of the buyldeyng ande wricte a greete Parte for Iscamme". Canyng to Rowley, 1432 - 'Lyfe of W:Canyng', in *Works I*, p.231.

17. Chatterton gave demonstrations of 'antiquating' parchments to John Rudhall, and Edward Gardner. See Meyerstein, p.119 & pp.120-121; also Ch.2, n.50.

18. 'Lyfe of W:Canyng', in *Works I*, pp.251-2.

19. "'He was always', says Mr.Smith, 'extremely fond of walking in the fields, particularly in Redcliffe meadows; and of talking about these manuscripts and reading them there. Come, he would say, you and I will take a walk in the meadow. I have got the cleverest thing for you, that ever was. It is worth half a crown merely to have a sight of it: and to hear me read it to you. When we were arrived at the place proposed, he would produce his parchment; shew it, and read it to me. There was one spot in particular, full in view of the church, in which he always seemed to take a particular delight. He would frequently lay himself down, fix his eyes upon the church; and seem as if he were in a kind of extasy or trance...'" - Gregory, p.45.

20. "Chatterton left Colston's School on the 1st of July, 1767, having remained there about seven years; and was bound apprentice on the same day to Mr. John Lambert, attorney of Bristol, who had offices on St. John's Steps, for the term of seven years, to learn the art and mystery of a scrivener" - Dix, p.24.

21. Catcott also later climbed 205 feet to the top of the steeple of St. Nicholas' Church. See Meyerstein, pp. 136-7.

22. Dix, pp. 31-33.

23. Dix, pp. 33-4. See also Ch. 3.

24. Amongst the poems which were read out at the Red Lodge was 'The Tournament. One Cento of an ancient Poem called the Unknown Knight or the Tournament. I offered this as a sample, having two more Cento's - The Author Unknown'. (*Works I*, p. 23) It is the early 'Tournament' which is called 'The Unknown Knight', but the unknown knight does not appear until the later poem ('The Tournament. An Interlude'. *Works I*, pp. 282-290), when he is defeated by Syr Simon de Bourtonne. See Ch. 3, pp. 66-90.

25. "'This yeere in the harvest-season, King Edward reode to Canterbury and to Sandwich, and so along by the sea-coast to Hampton, and from thence into the Marches of Wales, and to Bristow, where he was most royally received. Thus he progressed about the land, to understand the state thereof'. Our Calendars all mention this visit: from them it may be collected, that 'King Edward came to Bristol in Sept' 1461; where, by his order were beheaded Sir Baldwin Fulford, knight; and two Esquires, - Bright and John Haysant: and the same day the King departed'. These gentlemen had probably been taken prisoners while fighting for the Red Rose, and confined in the castle of Bristol, until the King's pleasure should be known: from his merciless disposition there was no hope of pardon... The memory of Sir Baldwin Fulford has been snatched from that common grave of oblivion, wherein sleep the names of so many thousand heroes, who died in the fatal war between the houses of York and Lancaster; and has been immortalized by the well-known poem, entitled *The Execution of Sir Charles Bawdin*. Whether written by Rowley or by Chatterton, it is compleatly Bristowan; and has so much poetical merit, that our city may well be proud of it". - Samuel Seyer, *Memoirs Historical and Topographical of Bristol and its Neighbourhood, from the earliest period down to the Present Time* (Bristol, 1821), pp. 10-191.

26. "I have not been able to trace any thing of Chatterton's in the *Town and Country Magazine* (with which he appears to have first corresponded) before February 1769; but in the acknowledgements to correspondents for November 1768, we find 'D.B. of Bristol's favour will be gladly received". - Gregory, p. 47. One of Chatterton's pseudonyms

was *Dunhelmus Bristolensis*. See also Ch.7, n.3 and Ch.6, n.50.

27. "At this letter Mr. Lambert, being alarmed, sent to Mr. Barrett, thinking he might persuade him from this meditated attempt on his life, who, sending immediately for Chatterton, questioned him closely upon the occasion in a tender and friendly manner, but forcibly urged to him the horrible crime of self-murder, however glossed over by present liberties; blaming the bad company and principles he had adopted. This betrayed him into some compunction, and by his tears he seemed to feel it.."Dix, p.242,

28. "...in the yere that Kynge Edwarde came to Bristowe, Master Canynge send for mee to avoide a Marriage which the Kynge was bent on, between hym and a Ladye he ne han seen of the Familie of the Widdevilles. The Dangers were nighe, unless avoided by one Remmedie, an holie one..." - 'A Brief Account of William Cannings', in *Works I*, p.54. See also 'Lyfe of W:Canynge', in *Works I*, p.233

29. Dix, pp.233-244.

30. 'Lyfe of W:Canynge', in *Works I*, p.233.

31. Dix, pp.287-8.

32. Gregory, pp.143-147.

CHAPTER ONE

AARON CRUCIFIX

Aaron Crucifix makes his first and only appearance in the vicinity of St. Paul's, some time in April 1770, where Thomas Chatterton meets him, decrying the futility and transience of fame and prophesying the collapse of splendid buildings. We know nothing of his origins or his life before or after this appearance, though something can be surmised. He was probably a boy from the provinces, like Chatterton himself, hoping to make good in London by means of Literature. He was, according to one account (1), still a young man at the time of the meeting - between twenty-five and thirty - but the years had been unkind. He was too thin, and his teeth were black and crooked, and his nose was crooked too. Although he was a melancholy man, his features were more expressive of inane comicality than of tragedy, and this was perhaps the reason for his failure as a genius and for his



bitterness. Thomas Chatterton, his companion, however dull and ridiculous at times, could at least assume a tragic expression - not so good as the hero of Vigny's play (2), or Wallis' painting (3), but at least an air which contemporaries could recall without sniggering. And whatever one thinks of the myriad witnesses to Chatterton's story - the weary pedants, the unbelieving school companions, the rival poets, - at least not one of them sniggered in the telling. Chatterton had worked on his expression and it paid off - reproduced and embellished in Wallis' painting as though Chatterton had stood in the doorway of the garret in Brooke Street and commissioned it. Aaron Crucifix, unfortunately for him, had a voice, rather than an air, of doom; - tragic youths, if possible, should always possess a voice of the sweetest optimism, with a lot of abandoned laughter, like Sebastian in *Brideshead Revisited*. The voice of doom is always reserved for dull older brothers, bemused onlookers who will die in their beds, friends who, although dear and of course wild in their time, will still live on to become

respectable and old - Charles Ryder and  
Tennyson:

He is not here; but far away  
The noise of life begins again;  
And ghastly thro' the drizzling rain  
On the bald street breaks the blank day.  
(4)

In other words, the voice of doom belongs to the narrator and to the poet, who are largely responsible for creating the face of doom in the first place. It need not be an undignified role - it is not, for instance, with Charles Ryder and Tennyson; it need only be undignified if one looks like Aaron Crucifix. Chatterton was lucky in achieving the role of doomed youth and creator together - with doomed youth coming out slightly better, which is just how he would have wanted it. But Chatterton was surrounded by voices - voices of doom with silly faces, like George Catcott and Henry Burgum and Mrs. Ballance and his mother and sister. And some voices he created, and gave more dignity to their appearance, as with Rowley and Canynge - Rowley speaking of Canynge is an

affirmation of the myth-creating role of the creative voice.

Aaron Crucifix comes somewhere between the real and the creative voice. He is difficult to place because we know even less of him than of those phantom figures which beset Thomas Rowley from time to time. Of all the odd characters who bow into the Chatterton story and bow out again, he is the oddest and most shadowy. He is not a respectable Chattertonian figure, since he is not to be found in Meyerstein's *Life*(5), but only in the *Faber Book of Anecdotes*(6) and in a novel by someone with the name of Rayne Kruger, called *Young Villain with Wings*. The name Aaron Crucifix has a kind of apocryphal resonance, suggestive of sacrifice and disaster, and also of an American hack jokiness. But his voice is doleful. As he speaks, youths starve in garrets, editors are imprisoned (7), Lord Mayors die (8) and edifices crumble:

Well, sir, be forewarned: if you are in a coffee-house or tavern and anyone enters at an undignified pace - do not wait, sir; do not pause to enquire if 'tis a new juicy amour burst upon the town, or a fall of stock at Jonathan's, or anything of that sort; take your hat, sir, and depart as fast as you

can, for the odds are overwhelming that the fellow has come to report the building is collapsing about your ears.... My name is Aaron Crucifix. (9)

It is that impressive introduction of his name at the end of this tirade which gives it the stamp of conviction and authenticity. For Aaron Crucifix was right: the sound of falling buildings *did* dominate that time, although it seemed only to be a danger to those whose hold on the substantial was tenuous in the first place: Beckford's Abbey at Fonthill actually collapsed about him (10), and Strawberry Hill, so Walpole declared, was made of paper. (11) These edifices, like Marie Antoinette's Petit Trianon, were assiduously created fictions, sustained only by the spirit and personality of their authors, and collapsing when that passion outran their frail architectural possibilities - whether that passion was for the antique, the pastoral, or the merely eccentric.

Thomas Chatterton, listening to Aaron Crucifix's predictions of disaster and collapse, thought of St. Mary Redcliffe - for Chatterton came from Bristol, and in his

younger days - and how far away they seemed at this moment, as he walked beside Aaron Crucifix, under the shadow of St. Paul's! - in his younger days he had been much attached to the church, and had built up a little poetical world around it; he thought about it now, part wistful, part pitying the passions of his childish days. The picture in his mind was vivid still - he had been in London but a few days - and he thought the church in no danger of collapse. It seemed as sturdy and as certain as his old grandmother's clay pipe, or Mr. Barrett's interminable History of Bristol. (12) It had been restored by William Canynge (13), thus reflecting that here was one edifice, at least, which could be constantly renewed - but it was sustained by something less ephemeral than one man's vision or whim - by mayors and corporations and courts and traditions in no-nonsense, prosperous, money-making Bristol (14).

Chatterton thought to tell Aaron Crucifix something of this, but the strange man was in the middle of a tirade which seemed to embrace the whole of London, from Will's Coffee-house to St. Paul's. He raved against Lord Bute (15), against the timidity

and perfidy of editors ( for they had rejected his work), against the vanity and viciousness of great ladies, (for their coaches had splashed him with mud); against the fickleness and tyranny of Lord Mayors (for Beckford had refused him audience).

At the mention of Beckford, Thomas Chatterton brightened, and began to speak of his plans; then of his poetry - of Rowley - oh if only Rowley had been a Londoner! (16) - but it was no matter, for Rowley's day would come; of his 'Kew Gardens', where Mr. Crucifix would enjoy many clever lines on all his enemies (17); of his plans for a History of England, which would surpass Barrett's History of Bristol as Rowley surpassed Ladgate (18).

Dusk set in over the churchyard, and still Chatterton entertained his new friend with his plans for a glorious future; until suddenly - he was boasting of *The Town and Country Magazine* (19) - he stumbled and fell into what seemed to be a hollow abyss of darkness, but which turned out to be a freshly-dug grave.

For the first time during their encounter, Aaron Crucifix laughed. His

crooked teeth and emaciated face looked very sinister to Chatterton, as he climbed out of the grave with the help of Crucifix's long wiry arms.

'I am glad', said Aaron Crucifix, as he emerged, 'to have been present at the resurrection of a genius'.

Chatterton drew himself up to his full height - which was not so high as Aaron Crucifix -

'I have been at war with the grave for some time', he said stiffly, 'and I find it not so easy to vanquish it as I imagined. We can find an asylum from every creditor but that'.

Then he walked away with great dignity, as the evening settled in over St. Paul's, and Aaron Crucifix stared after him with a satisfied sneer.

## CHAPTER ONE - NOTES

1. This anecdote of Aaron Crucifix<sup>x</sup> is based on an incident in the novel *Young Villain With Wings*, by Rayne Kruger (1953), p.258.
2. Alfred de Vigny's play *Chatterton*, written in 1835, was responsible for a romantic cult of genius and suicide in France, and also for the addition of a heroine, Kitty Bell, to the Chatterton romance. See Meyerstein, p.519-20.
3. Henry Wallis' painting, *The Death of Chatterton*, was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1856. See Meyerstein, p.518.
4. Tennyson, 'In Memoriam', VII, in *Poems and Plays*(1973), p.232,
5. Although Aaron Crucifix is not mentioned by name in Meyerstein's *Life*, the anecdote is: Meyerstein, p.432. Also Dix, p.290.
6. Clifton Fadman (ed.), *The Faber Book of Anecdotes*, (1985), p.115. Here also we are given no name for Chatterton's companion,
7. Isaac Fell, editor of the *Freeholder's Magazine*, was arrested for his patriot publications in May 1770, as was William Edmunds, editor of *The Middlesex Journal*, which published Chatterton's 'Decimus' letters. See *Works I*, p.570, and Meyerstein, pp.361-2; also *Works II*, pp.1054 & 1065,
8. Beckford died unexpectedly on June 21st., 1770. See Meyerstein, p.381.
9. *Young Villain With Wings*, pp.257-8.
10. William Beckford, son of Chatterton's Beckford. See *Vathek*(1983), p. vii.
11. Oswald Doughty (ed.), *The Castle of Otranto* (1928), pp. xxxix-xlv.
12. William Barrett's *History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol* was eventually published in Bristol in 1789, by William Pine,
13. See Meyerstein, pp.156-157; also 'The Storie of Wylliam Canynge', ll.317-322, in *Works I*, p.247, and 'Lyfe of W:Canynge', in *Works I*, pp.232-3. Rowley was commissioned to

write 'The Parlyamente of Sprytes' on the dedication of the church - *Works I*, p.106.

14. Peter T. Marcy, 'Eighteenth Century Views of Bristol and Bristolians', in Patrick Mc.Grath (ed.), *Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Newton Abbot, 1972).

15. John Stuart, third earl of Bute, hated by the Patriots, who assumed he was the lover of the Princess Dowager. He had been the tutor of George III, and came to power on his accession to the throne. He is satirized by Chatterton in various poems, especially 'The Consuliad', 'Resignation', and 'Kew Gardens'.

16. See 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton', 14 May 1770, in *Works I*, p.570.

17. Written before April 1770, because it is mentioned in Chatterton's 'Will' (Dix, p.153). Kew was the residence of Augusta, Dowager Princess of Wales (*Works II*, p.1070), and in this poem Chatterton writes of public figures and also of local Bristol characters, and the effect is that of trying to wrench the two worlds together. See *Works I*, pp.512-546.

18. "I get four guineas a month by one magazine: shall engage to write a history of England and other pieces, which will more than double that sum" - 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton, Thomas Cary, and others', 6 May 1770, in *Works I*, p.560. See also 'To John Ladgate', in *Works I*, p.60, and 'John Ladgate's Answer', in *Works I*, pp.62-3.

19. The *Town and Country Magazine* was the first publication to accept Chatterton's work. See Gregory, p.47; also Chronology, n.26, and Ch.6, n.50.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE GRAND GESTURE AND 'DISSEMBLED GRACE'

Some time in 1727, the Church authorities of Bristol decided to force open the six chests in the muniment room, over the north porch of the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe. (1) What was of any conceivable use to the parish they took; what was useless they abandoned, and left the chests open for plunder. The chests lay untouched until Mr. Chatterton the schoolmaster, a lively and talented but by all accounts a satiric and splenetic character, (2) decided to ransack them for use as hymn-book covers for his schoolboys. It was left to his son to imagine a plunder of a different kind. Years later, Chatterton was to speak of his parchments as so much 'literary lumber' which was useless; (3) and perhaps somehow those long years of neglect and abuse accumulated around the manuscripts a feeling of dust and

uneasiness and boredom which, even when transmuted into the words of Rowley, they could not quite shake off; just as their creator could never quite shake off the shackles of poverty and ignorance and the dusty office at Lambert's and the narrow cramped rooms and minds in the house on Redcliffe Hill.

It is part of Chatterton's imperfection as a poet that makes us receive the impression of the lumber-room of poetry before the poetry itself; that makes us see the anxiety of the churchwardens making that arbitrary but crucial choice in what to take, what to leave. The poetry of Chatterton is a series of highly diverting and visual and interesting glimpses into many such lives of men, churchwardens and parchments. There is the initial reluctance which makes us prefer to look all around the poetry rather than at the poetry itself; to read a biography first; to find out what Meyerstein said; what Dr. Johnson said; what Keats said. But here perhaps we are catching Chatterton's own mood. For although - so one has been led to believe - the poetry is that of anguish and rebellion; and although - such is the

impression received from the famous painting, the famous odes, all the famous filtered-down husks of Romanticism - the poet is a rebel and an outcast; yet it is the poetry of a mind which could never forget what people said of it - what Mr.Barrett said; what Mr.Walpole said; what Mr.Wilkes was saying. Indeed the poor fatherless boy seems to have been surrounded by knowing loquacious gentlemen. And instead of banishing them from the rich and suggestive lumber-room where, after all, there was a locked door, - he let them intrude; more or less invited them in. The air is full of their loud and grating voices, now wheedling, now preaching, now pre-occupied before setting out for Paris. (4) And what they wanted, they got: Mr.Barrett got his documents for his History of Bristol; Mr.Walpole got his antiquities; Mr.Wilkes got his political pamphlets. But they got it, so to speak, with a vengeance. The drudge in the lumber-room was a willing drudge, and his offerings were the result, not of an act of rebellion, but of a kind of demented acquiescence.

The compliance with the will of Mr. Walpole and his kind was of course erratic

and uncertain because Mr. Walpole's needs were never defined and seemed at times rather ambiguous. He wanted antique poetry, but he had a tendency to reject it when it was offered. Naturally this was rather irking; naturally also the voices of these demanding and fractious gentlemen, having invaded the lumber-room, found their way into the poetry itself - 'Knights and barons live for pleasure and themselves', complains Chatterton in the middle of 'The Ballad of Charity' (5). The poet, given these demands, is like a passionate and desperate child seeking the love of adults, who is commissioned rather vaguely to bring flowers from the garden. But the child - so eager is he for approbation - culls from the garden not only the sanctioned flowers from the pretty and well-ordered flower-beds, but grasps forbidden roots that have been growing for years, and plants that are unknown and dangerous. The poet is not yet the knowing child he has become when, in *The Go-Between*, he realizes that the deadly nightshade is a lethal poison which must be plucked stealthily by night and gloated over in private: something in him demands that he

offer it openly, with love and with relish. The link of Thomas Chatterton with Leo Colston is heightened by the fact that they are both aspiring to a higher social class at the same time as experimenting with invented worlds, and they both confuse their practical and worthy social aspirations with their private invented hierarchies. Words spring up around them and take on magnificent proportions - the word 'vanquished' sets off Leo's trail of triumph and tragedy. With Chatterton it was perhaps 'Fame', with its attendant 'Pride', which two words dance round his reputation, and are picked up with either joy or distaste by biographers. Despite their wish to be the equals of Viscounts and Prime Ministers' sons, their origin will keep asserting itself in their liking for ugly poisonous plants rather than the pretty cultivated flowers they are asked to admire.

'Well, now', said Mrs. Maudsley, 'here's the garden. It looks a bit lop-sided, doesn't it? with that L-shaped wall? I'm not sure I should have made it like that, but they keep the east wind and the north wind off, and then such lovely roses grow on them. But are you really interested in flowers?'

I said I was, especially in poisonous ones.  
She smiled.

'I don't think you'll find many of those here'.

To demonstrate my knowledge I began to tell her about the deadly nightshade, and then stopped. I found I did not want to speak about it. But she was only half-listening.

'In one of the outhouses you say? You mean where the old garden used to be'.

'Yes, somewhere there... but ... will you tell me what this rose is called?'

'Mermaid. Isn't it a beauty? Do you often go to the outhouses, as you call them? I should have thought it was rather a dank place'.

'Yes, but there might be poachers'.

'Do you mean real poachers?'

'Oh no, just pretence ones'.

(6)

They both share this timid half-telling quality - almost giving the secret away, and then retreating. This is partly because of their timidity and partly their arrogance - they like to build up mysteries and make people nervous. They leave their diaries to be found by hearty unsuspecting bullies like Jenkins and Strode, or their Last Will and Testament to be discovered by Mr. Lambert. They are both rather fond of 'demonstrating their knowledge' - although Leo doesn't go nearly so far as Chatterton does in displaying the utensils and technique of his 'experiment' - except to the servant:

Henry came across and stared at my handiwork. It looked like a little heathen altar, or a study for Stonehenge. The four books formed the temenos, within

stood the four candles, close together; above them, resting on the books, lay the drainer from the soap-dish, and on the drainer, ready to receive the ingredients, my silver cup. The water-bottle, the damp sponge, the four boxes of matches, were set at ritual intervals. Only my watch was absent from the roll-call. Flimsy and childish-looking as the structure was, it did somehow bear witness to occult intention, as if it was ready to do what harm it could, and I felt exceedingly embarrassed at having to confess myself its architect. (7)

Very probably this embarrassment was both real and assumed, for there was no reason why Leo could not have cleared up the debris before Henry's arrival; but, having managed the spell and not having the courage to boast about his powers to Marcus or Mrs. Maudsley, he could not resist showing off to someone. So also are some of Chatterton's most telling phrases found in letters home to his mother and sister, or to boys at Bristol younger than himself; these 'lesser characters' become the receptacles for the ideas and secrets which the major characters in the drama are perfectly indifferent to.

But also there is something more complex at work in this wild plucking from the well-ordered garden. The child's love and desire to please holds within itself the dull realization of rejection, and the corresponding desire to bruise and destroy:

after all, the garden may be an adventure and a potential means of gaining recognition, but the drawing-room is not so far away. Even at the moment of uprooting the most subtle of plants, it is possible to hear the clinking of tea-cups, the urbane and fashionable chatter, the polite laughter, which can sound so savage when you have been banished from the drawing-room by an arbitrary and careless command:

And where wee kenn somme ishad floures besprente,  
We take ytte, and from oulde rouste doe ytte clene;  
(8)

The thyng yttself moste bee yttes owne defense -

(9)

The fear and anger and defensiveness of the child in the garden is not quite overlaid by these controlled and reasoned words of Rowley. Indeed, in the dedication of 'Aella' Rowley gets in a sly jab at the 'graiebarbes' who uphold their own drab version of 'Trouthe', ignoring the difficulty and integrity of turning not only 'history' into truth but truth into history, and virtue being equated with poetry of the highest

order (10). The whole mood of 'Aella' is a testing of those strictures placed by the graybeards of the drawing-room upon what the poet may pluck and what he may not: the flower-beds may after all be insipid or even evil, while the poison may contain its own antidote: the poison with which Celmonde plots to spoil the marriage-feast of Aella and Birtha, is stopped by the poison of war, of parting, sorrow and non-consummation - by that outer heroic structure of the play which is always at odds with the deeper structure of danger, revenge and lust which are offered - like the poisoned plant - with defiance and despair, but which are more akin to Rowley's tone at the beginning of the play; although Rowley's dedication, like the play itself, ends by an ostensible return to courtesy and urbanity, to the chatter of the drawing-room, to the easy politeness of the Red Lodge:

Canynge, adieu! I do you greete from hence;  
Full soone I hope to taste of your good cheere;  
Goode Byshoppe Carpynter dyd byd mee saie,  
Hee wysche you healthe and selinesse for aie.

(11)

Rowley, we are to discover, is not the simple and heroic character he seems from the outside of the Rowleyan myth; he is witty and devious and ironic; he is subject to sudden attacks of licentiousness in the middle of what should be moments of awe and solemnity, revealing him in a somewhat ridiculous light (12). There is something sycophantic about the zeal with which he sets about collecting the ancient drawings of churches for Canynge; one thinks of Chatterton approaching Burgum, promising him his ancestry (13), of 'Apostate Will' in that earliest known poem of Chatterton's, approaching the Wesleyan minister, 'with looks demure and cringing bows' (14). He is careful to report what he was paid for each drawing, and each reward is recorded with certainly a cringing kind of gratitude. And his sycophancy is not, alas, the Bushy and Bagot kind which exalts the giver and its subject and lifts up the whole world which sustains them; but rather more in the Thomas Cromwell line. Rowley is very good to send on errands, and to get one out of sticky situations - like unwelcome marriages (15). But as Court poet he has certain beliefs about poetry which he can

only get in on such occasions as the preface to 'Aella'. At the Red Lodge the poetry favoured was formal and heroic and polished. Rowley was fully equipped to provide this, but there was something in him which wanted also the darkness, the vastness, the irreconcilable in poetry. He wanted the honesty of the lower passions, and he wanted to show how they might be allied to the more exalted feelings in Man; he wanted to venture beyond the glib courtship of the Minstrel's songs into the mystery of the dark woods. He perhaps remembered with honesty and even with some affection for human frailty the occasion on which he himself realized how near the feeling of veneration was to that of simple desire - he had been visited by the vision of 'Trouthe', a naked girl:

But I ne dyd once thynke of wanton Thoughte  
For well I mynded what bie Vowe I hete  
And yn my Pockate han a Grouchee broughte  
Whych yn the Blossom woulde such Sins anete  
I lok'd wyth Byne as pure as Angelles doe  
And dyd the everie Thoughte of foule escew.

(16)

He felt a decline in poetry, and wanted it to become, like himself, devious and knowing and bold:

Nowe shapellie poesie hast loste yttes powers,  
And pynant hystorie ys onlie grace;  
Heie pycke up wolsome weedes, ynstedde of flowers,  
And famylies, ynstedde of wytte, theie trace;  
Nowe poesie canne meete wythe ne regrate,  
Whylst prose, and herehaughtrie, ryse yn estate.

(17)

Rowley had not always been the favoured Court poet. He had known neglect and observed pettiness and meanness under Canynge's father and brother - 'Master Robert was a Manne after his fadre's owne Harte, greedie of Gayne, and sparynge of Almes Deedes' (18) - and it is probably a tactful compliment rather than any real alliance in feeling with Canynge which provoked the inclusion of his patron in his bold, soaring claims for riding the steed and not the cart-horse: 'Canynge and I from common course dyssente...' (19)

Chatterton has provided in 'Aella' a complex undercutting device. Just as he resents the offerings he must make to Henry Burgum, to Barrett and to Walpole; so Rowley,

with the same slight defiance, offers his poems to Canynge. The Rowleyan poetry is not a neat reversal of Chatterton's own discontent, but a subtle appraisal of it. The tension which exists between Rowley and the Court of the Red Lodge is a tension which is so mastered by Rowley that it is assimilated into the poetry and creates its own fulfilment. Rowley, like Chatterton, sees the prescribed boundaries of his world and finds it lacking; but whereas Chatterton is the child-poet, savagely plucking at roots which he knows will be rejected, Rowley is a mature and urbane craftsman who can hide his rebellion beneath layers of compliment, of courtliness, and a seeming compliance with the outward fabric.

In Bristol, Chatterton belonged to the 'Juvenile Society', a group of youths, mostly apprentices or clerks, who met regularly to discuss politics and how they were to improve the country, once they were free of the restraint of their several terms of service (20). In June 1771, they were

described scathingly by the author of 'A  
Bristol Spouting-Club', in *The Town and  
Country Magazine*:

Many of the principal performers are still in their non-age, and servants by covenant for a certain term; but like lads of spirit, detest control, scorn the drudgery of dirty mechanics, and pant for fame in the more glorious fields of literature. Here they give full scope to their natural free-born sentiments, curse the inventors of subordination and servitude, lament that Britons should ever be restrained, and, like true sons of liberty (for they are all staunch patriots) rail at their masters for keeping them to their duty... In this group of dirty-faced wits, are three or four *authors* or *poets*, who have already composed, or at least transposed, more verses than Dryden or Pope ever wrote, and with much more elegance and fire, as these prodigies of erudition, their fellow members, very confidently assert. The effusions of their brains are eclogues, epigrams, epitaphs, odes and satires, with the last of which they keep their neighbours in awe; for if a man by any transaction has rendered himself ridiculous, these wits immediately publish his folly in a lampoon, by setting his name at the top of a half-penny publication, called *A New Copy of Verses*, to the great diversion of themselves and the public. Some cavilling critics, indeed, charge our adventurers with many heinous crimes, such as plagiarism and parricides upon their mother tongue, etc., but these we may suppose are rather the offering of envy, from the conviction of superior abilities, than the dictates of truth and justice. (21)

The received myth of Chatterton is of his isolation and secret nurturing of a great gift. But such a description of Bristol literary life gives a glimpse of the sameness, the shared vanity of the

inhabitants. Chatterton's first adventure in literary imposture was in response to the opening of the new bridge at Bristol, which gave him the idea of concocting an ancient account of the old mayor crossing the old bridge, when that was first erected (22). Although this produced the desired effect, and gained recognition in Bristol for the young 'discoverer' of the document as soon as it appeared in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, even this ingenious piece of prose had its mundane spectacular Bristolian accompaniment: 'The Mayor's first passing over the Old Bridge' appeared in *Felix Farley* on October 1st, 1768, but already, on June 25, 1767, Mr. George Catcott, pewterer, and later recipient of much Rowleyan poetry, had made a name for himself as the first person to cross the new bridge, before it was opened to the public: he borrowed a horse from Burgum, his partner in the pewtering trade, and rode across the bridge, ensuring that he did not avoid the loose planks which made the crossing precarious. Flushed by the success of this adventure, Mr. Catcott later climbed 205 feet to the top of the new steeple of St. Nicholas' Church, in order to place there

two pewter tablets, engraved with a Latin inscription, commemorating both his trade and the extravagance and courage of the deed. (23)

For these two incidents Chatterton ridicules Catcott in his poem 'Happiness', written in November 1769:

Catcott is very fond of talk and fame  
His Wish, a Perpetuity of name  
Which to procure a Pewter Altars made  
To bear his name and signify his Trade  
In Pomp burlesq'd the rising Spire to head  
To tell Futurity a Pewterer's dead  
Incomparable Catcott still pursue  
The seeming Happiness thou hast in view  
Unfinished Chimneys Gaping Spires compleat  
Eternal Fame on Oval Dishes beat  
Ride four-inch'd Bridges clouded Turrets climb  
And bravely die to live in after-time.

(24)

Catcott described to Herbert Croft the circumstances which led up to the writing of the poem: he had been walking with Chatterton and brought up the subject of happiness, which Chatterton admitted he had never thought about; but he promised he would think about it that very evening, and the following day his lines on 'Happiness' were in the pewterer's hands (25). However, if

Chatterton had never considered the subject, Rowley certainly had - or at least William Canynge had, and Rowley had transcribed his poem: in 'Rowley's Heraldic Account', Rowley, speaking of Canynge's various talents, adds, 'of hys poesie see as followeth', and then follows Canynge's poem 'On Happiness', in which he concludes that the way to happiness is through 'content':

{ All hayle Contente Thou Mayde of Turtle Eyne...  
Whoe're hath Thee hath gotten Selynesse.

(26)

With the depiction of George Catcott's 'seeming Happiness', acquired through the carrying-out of foolhardy, bombastical deeds, Chatterton seems to be voicing the ironical response to Canynge's rather glib assertion, an irony which Rowley delicately refrains from indulging in his presentation of the Mayor's poem: for, according to Croft, Catcott was delighted with the poem, especially with the lines pertaining to himself: 'the pewterer produces the poem, and

in the simplicity of his vanity, imagines it to contain a *panegyric* on himself' (27). In other words, he has achieved the - according to Canynge - pinnacle of 'Happiness' - such simplicity, such content, that even the most blatant mockery can only affirm his own vanity and incite him to further folly - a fine courtier for Canynge, which Rowley never completely becomes - 'Whoe're hath Thee hath gotten <sup>S</sup>elyness'. The purity and simplicity recommended by Canynge has become 'the simplicity of his vanity'.

Catcott's simplicity was still in evidence six years after Chatterton's death, when he welcomed Dr. Johnson and Boswell to Bristol:

George Catcott, the pewterer, who was as zealous for Rowley, as Dr. Hugh Blair was for 'Ossian'... attended us at our inn, and with a triumphant air of lively simplicity called out, 'I'll make Dr. Johnson a convert'. Dr. Johnson, at his desire, read aloud some of Chatterton's fabricated verses, while Catcott stood at the back of his chair, moving himself like a pendulum, and beating time with his feet, and now and then looking into Dr. Johnson's face, wondering that he was not yet convinced... Honest Catcot seemed to pay no attention whatever to any objections, but insisted, as an end to all controversy, that we should go with him to the tower of the church of St. Mary Redcliffe, and 'view with our own eyes the ancient chest in which the manuscripts were found. To this, Dr. Johnson good-naturedly agreed... 'There', (said Catcot, with a bouncing confident credulity), 'there is

the very chest itself'. After this 'ocular demonstration', there was no more to be said.

(28)

It is a simplicity and smugness with which Chatterton endows his characters on occasions - the newly-married Elynour of the second minstrel's song in 'Aella' (29); Sir Charles Baldwin, Aella and Birtha, and even Rowley himself are prone to the drowsy indulgence of self-congratulation, only to be awakened to unexpected feelings, darker passions which cannot be filed away as evil, but must somehow be assimilated into the vision of goodness and a more intricate scheme of happiness and virtue: Rowley, 'anent a Brooklette as I laie reclynde' ('The Storie of William Canynge') (30), and 'Sly Dick' who

Had laid him down to take his rest  
And soothe with sleep his anxious breast,

(31)

only to be disturbed by the 'dark infernal sprite', as Rowley was disturbed by the 'blythe and sweete' figure of 'Trouthe'.

Then Chatterton, whose one wish is also, like Catcott's, a 'perpetuity of name', berates the pewterer with wishing to cross the boundaries of 'Futurity', of which heroes such as Aella are the 'darlings' and stern guardians ('Songe to Ella') (32):

Horrid Idea! if on Rolls of Fame  
The Twentyeth Cent'ry only find thy Name  
Unnoticed this in Prose or tagging flower -  
He left his Dinner to ascend the Tower.

(33)

For the prospect of George Catcott, attaching his pewter tablets triumphantly to the top of St. Nicholas' Church, presented Chatterton with a dilemma, both for his own personality and his poetry. Of what use was an ideal if it was shared with every boasting pewterer in Bristol? Of what beauty was 'Futurity', when the trouble taken to achieve it involved such a mixture of bravery and folly, and every mediocrity in Bristol could climb steeples? Chatterton's express desire at five years' old, to have inscribed on a Delft cup 'an angel with a trumpet, to blow his name about' (34), becomes, when faced

with this predicament, not the precocity of an infant genius, as declared by his admirers, nor the sad premonition of doomed pride and wilfulness, as lamented by his detractors; but merely an incident which marks him as a true child of Bristol, where such 'perpetuity of name' was a common longing, where it was 'morally impossible', according to the *Town and Country Magazine*, 'to walk in a straight line' (35), and where every clerk and apprentice in the city was 'crazy to excess' in the matter of fashion and dress - including Chatterton himself who was, so Southey heard, 'a great coxcomb in his dress' (36). He was glad, nevertheless to escape from the restrictions of fashion in Bristol, and to achieve the more casual and inventive style of dress in the capital. His relief is given voice in a letter to his mother of 6 May 1770, where snobbery, relief, contempt for his former enslavement are all intermingled:

Good God! how superior is London to that despicable place Bristol - here is none of your little meannesses, none of your mercenary securities which disgrace that miserable hamlet. - Dress, which is in Bristol an eternal fund of scandal, is here only introduced as a subject of praise; if a man dresses

well, he has taste; if careless, he has his own reasons for so doing, and is prudent. Need I remind you of the contrast. (37)

In a modern satirical novel about University life, Chatterton would feature as the diligent provincial scholarship boy who, conscious of his social disadvantages, bores and amuses everyone with his insecurities about what clothes to wear, what wine to drink, and what books to keep on his shelves; one of Malcolm Bradbury's 'victims' - though possibly handsomer, and with more of a chance of growing out of it. The rather tactless candour with which he addresses his mother and sister shows that he was not writing to them other than as witnesses to his improved state, and his generosity to them reflects his anxiety that, when his 'perpetuity of name' is at last assured, and he sets them up in London, they should not shame him with their provincial 'meannesses':

Dear Sister,

I have sent you some china, and a fan. You have your choice of two. I am surprized that you chose purple and gold; I went into the shop to buy it; but it is the most disagreeable colour I ever saw; dead, lifeless, and

inelegant. Purple and pink, or lemon and pink, are more genteel and lively. Your answer in this affair will oblige me. Be assured, that I shall ever make your wants, my wants: and stretch to the utmost to serve you. Remember me to Miss Sanford, Miss Rumsey, Miss Singer, etc etc etc... (38)

The promise of service, of acquiescence to his sister's wishes, belies the very serious entreaties he is making to her, the earnest persuasion of his language - 'dead, lifeless, and inelegant' ('how withered, forwynd, deade!' - 'Ballad of Charity'). Chatterton knew, beneath his provincial insecurity, the futility of such splendour, and yet even in the 'Ballad of Charity', which seems to extol poverty against riches, he steps aside to admire the outfit of the negligent Abbot:

His cope was all of Lyncolne clothe so fyne,  
With a gold button fasten'd neere his chynne;  
His autremete was edged with golden twynne,  
And his shoone pyke a loverds mighte have binne;  
Full well it shewn he thoughten coste no sinne;

(39)

and for a moment the beauty of extravagance takes over, and it is certain that, whether

it tends to meanness or to generosity, the chance moment which decides it will be one of stern grandeur, and so it is:

Varlet, replyd the Abbatte, cease your dinne;  
This is no season alms and prayers to give;

(40)

and there is a sense in which both the pilgrim and the reader stands reproved, for it does seem an insult to such finery to offer it alms and prayers, just as it was an insult for Mrs. Ballance to call the author of Rowley 'cousin Tommy' (41), and urge him 'not to set up as a gentleman'; just as it was an insult for Aella to ask the minstrels for 'marriage-blessings' when they have offered love and beauty (42); and for Bristol to grasp the attorney clerk's 'antiquities' and ignore his poetry.

But with regard to his sister, Chatterton had learned that in London one could do very well if one either dressed very well, or dressed very badly. But to dress very badly required even more skill and

subtlety than dressing finely, a skill Mary Chatterton was not quite gifted with.

Besides, women who affected such graceful dressing-down techniques doubtless called down upon themselves a thousand outraged drawing-room tongues, 'an eternal fund of scandal' (43), and even for the sister of a genius, and of such a young and recently-acclaimed genius, this would not do. So he must help her abandon the despicable Bristolian ideas of fashion. He must steer her gently away from the purple and the gold. But over and above all the fussiness and disapproval and trickery of persuasive language in the letter, lies its undeniable generosity - a generosity which exists alongside deviousness and vanity and arrogance.

I am <sup>my</sup> Love's borrower and can never pay,  
But <sup>be</sup> his borrower still, and thine, <sup>my</sup> sweet, for aie

(44)

Thus Aella to Birtha. A confession of encroachment and obligation, it is couched in

the language of generosity, the 'never can<sup>d</sup> pay' at the end of the line reading like the proud assertion of freedom, and the lengthy 'thine, my sweet, for aie', of the alexandrine sealing the promise. Chatterton was an over-borrower, whether of words, space, oysters, arsenic or parchment; but, like over-borrowers everywhere, he gave out the aura of generosity and extravagance, and held out the promise of freedom:

I am settled, and in such a settlement, as I would desire. I get four guineas a month by one magazine: shall engage to write a history of England and other pieces, which will more than double that sum. Occasional essays for the daily papers would more than support me. What a glorious prospect!... I am quite familiar at the Chapter Coffee-house, and know all the geniuses there. A character is now unnecessary; an author carries his character in his pen.

(45)

Apart from the deluding optimism of the letter, it invokes the spirit of the times - the play on 'settlement' and the 'glorious prospect': Chatterton, member of the Bristol Juvenile Club, was a <sup>P</sup>patriot (46). His arrival in the capital coincided with the triumphant mob celebrating Wilkes' winning of that well-named Borough - so

suggestive of dubious boundaries and exclusive exile - the Ward of Farringdon Without (47). But even before this opportune removal to the loyal city of his hero, Chatterton had caught the Patriot spirit, so fitting for the spirits of youth, with its promise that every glorious thing imaginable could happen, because nothing yet had - a feeling akin to Chatterton's boy heroes-in-the-making - Canynge and Sly Dick and the invention of his own young self, so faithfully witnessed and adhered to by his contemporaries and biographers: a young poet reading aloud his poetry in a trance-like state, in the meadows before St. Mary Redcliffe Church (48). Chatterton, who would have liked to have climbed the steeple himself, must instead make his mark in a different fashion, and busy himself with ochre and parchment. Instead of bland courage and daring, he must work timidly and deviously, choosing his moments with care - half-confessing mysteriously to the right people - to his mother and sister (49), and boys at Bristol such as Edward Gardner:

Edward Gardner, ...an observant person, who particularly recollected the philosophic gravity of the poet's countenance and the keen lightning of his eye, saw him some three months previous to his journey to London - Gardner was a lad at the time - first rub a parchment in several places in streaks with yellow ochre, then rub it several times on the ground, which was dirty, and afterwards crumple it in his hand; 'That was the way to antique it', he said, adding finally that it would do pretty well, but he could do it better were he at home. (50)

'An observant person', who could be relied upon to send the incident rolling through the centuries - complete with descriptions of the grave countenance and the lightning-keen eyes; a nicely-judged mixture of dirt and mystery, secrecy and candour. He always kept one eye open for his biographers even in the midst of the sweetest reveries at Canynge's tomb; he never, unlike Lamb, entirely despaired of posterity; antiquity would never suffice for *him*. At Colston's school, where the dreary routine of the most mundane kind of learning would surely have tempted anyone of his temperament to some more creative endeavour, he remained aloof from the poetic gatherings of the kindly literary-minded usher, Thomas Phillips, - so much so that in later years friends who had been his schoolfellows asserted that he could not have

been the author of Rowley, for he had never at this time, given the opportunity to shine, exhibited either the talent or the desire to do so. James Thistle<sup>l</sup>thwaite ( who seems to have been assigned the role of the 'rival poet' in the Chatterton romance), wrote in 1781, 'The poetical attempts of Phillips had excited a kind of literary emulation amongst the elder classes of the scholars... and Phillips still, to the mortification of his opponents, came off victorious and unhurt' (51); and Thistlethwaite believed that between the end of 1763 and 1766 Chatterton 'had not attempted the composition of a single couplet' (52).

However satisfying the secret nurturing of Rowley during the time at Colston's, Chatterton, once embarked upon the drudgery at Lambert's, soon fell victim to the more Bristolian signs of fame at the same time as despising them intensely. Other people's affectations impinged upon his tyranny, and so he must create a parody of, for instance, Catcott's dangerous ride over the new bridge, with the substitute of a description of the first time the mayor crossed the old one. Central to the

situation is the usual Chattertonian question of exactly who is being parodied - George Catcott and modern Bristol, or the old mayor and the myth itself. Does not the forged description, coming later than Catcott's daring deed and in some way done in envy and spleen for not having thought of it first, reduce the ancient mayor of Bristol - the gorgeous figure of William Canynge - to a monstrous imitator of the pewterer, limping along behind his cart-horse, aping his airs and his gestures:

We eryde the stede, bot <sup>te</sup> yev to hym the reene,

(53)

says Rowley proudly at the opening of 'Aella', of himself and Canynge. But perhaps in this instance the cart-horse has the edge on the steed, as the cart-horse is always threatening to do throughout the whole of Chatterton's poetry. The steed is associated with the grand gesture, but there is something to be said for the cart-horse after all. Rowley's declaration is a rhetorical

boast of the ideal, the exalted and the unique in poetry - the rest of 'Aella' shows just how inadequate and dubious such a claim is; and it is telling that the well-meaning rhetoric of Rowley should become mingled with the effete and empty rhetoric of Bristol. In 'Apostate Will', one of Chatterton's earliest known poems, the religious turncoat has an appropriate 'air' for whichever sect is most to his advantage. Chatterton captures both his poverty and his meanness at the opening of the poem:

Apostate Will just sunk in trade,  
Resolv'd his bargain should be made.

(54)

The Wesleyan minister to whom he applies gives 'instructions' on belief and behaviour - a picture which recalls Chatterton's own demonstration of the technique of forgery, so that his followers can present his history in the right way. And sure enough, after receiving his instructions, the 'Apostate' voices the correct 'Enthusiastic' response:

Then lifting his dissembling eyes,  
How blessed is the sect he cries,  
Nor Bingham, Young, nor Stillingfleet  
Shall make me from this sect retreat.

(55)

Insidiously, and true to the style of Chatterton's later writing, the tables have been turned, and Apostate Will, having begun by deceiving the preacher, is himself being imposed upon. His working relationship with this obliging man to whom he has confessed his poverty and who has given him the money of the 'whole collection', anticipates in some ways the courteous and circumscribed relationship between Canynge and Rowley, with Rowley carrying out his duties as collector of drawings and provider of Court entertainment, while underneath it all is something working in conflict with these roles, in which 'payment' plays no small part, however delicately alluded to:

With looks demure and cringing bows,  
About his business strait he goes;  
His outward acts were grave and prim,  
The Methodist appear'd in him;  
But, be his outward what it will,  
His heart was an Apostate's still.

(56)

The last two lines can read as an assertion of dignity and integrity: in spite of obedience and drudgery, never to let go of the central freedom of being an 'Apostate' - of the fact that compliance does not mean belief. One can be the laureate at the Court of Canynge and still uphold one's own beliefs about poetry and virtue and human behaviour, even if no-one notices what is going on beneath the courtly and acquiescent verse; and in the same way a reluctant Wesleyan can enjoy voicing his true opinion through the medium of the scripture he disdains:

He'd oft profess with holy fire,  
The labourer's worthy of his hire.

(57)

('But the devil of the matter is', wrote Chatterton to his sister in May 1770, of his interview and prospects with Beckford, the Lord Mayor, 'there's no money to be got of this side the question. Interest is of the other side. But he is a poor author, who cannot write on both sides') (58). Apostate

Will, seizing his chance, deserts the  
Methodists for a better place with a  
'Protestant' curate, whom he begs to accept  
him and to whom he promises to 'do everything  
that's right and fit'. Once again generosity  
and acceptance are readily offered:

The curate straitway gave consent -  
To take the place he quickly went.  
Accordingly he took the place,  
And keeps it with dissembled grace.

(59)

'Apostate Will' and 'Sly Dick', those  
two early poems of loss and gain, deception  
and redemption, although a first essay in  
satire, are yet but one remove from the  
passive acceptance expressed in 'A Hymn for  
Christmas Day' (60). They are a way of  
allowing the poetry of gesture and the poetry  
of deviousness to exist side by side.  
Involved as the muniment treasury was with  
rights, inheritance and possession, the poems  
both claim ownership in the grand manner, and  
justify defiantly any dubious measures which  
may have been taken to claim it.

He'd oft profess with holy fire,  
The labourer's worthy of his hire.

They shakily assert the right to be both  
conformist and 'Apostate' in one.

This quality, a peculiarly adolescent  
need, becomes engrossed into Chatterton's  
poetry, and finds a spokesman in the  
restrained, urbane and mature voice of  
Rowley; somewhere within the process of  
transition, bombast is dignified, spleen  
purified; thoughts about language, about  
fashion, and about poetry, once removed from  
the realm of the social, inhabit the realm of  
ideas; but they arrive with the husks of  
struggle and snobbery and boredom upon them,  
and Rowley must find himself faced with the  
Court of Canynge, and with his own baseness  
and inadequacies. Poetry, the gift which  
must survive in spite of them, can be  
recognized without shame in this world -  
(although with polite boredom, as is made

evident by the tension conveyed in Rowley's long prologue to 'Aella') (61), and in the hands of the faceless, classless priest, as it could not be tended in the world of Burgum and Catcott by the apprentice with his fortune to make and his worry about his clothes and his lack of Latin. What Chatterton admired about the London style of dress was not the dress itself, but the easy negligence with which it was worn:

If a man dresses well, he has taste; if careless, he has his own reasons for so doing, and is prudent. Need I remind you of the contrast.

(62)

That sentence, though it is dealing with one of Chatterton's major pre-occupations, gives out, in its tone and its formation, an air of dismissiveness. What he admires, and wants to attain to, is *indifference*. It is this which augurs ill for a poet. It isn't the fact that he fussed over his clothes and those of his sister; it isn't the snobbery and fear of provincialism; it isn't the fact that he missed both the magnificent

carelessness of Johnson and the conscious dandyism of Byron. It is the ominous feeling, not that he cares for fashion too much, but that he doesn't care enough; that he has no innocent abandoned delight in colour and finery; that he is in fact merely 'prudent', and is endeavouring to hide his prudence in hectoring distinctions. He might talk of Wilkes and Townshend (63), but it should not be forgotten that Walpole was his first thought in the world of literature - he aspired to be the 'man of letters'; and if there is a sartorial equivalent of the literary gentleman, Chatterton wanted to be him as well - elegant, aloof, and effortlessly fine; effortlessly prolific. Of course it didn't work for the Bristol law-copier, but Chatterton never lost sight of that mean ideal: he was ashamed of his dress; he was ashamed of his best poetry - it must be hidden in the lumber-room. He must proclaim himself its discoverer, not its creator.

Besides Chatterton's attitude to fashion, both high-handed and cautious, can be set that of Keats - abandoned, unashamed and openly imitative:

Among the rough-and-tumble of hospital life, he now felt it necessary to establish his own identity, and, in a superficial sense, to act the poet. 'The greatest men in the world were the poets, and to rank among them was the chief object of his ambition', Stephens noted. Keats decided to make sure he was a poet by dressing and looking like Byron. While George and Tom still wore high collars and neckerchiefs, their poet brother turned down his collar, and wore it open with only a thin black ribbon round his bare neck; he also experimented with a set of Byronic moustaches.

(64)

This was during the time that Keats, also, was pursuing a course of life not congenial to his temperament. And yet not only is the later poet willing to 'act the poet' in a sense that Chatterton, for all the bestowed and mistaken acknowledgements of posterity, could never do; but there is also an instinctive, though well-balanced knowledge that style is the centre of poetry, and not merely, as Chatterton thought or wished, an accessory to it. Yeats' picture of Keats, looking longingly through the shop-window, could almost be Chatterton:

I see a schoolboy when I think of him,  
With face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window,  
For certainly he sank into his grave  
His senses and his heart unsatisfied,  
And made - being poor, ailing and ignorant,  
Shut out from all the luxury of the world,

The coarse-bred son of a livery-stable keeper  
Luxuriant song (65)

It could almost be Chatterton; except that such a likeness depends, not only on the fact that both poets were excluded from the luxury of the world, but on their attitude to luxury, and what their responses would be to an invitation to enjoy it: 'but he was offended at her expressions, 'which seemed to hint he was in want', and assured her he was not hungry' (66).

What Chatterton lacked, in his attitude to fashion, was a feeling for clothes in themselves; just as he lacked a feeling for words in themselves. Words, like the purple and gold material which he bought for his sister, must be accounted for:

I went into the shop to buy it; but it is the most disagreeable colour I ever saw; dead, lifeless, and inelegant. (67)

I employ my money now in fitting myself fashionably; and getting into good company; this last article always brings me in interest.

(68)

and a casual reference to the Rowleyan poetry in a letter home soon after his arrival in London, reflects, firstly, how deeply the Rowleyan poetry was an outcome of the tensions and resentments in living at Bristol; and also a quick glimpse of Chatterton the fortune-hunter, dismissing the poet-priest who had been the source of all his comfort and diversion:

As to Mr.Barrett, Mr.Catcott, Mr.Burgum, etc,etc, they rate literary lumber so low, that I believe an author, in their estimation, must be poor indeed! But here matters are otherwise; had Rowley been a Londoner, instead of a Bristowyan, I could have lived by copying his works. - In my humble opinion, I am under very few obligations to any persons in Bristol.(69)

Eighteenth century adventurers were beset by forgetfulness: they forget spouses, children, and feelings: "A fine story!" exclaims the old nurse to Moll Flanders, as Moll, preparing to hand over her new-born child, yet indulges in some little maternal anguish,

A Fine story! says the Governess, you would see the child, and you would not see the child; you would be Conceal'd and Discover'd both together; these are things impossible my Dear, so you must e'n do as other Conscientious Mothers have done before you; and be contented with things as they must be, tho' they are not as you wish them to be. (70)

Moll at last agrees to put the child out to nurse, after many misgivings and motherly fears, and only after carefully scrutinizing the nurse herself:

The woman was a very wholesome look'd likely woman, a Cottager's wife, but she had very good Cloaths and Linnen, and every thing well about her, and with a heavy heart and many a tear I let her have my Child...

(71)

But by the end of the novel, when Moll is settled in comfort and prosperity, there is no mention of this child who caused her so much heartbreak at parting, even though an ideal relationship with another son is depicted. It is not that the feeling itself is lost, but the idea that the object of the feeling can be so easily substituted, which is the cause of uneasiness in the reading of these adventures. Defoe's Roxana, after

heartily wishing her eldest daughter dead, and achieving her wish through the tenacity and devotion of her maid Amy, can yet organize an occasion at which she can observe her youngest daughter unobserved, and be struck by tender maternal feelings in the contemplation of her, uncomplicated by any remorse for her cruelty towards the elder:

I have not Time here to take notice what a surprize it was to me, to see my Child; how it work'd upon my Affections; with what infinite Struggle I master'd a strong Inclination that I had to discover myself to her; how the girl was the very Counterpart of myself, only much handsomer; and how sweetly and modestly she behav'd; how on that Occasion I resolv'd to do more for her, than I had appointed by Amy, and the like. (72)

This strong tenderness, which could not be aroused by the desperate importunities of the child who needed it, is introduced in the last page of the novel. There is, not a lack of tenderness, but a taut austere tenderness which will not be swayed by importunity or need. From such a viewpoint, the 'Ballad of Charity' becomes not only allied to its time, but the poem where words, emotions and clothes become jarring

fragments within the larger landscape of the poem: It leaves the same uneasy sense of incompleteness as *Roxana* does - the words have not matched the feeling, the generosity has not matched the finery; the gesture has been made, but it has been made in an unexpected direction. Much of Chatterton's poetry receives its effects from his personal tensions - his inability both to accept and defy the functional, to see fashion as merely clothes, poetry as merely words, despite the real and invented 'lumber' with which they are surrounded. Sometimes it becomes apparent that the lumber is becoming a

because the poem is acting out stylistically a

feeling which Chatterton was encountering at the time - that resolutions are just as empty as needs (cf. *Rasselas*); but within the poem, the 'resolution' of the second line quoted conveys this emptiness in a lyrical mode, it becomes part of the technique and mood of the poem - that mood of not quite saying all there is to say about a feeling, of leaving something unsaid, of suggesting feelings beyond the rhetoric of the poem. paltry remedy, ~~which is perhaps all that~~ [See inset]

~~'Aella' is~~ 'There is a somewhat ever in the mind' is an opening-out line, full of possibilities, only to be closed within the

limited confines of a line recommending lawful and prescribed love. But it is the need itself which is the creative force, not its satisfaction. One child is murdered, another loved, the pilgrim's pleas are ignored by the rich Abbot. No-one gives a rent-roll to the Lord, as the good Limitour observes as the Abbot rides away resplendent (74). Chatterton, being needy himself, only dimly appreciated the role of need in poetry; but there are moments, such as those lines from 'Aella', when what begins as the purely functional becomes central to the mood of the poem, and subjugates all the things around it which had been set up as the chief subject or controlling mood. This accident of style falls in neatly with the whole structure of 'Aella', in which what are held up as the correct notions at the beginning of the poem have been uneasily questioned by the end.

not, like other poets, - Francis Thompson for instance - through negligence or a failure of feeling for sound or voice. Chatterton's boredom is elaborate and contrived, he is *boring on purpose*. Even in Chatterton's day, the boredom was not so fraught, so threatening, so open to risks for others as it was for him:

↳ Chatterton cannot shake off the 'lumber' of boredom, as Walpole and Wilde can, and so has to take it with him into the poetry, where it becomes difficult - spelling, heraldic devices, and contrived family trees.

When I had drunk tea, I strolled into the garden - they told me, it was now called the 'pleasure ground' - what a dissonant idea of pleasure - those groves, those allees, where I have passed so many charming moments, are now stripped up, or overgrown; many fond paths I could not unravel, though with a very exact clue in my memory - I met two gamekeepers, and a thousand hares! In the days when all my soul was tuned to pleasure and vivacity (and you will think perhaps it is far from being out of tune yet) I hated Houghton and its solitude - yet I loved this garden; as now, with many regrets, I love Houghton - Houghton, I know not what to call it, a monument of grandeur or ruin!

(76)

That is Horace Walpole writing of his father's house, where the bookish, dreamy, fastidious youth lived under the perpetual cloud of his father's brisk, worldly dominance. He writes wistfully and nostalgically, recalling past hatred and boredom, and there is a great deal of boredom in the creation of nostalgia. Walpole was

one of the earliest dandies. But Chatterton had neither the leisure, the resources, nor indeed the temperament, to be a dandy. There is no pleasure ground anywhere within sight of St. Godwin's convent, not even one inconveniently named and suggestive of past pleasure of a purer and more harmonious kind. The Ballad of Charity is a poem of need, not of excess. When excess enters the convent-ground in the form of the rich Abbott, the effect is to make the need more clamorous and more ugly, as the poor and the worthy and the painstaking will always look in the presence of carelessness, charm and wit. The overgrown garden has become, by Wilde's time, the brilliant artificial conservatory at Selby Royal, but Chatterton is allied not to Dorian Gray but to James Vane, the white angry face at the window, the man with a passionate grievance watching from the shadows, lurking in the bushes, and arbitrarily murdered in the undergrowth. Chatterton's peculiar predicament was to be caught between a degenerating and fatal condition, boredom, and a sensibility, ennui. A personal condition can be transformed into a sensibility by a consummate and knowing

Chatterton is subject to this condition; it is because he feels frustration and boredom so strongly that he has difficulty, until the 'Ballad of Charity', in transforming it into a 'sensibility', unlike Wilde, whose 'ennui' was totally artificial.

artist, like Wilde, but Chatterton would keep getting the two confused, so that his work never manages the generous abandon, the concentrated pose of the superbly mannered literary dandies:

The world has cried out against us both, but it has always worshipped you. It always will worship you. You are the type of what the age is searching for, and what it is afraid it has found. I am so glad that you have never done anything, never carved a statue, or painted a picture, or produced anything outside of yourself! Life has been your art. You have set yourself to music. Your days are your sonnets.

(77)

Chatterton neither transformed his life into a gesture or a pose or, as Wilde put it somewhere, into a warning, nor did he give this lifeless beauty to any of the characters he created: Rowley and Canynge are always moving. They are too good, too austere, and their environment too taut and intellectual, for them to be poses merely - as Dorian Gray's life, from the sitting for the fatal portrait onwards, becomes a constant pose.

And Chatterton was too busy writing poetry to  
become a poem. It is the poetry of a  
transposed and heightened mode and world; but  
it is the sensibility of failed dandyism.

## CHAPTER TWO - NOTES

1. *Thomas Chatterton: Poetical Works, to which is prefixed a life of the author* (Edinburgh, 1795), p. 300. See also *Chronology*, n. 1.
2. "His eccentricities included great reticence, absent-mindedness in company, and solitary walks by the river, when he was said to gesticulate and mutter to himself, whilst above all, 'like all his family, he was so proud'". - J.H. Ingram, *Chatterton and His Poetry* (1916), p. 14.
3. 'Letter to Horace Walpole', 8 April 1769, in *Works I*, p. 271.
4. "When I received this letter, I was going to Paris in a day or two, and either forgot his request... or... deferred complying till my return, which was to be in six weeks" - Walpole, *Letter*, pp. 128 (vol. 16).
5. 'An Excelente Balade of Charitie', l. 29, in *Works I*, p. 646.
6. L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (1953), pp. 269-70.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
8. 'Aella', ll. 85-6, in *Works I*, p. 178.
9. 'Aella', l. 97, in *Works I*, p. 178.
10. 'Aella', ll. 7-12, in *Works I*, p. 175.
11. 'Aella', ll. 101-104, in *Works I*, p. 178.
12. 'The Storie of Wyllyam Canynge', ll. 233-244, in *Works I*, pp. 243-4.
13. Dix, pp. 18-23.
14. 'Apostate Will', l. 25, in *Works I*, p. 1.
15. See 'A Brief Account of William Cannings', in *Works I*, p. 54.
16. 'The Storie of Wyllyam Canynge', ll. 239-244, in *Works I*, p. 244.
17. 'Aella', ll. 51-56, in *Works I*, pp. 176-7.

18. 'A Brief Account of William Cannings', ll. 2-4, in *Works I*, p. 51.
19. 'Aella', l. 81, in *Works I*, p. 177.
20. See M. Dorothy George, 'The Uncertainties of Life and Trade', in *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (1985), pp. 266-7.
21. Meyerstein, pp. 100-1.
22. Gregory, pp. 27-8.
23. Meyerstein, p. 136.
24. 'Happiness. A Poem', ll. 49-60, in *Works I*, p. 405.
25. *Love and Madness*, p. 170.
26. 'On Happieness', ll. 156-162, in *Works I*, p. 241.
27. *Love and Madness*, p. 170.
28. Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (1907), p. 632.
29. 'Aella', ll. 326-349, in *Works I*, pp. 187-8.
30. *Works I*, p. 241.
31. 'Sly Dick', ll. 5-6, in *Works I*, p. 3.
32. *Works I*, p. 61.
33. 'Happiness. A Poem', ll. 61-64, in *Works I*, p. 405.
34. *Thomas Chatterton: Poetical Works* (Edinburgh, 1795), p. 298.
35. "It will be necessary to inform the reader before we proceed further, that in Bristol it is morally impossible to walk straight through a street; the drays which are used there oblige the passenger to travel in this direction:
 



 This inconvenience may indeed be remedied when you are acquainted with the place, and, by the principles of mathematics, know how to accompany the horses". - 'One Hour After Marriage', in the *Town and Country Magazine*, Supplement, 1770; see Meyerstein, p. 13.
36. Meyerstein, p. 17.

37. 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton, Thomas Cary, and others', 6 May 1770, in *Works I*, p.561.
38. 'Letter to Mary Chatterton', 11 July 1770, in *Works I*, p.649.
39. 'An Excelente Balade of Charitie', ll.50-54, in *Works I*, p.647.
40. Ibid., ll.64-5, in *Works I*, p.647.
41. "Mrs Ballance describes him as 'proud as Lucifer', and says he quarrelled with her for calling him 'Cousin Tommy', asking her if she had ever heard of a poet being called *Tommy*. She assured him she knew nothing of poets and only wished he would not set up for a gentleman". - F.R. Dean, *Thomas Chatterton - A Literary MASquerader* (Papers of the Manchester Literary Club, 1937, vol.63), p.126.
42. 'Butte have you noone thatt marriage-blessynges telle?' - 'Aella', l.271, in *Works I*, p.185.
43. 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton, Thomas Cary and others', 6 May 1770, in *Works I*, p.561 - "Dress, which is in Bristol an eternal fund of scandal, is here only introduced as a subject of praise".
44. 'Aella', ll.181-2, in *Works I*, p.181.
45. 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton, Thomas Cary, and others', 6 May 1770, in *Works I*, p.560.
46. Meyerstein points out that many of the phrases used by Chatterton in his letters were "catchwords of the Wilkesites" - Meyerstein, p.336.
47. Meyerstein, p.365.
48. Gregory, p.45; also Chronology, n.19.
49. Chatterton confessed to his mother and sister, to being the author of 'Onn cure Ladies Chirch' and 'Sir Charles Bawdin'. He read the former aloud to his sister and she guessed it was his own work: "He begged to know what reason I had to think so. I added, his style was easily discovered in that poem. He replied, 'I confess I made this, but don't you say anything about it'. When he read the Death of Sir Charles Bawdin to my mother, she admired it, and asked him if he made it. He replied, 'I found the argument and I versified it'". - *Mary Newton's Letter to Mr. Cottle* (Bristol, 1802).
50. Meyerstein, pp.120-1.

51. Meyerstein, p. 50.
52. Ibid.
53. 'Aella', 1.82, in *Works I*, p. 177.
54. 'Apostate Will', 11.3-4, in *Works I*, p. 1.
55. Ibid., 11.15-18, in *Works I*, p. 1.
56. Ibid., 11.25-30, in *Works I*, pp. 1-2.
57. Ibid., 11.35-6, in *Works I*, p. 2.
58. 'Letter to Mary Chatterton', 30 May 1770, in *Works I*, p. 588.
59. 'Apostate Will', 11.51-4, in *Works I*, p. 2.
60. *Works I*, p. 4.
61. *Works I*, pp. 175-9. See also Ch. 5, 'The Tragedy of Aella'.
62. 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton, Thomas Cary, and others', 6 May 1770, in *Works I*, p. 561.
63. Charles Townshend, Chancellor of the Exchequer. See R. J. White, *The Age of George III* (1968), pp. 118-9. Also see 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton, Thomas Cary, and others', 6 May 1770, in *Works I*, p. 560 - "By the means of another bookseller I shall be introduced to Townshend and Sawbridge".
64. Robert Gittings, *John Keats* (1971), p. 105.
65. W. B. Yeats, 'Ego Dominus Tuus', in *Selected Poetry* (1962), p. 79.
66. *Love and Madness*, p. 219.
67. 'Letter to Mary Chatterton', 11 July 1770, in *Works I*, p. 649.
68. 'Letter to Mary Chatterton', 30 May 1770, in *Works I*, p. 587.
69. 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton', 14 May 1770, in *Works I*, p. 572.
70. Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (Oxford 1981), pp. 175-6.
71. Ibid., p. 177.
72. *Roxana* (Oxford 1969), p. 329.

73. 'Aella', ll. 310-11, in *Works I*, p. 187
74. 'An Excelente Balade of Charitie', ll. 85-91, in *Works I*, p. 648.
75. Gregory, p. 154.
76. Walpole, *Correspondence*, p. 349 (vol. 9).
77. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Everyman 1967), p. 248.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE UNKNOWN KNIGHT

The story, so often imitated, itself began as imitation - as an improvement on an occasion; as a jealous emulation of style. George Catcott rode over the new bridge - a deed absurd and daring and - when we know what Catcott looked like - a deed pathetic rather than romantic, for Mr. Catcott was not young, and somewhat misshapen, and his face was long and sour. George Catcott rode over the new bridge - having first borrowed a cart-horse from his partner Burgum - and Thomas Chatterton introduced his first Rowleyan composition to Bristol. The old man acts out the deeds of foolhardy youth; the young man bothers himself with ink and parchment and devious letters to editors. Age is flamboyant and youth is pedantic; or rather - the instinctive flamboyance of youth

is driven underground by that unseemly conduct of age. Already the strange transgressive boundaries of the Rowleyan world are being worked out - of course it will have the ageless, timeless quality of myth, where nothing Canynge or Rowley do will appear ridiculous or unseemly; but it will also take into itself something of that devious underground quality too; it will reach purity through artifice, it will state the feeling of sincerity through the language of denial; Rowley, too, will borrow a cart-horse and ride shakily over the precarious bridge of history and boredom and discontent into the equally precarious world of myth.

Chatterton contrives his world by a continual longing and a continual robbery - he robs language, and muniment-rooms, and other people's occasions. In return he is always betrayed: for to confess is to give the game away; to remain silent is not to get the opportunity to do so. And so those two large tempting possibilities - Confession and Denial - are curtailed, and must be replaced by something else - something more timid but, in the end, more insistent and replete: 'Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it

distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion' (1). Speculations about Chatterton's half-confessions to the authorship of the Rowley poems, his demonstrations of forgery for the benefit of Bristol friends, must therefore be removed straight from the realm of reality into the substance of the myth itself. It was a deliberately assimilated confusion, akin to the ambivalence of Rowley's vision of 'Trouthe'. The attempt behind Chatterton's timidity and inconsistency was merely to 'transform history into nature' (2). But it was difficult to make such a strenuous transformation, when there was History herself, in the form of eighteenth century Bristol and George Symes Catcott, climbing steeples, crossing bridges, alternately threatening and placating, and offering one shillings:

The newspaper contribution at once attracted notice, and enquiries were made at the office in Small Street, just round the corner from Lambert's, for the owner of the pseudonym. The printer could give no information, but after much enquiry it was discovered that 'the person who brought the copy' was a youth between fifteen and sixteen named Thomas Chatterton, a Redcliff youth descended from sextons of the church. He was threatened - 'agreeably to his age and appearance' are Croft's words - as a child, but

'returned nothing but haughtiness and a refusal to give any account'. On the application of milder usage he first said, anxious, no doubt, not to have to produce any originals, that he was employed to transcribe certain ancient MSS. by a gentleman who had engaged him to write love verses... this answer not satisfying the questioners, he said the original of the contribution was found by his father, with many other MSS in a large chest in the upper room over the chapel on the north side of Redcliff Church. This, apparently, was vouchsafed after many promises had been held out to him. It is practically certain that George Catcott, who took him up three weeks or a month later, was the main party to this scrutiny; the questioners, anyhow, were made thoroughly happy by the last admission.

(3)

That passage is one of the earliest of many about Chatterton, which fix the fiction within a situation. We are in Bristol, a Bristol temporarily bemused by an 'antique' discovery; we are - how can we be anywhere else? - in the office of the printer of *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*; and there the interview is taking place. The printer himself is there - he is perhaps a little like Mr. Snagsby in *Bleak House* - timid and tremulous and eager to please; and so is the printer's boy, to whom Chatterton first delivered the narrative - he is pert and knowing. Chatterton has met him already - in Mr. Lambert's kitchen, where he was forced to eat with him; he is to meet him again - in

Mrs. Ballance's dwelling, where he is obliged to sleep with him. The world, for Thomas Chatterton, seems to be full of such boys, who eat and sleep and seem perfectly content with their lot (4). Mr. George Catcott is present, and already in his imagination he is collecting ancient manuscripts in their tens and hundreds. And perhaps - if we want a villain of the piece, as Meyerstein himself does (5) - Mr. Barrett was there too - more likely, in many ways, an instigator of the 'enquiries' and interview than Catcott.

Mr. William Barrett, with his wry face and his ironical intelligent voice - so like Thomas Rowley, it was almost as if that spirit had visited the musty office to see this christening of his fiction - would be thinking of his library and his History of Bristol, and when the questioning became too insulting or accusing, he would be very kind and placating, like Cranmer questioning Catherine Howard.

The passage is interesting on several accounts. Not only does it place the Rowley controversy within the atmosphere of eighteenth century Bristol, but it places it with a cloudy hesitancy which belies this

solid claim as a particular literary landmark. For instance, who was the organizer of the meeting? Where was it held? What are we to surmise from that hint of brutality which makes us think at once of the headmaster's room and the sinister antechamber of a Tudor Court? - which depicts Chatterton as part schoolboy in disgrace, part traitor on trial? Meyerstein's language is itself evasive - his frequent use of quotation, his use of the passive. Within it we see both the ramifications and the processes of the myth: Chatterton is linked irrevocably to Bristol, to History, and to St. Mary Redcliffe - 'a Redcliff youth descended from sextons of the church'. And then a certain decision about his poetry is forced upon him; - like torturers questioning traitors, Mr. Catcott and the printer and the other representatives of Bristol have decided what they want to hear, and they are prepared to threaten, cajole and manipulate until they hear it. They reject as unsuitable for their purposes, firstly, silence and complete mystery; and secondly, the offer of a gentleman who also commissioned love verses. This bait of Chatterton's is clever but

unsuccessful - he was thinking, no doubt, of his friend Baker in America, for whom he really did compose love poems (6); he was thinking that perhaps by mentioning love poems he might divert his questioners' thoughts from the ancient manuscripts; it was also a subtle confession, for by mentioning the transcription of manuscripts and the composing of love-poems in the same breath, it is an easy step to guess that the transcriber and the poet are one and the same; and also beyond all these ploys and random devices, there was a nostalgic idea in his mind of a literary gentleman who would indeed employ him as poet - he was thinking of Walpole and of Canynge.

But the questioners in the printer's office did not want a literary gentleman. It was easier to deal with a haughty youth than with a literary gentleman. Literary gentlemen were notoriously splenetic and remote; nor could they be bullied or silenced with shillings. It is beside the point that Chatterton was desperate 'not to have to produce any originals'; since in this desire he and the gentlemen entirely concurred. What they wanted was an inanimate but

inexhaustible source of manuscripts. And at last there it is - blabbed out in a great rush, - and no King's councillor could feel more 'thoroughly happy by the admission' of plots, times, names of fellow conspirators, names of the Queen's lovers; nor could the traitor himself feel more absurdly joyous on hearing the strangely confining yet releasing admission pouring from his lips, - as both gentlemen and poet felt when those words, the founding-stone of the Rowleyan myth, to be repeated time and time again, in biographies and constant re-tellings of the story, came tumbling from the poet's mouth into the close, expectant air of the printer's office - 'in a large chest in the upper room over the chapel on the north side of Redcliff Church'.

The myth, then, is a conspiracy which exists in the minds of others beside the creator of it; indeed, this incident shows how the Bristol literati were not merely concurrers in the myth, but were themselves creators of it: it is the poet who concurs:

{ Does the boy blunder, blurt out this, blab that,  
'Break down in the other, as beginners will?

All's candour, all's considerateness - 'No haste!'  
'Pause and collect yourself! We understand!  
'That's the bad memory, or the natural shock,  
Or the unexplained phenomena!

(7)

Browning said that the episode in the printer's office was the beginning of the end for Chatterton, he could come to no good after that - after being forced by his elders to say he was the discoverer of the Rowley poems, thus deviating from the Truth. His subsequent departure from Bristol and the rest of his career in London, says Browning, was all an effort to recapture Truth, to get back to the state of purity and poetry which had existed before that fatal occasion. This aim was realized by his death, which was the triumph of Morality over Intellect. (8)

But if myth is a conspiracy and a compromise, then the Truth itself is at best a fiction, at worst - or at its most irrelevant - a tangible quality which one tries to capture. Indeed Truth, if one transforms one's life into fiction, must always be an ominous and uneasy companion, appearing now as hunger, now as suicide, now

as the whole fabric of myth-making collapsing about one ('My name is Aaron Crucifix').

What Chatterton and the Bristol gentlemen were engaged in on that christening of Rowley's origins, was not truth or dishonesty, but purely a matter of style: how shall we present this discovery which serves the interests of us all? What history shall we explain it by? Since both denial and confession are out of the question, what way out shall we devise? The decisions which were reached in that shoddy busy affluent office on that day in 1768 were as strenuous as any of the processes which created the poems themselves; and Thomas Rowley was to be endowed with a memory of this occasion: write as you will, said the cajoling Bristolian gentlemen; but remember your origins and your loyalties and the tensions which spring from them; remember that you come from a chest in the muniment room over the north porch of St. Mary Redcliffe - a confession wrung from you after a tortuous examination; remember that Mr. Barrett is writing a History of Bristol and Mr. Catcott collects antiquities and that at some point you shall have to share a room with the printer's boy, in one

of his many menial manifestations; remember that Bristol is a ridiculous, prosperous, incongruous place; and that nobody there can walk in a straight line; and that they are all crazy to excess on the subject of fashion; and that once Mr. Catcott climbed the steeple in the dead of night; and that Thomas Chatterton's father used to swagger through the streets with his pot-companions; and that Thomas Chatterton's grandmother smokes a clay-pipe. And don't forget, said the encouraging gentlemen, that we rejected Mr. Walpole before ever he rejected you.

Thomas Rowley, the subject of these injunctions, had earned his position at Court only after years of neglect at the hands of mediocrity and ignorance: he was born at Norton Malreward, educated at the convent of St. Kenna, and was to die at Westbury. By the time of the meeting in the printer's office in Small Street only a handful of work had been written, but Rowley makes his entrance into the bustling streets of Bristol with a great mantle of history and age and trouble

and fluctuations in fortune suffusing him. His 'Brief Account of William Cannings' is cited as a fragment, as being part of the larger 'Life of Thomas Rowlie Preeste' (9). There is, we are being asked to believe, a finished story somewhere, but where it is, how it shall unfold and how it shall end we have no idea. At the same time the story's tone has the confidence, the nostalgia, of completion. The title of the fragment is, 'A short Account of Mr. William Canynge, an Opulent Merchnt. Native of the City of Bristol, and sole Founder of Saint Mary Redcliff Church in the same city, extracted from the Life of Thomas Rowlie Priest, and principle Author of the Eclogues Poems etc, contain'd in this Book'.

The freedom evident in such a title is in direct opposition to Mr. Barrett's complaint that Chatterton should deliver the manuscripts in their entirety 'with a fair account of them' (10). It wasn't only the impossibility of doing this, owing to the fact that they had not yet been written, which made the suggestion unfeasible; it was the very notion of producing poetry on demand, without that generous opening-out

towards the limits of the boundaries of history, the boundaries of the myth itself. The poetry made its own confines - it could speak of itself as a finished text, containing poems and eclogues as well as a completed life of the poet; and it broke out of its own confines also. The book having been claimed as complete, its completion can then be ignored, and a liberating fragmentation take place. 'After this', announces Rowley, speaking of his own life and referring to an unwritten, unacknowledged episode; and so drifting in at the tail-end and yet also at the beginning of History; - 'after this I was Fader Confessour to Mastere Roberte, and Mastere Wm. (Cannings)' (11). And soon we realize that the 'after this' refers to his service to Master Robert and William's father. That was also a troublesome and difficult era, but Rowley has to draw demarcations somewhere, for how many other tyrannous Roberts and Williams has he had to serve before reaching the golden age of the present subject of his praise? 'Master Robert was a Manne after his Fadre's owne Harte, greedie of Gayne, and sparynge of Almes Deedes; but Master William was mickle

Courteous, and gave me manie Markes in my neede' (12). The myth begins simply enough, however complex it is to become: goodness and wickedness, generosity and meanness, a comparison between two brothers. But at last the wicked brother died, at the age of twenty-two, having first been persuaded by William to bequeath his long-suffering confessor one hundred marks in his will. Rowley goes to thank his new master, and to offer his services, and the great friendship and patronage begins. The passage which follows is one of the rare moments when we hear Rowley and Canynge talking to one another. It is, perhaps, a few weeks after Master Robert's death, in an antechamber in the 'greete rudde House neere to the waterre' where Canynge was born, and to which he has at last returned, after the death of wife, brother and father, and with his vast inheritance with which he is already transforming the Court to suit his own temperament and to banish those ignoble and ungenerous days forever. The direction of life has changed for Canynge. His wife, whom he loved, is dead; his brother and father, with whom he remonstrated and whose

viciousness he placated and deplored, are dead too. Both Love and Tyranny are over; there is only poetry left. And so he transformed the Red House into a freemason's lodge and summoned Thomas Rowley to an interview. It was almost Epiphany, 1432. In London the boy-King Henry VI was caught between bickering uncles. But at the Court of Canynge there was quiet, after years of such bickering and unease. William Canynge turned to greet Thomas Rowley. Canynge's figure was tall and stately, his eyes and hair were jet black, and he turned to welcome the courtier with a graceful leaning air which, if it were not so dignified, mused the critical priest who was soon to save him from an unwanted marriage, might be called womanish (13). 'Fadre', said William Canynge, 'I have a Crotchet in my Brayne, that will neede your aid' (14). ('I have a work in hand', Thomas Chatterton told his mother) (15). 'Mastre William', replied Thomas Rowley, already looking warmer and better-fed under the new regime and the promise of membership in the Freemasons; already, perhaps, developing decidedly sycophantic traits - 'Master William, if you

command mee, I will goe to Roome for you'.

But it was not only the language of the sycophant. Rowley was never so coddled and so assured as the natural sycophant, for he remembered needier days, and that is why his sycophancy was so strange and so alluring.

It enveloped not merely the courtier's desire for comfort and security, but the poet's too, and the poet's promise of largeness and freedom and abundance once it is granted; which was why he could stand in the Red Lodge and promise - almost plead - to go as far away from it as possible, under its auspices and so within its confines.

But Master William, indulgently and shrewdly recognizing sycophancy - but only, alas, the Courtier's kind, - replied in humorous vein; - 'Not so farre distaunt'. The shrewd, kindly words from the charming and worldly merchant prince swept a warning rush of cold air into the still and luxuriant room. The room, for an instant, seemed incredibly stifling to Thomas Rowley, but it was the cool air of denial which had made him think it. And then, just as suddenly, the breeze was gone, and there were only the warm protective flames, and William Canynge's

dark eyes upon him, wishing him well. But it was a premonition of that silent compromise which later had to be made between them as surely as between Chatterton and the Bristol elders. Like Chatterton, Rowley offered to the overseer of his poetry a potential story, a possible existence which was ignored: a visit to Rome was brushed aside as firmly as Chatterton's offer of a gentleman who employed him to write love verses. Rowley's life, like Chatterton's, was to be linked to Bristol, to churches, to antiquities: 'hee tolde mee I must goe to all the Abbies and Pryories, and gather together auncient drawynges, if of any <sup>A</sup>ccount; at any <sup>P</sup>rice' (16). And so Rowley obeys, and does his master credit, and later presents him with his 'Bristowe Tragedie' which is very well received. But as he travelled through the parishes and priories of England, collecting drawings for the glory of the red house by the water, that kindly, dismissive phrase of Canynge's was never quite banished from his thoughts: 'not so farre distaunt'. With those words his art is circumscribed, and a tension is planted between Court and poet which is to reach its most acute point in

'Aella'. The poet, grateful though he is, can never forget that certain rich possibilities have been denied him. Thomas Rowley will never get to Rome; Thomas Chatterton will never travel as tutor to a rich young gentleman, or cross the seas as sailor-physician (17). And by such a limitation the very nature of the poetry is decided: it is to be the poetry of need, not of excess; of longing, of the child looking through the sweet-shop window; it is to produce the note of aspiration and regret together -

...oh- y  
I wish to be more greate,  
In ~~tenure~~ Tenure and Estate.

(18)

It is to open out into the largest possibilities and just as suddenly close in on itself. It is to live by its need, and to die only on the application of need's relief; until in 'Aella' and the 'Ballad of Charity', the poetry is to act out its own dilemma, as a fine need stifled by a paltry remedy.

But in 1462, when Rowley presented 'The Bristowe Tragedie' to Canynge, after returning finally from his tour, this idea had been only vaguely registered, and had not yet become fully integrated into the texture of the poetry. The poem is a delicate compliment to a beneficent protector - Canynge in the poem is given the role of pleader with King Edward for Sir Charles Baldwin's life. The poem is set in September 1461, when King Edward came to Bristol, 'where, by his order were beheaded Sir Baldwin Fulford, knight; and two Esquires, - Bright and John Heysant; and the same day the King departed' (19). So Rowley is presenting the Court of Canynge with a ballad about an event which happened the year before: it therefore occupies the same position for Rowley in Canynge's world as the 'bridge narrative' did for Chatterton in eighteenth century Bristol: it is an imitation of a recent event. Rowley was sent on his tour in 1432; it is now 1462 - his life, therefore, assumes the timeless quality of myth; whereas his poetry celebrates the solid and the historically real. As an introduction of his poetry to the Red Lodge after his long

journey, and as a means of gaining acknowledgement of himself as a poet after the continual production of prose and drawings, it was an astute move. Chatterton imposes upon Rowley the privileges of a long life and a freedom in time, if not of space. If Rome is denied him, old age is not; neither is a house on the hill where 'the Ayr is mickle keen' (20); neither are 'some Markes' with which to repair it, and buy it from a 'personne greedie of Gaine' on a lease for 99 years (21). And as Canon of Westbury, from his house on the hill, Rowley writes his account as an old man, with all his poetry written, and his story completed. Canynge is dead, and Rowley is now 'hasting to the grave himself' (22), and so can tenderly and at his leisure recall his youthful adventures: how he conspired to help Canynge avoid the marriage King Edward had determined upon between him and a lady of the Woodvilles (23); how he sold his translation of 'The Battle of Hastings' to Master Pelham of Ashlie, whose wife was of the family of the Fiscamps, and who was so enraged at the lines referring to her ancestor in the poem that

when Rowley arrived at his house for payment  
he was hounded from it:

I did goe to Ashlie to Master Pelhamme to be  
paid.... but his Ladie beyng of the Familie of the  
Fiscamps of whom somethynge is sayde in Booke the fyrste,  
he tolde me he had brent it, and woulde have mee brent  
too if I dyd not avaunt. Duryng this Dinn hys Wife  
dyd come out, and make a dinn to speke by a Figurre,  
woulde have oversounded the Bells of our Ladye of the  
Clyffe. I was faygne content to get awaie in a safe  
Skynne. (24)

Rowley for a moment adopts the ridiculous  
pose of a Catcott - being chased from a  
household by an angry man and his hysterical  
wife, a household he has crawled to, asking  
for payment. An unseemly domestic scene, one  
surely echoed in the middle of the 'Bristowe  
Tragedie':

Thenne Florence rav'd as anie madde,  
And dydd her tresses tere;  
'O<sup>h</sup>! staine, mye husbände! lorde! and lyfe!' -  
Syr Charles thenne dropt a teare.

'Tyll tyredd oute wythe ravyng loud,  
Shee fellen onne the flore;  
Syr Charles exerted alle hys myghte  
And march'd fromm oute the dore. (25)

As a parting from domestic bliss and security it sets the tone for Rowley as misogynist. It pushes domestic love to its limits and reveals hysteria and indignity. In 'Aella', this attitude is to be more fully established by Celmonde's 'In marriage, blessings are but few, I trowe' (26). Rowley is after all a priest, and he has suffered neglect and indifference during years of familial situations - first pushed to the background by Canynge's brother and father, then by Canynge's devotion to his wife and happiness with her. It was not merely devotion to his patron's interests which urged Rowley to rush Canynge to sanctuary in order to escape the ties of matrimony. As 'a holy priest unmarriageable' (27), Canynge was safe against the tyranny of family ties, and the Red Lodge was finally secured irrevocably as a sanctuary for poets and priests, and the pure interchange of ideas amongst austere and monkish men. Chatterton's contract to Lambert was based on a similar framework: 'Taverns he shall not frequent, at Dice he shall not play, Fornication he shall not commit, Matrimony he shall not contract' (28). Chatterton took these enforced

negatives from the office at Lambert's, where they appeared as restraint, into the Court of Canynge, where they became the very essence of freedom.

But after the occasion in the printer's office, this development was forced to go further. It was no longer the poetry of a youth borrowing his master's time and bestowing it upon his own world, so that restraint became liberation. He had already found that the transition was not so simple - that something of the underhand means of production in Mr. Lambert's office, and something of the resentment which went with it, found its way into Rowley's mind and voice as he thought of how Canynge, noble gentleman though he was, had yet kept him waiting for years while he placated his family, and even now put restrictions on his vast, unlimited, unvoiced longing. But now he had been surprised in the very act of appropriation. And with the making of Rowley public the poetry is suddenly forced into another gear. It brings the idea of threatened privacy within the work itself. The more threatened Rowley is, and the more uncertain of his position, the more publicly

he acts: his work after this point becomes much more of a performance, as in 'Aella' and 'The Parliament of Sprites'. He no longer writes his poetry alone while he is collecting drawings, and then presents it to Canynge discreetly; he now produces it at a Court entertainment - just as Chatterton no longer composes entirely in secret in Mr. Lambert's office, but has the expectant eyes of Bristol upon him. Rowley's life and art was altered by that encounter with the Bristol gentlemen in the printer's office. Already, within the Rowleyan world, the first part of 'The Battle of Hastings<sup>2</sup>' had been acted out, families had risen and been ruined, Sir Charles Baldwin was rotting on Kynwulph Hill and the High Cross and the Minster Gate, and the first part of the tournament had been played out. But the unknown knight of the title has not yet appeared. When he does appear - in the second canto produced the following year (1769) - he is to appear magnificently and with the most auspicious arrival in the world, only to fail (29). (William Henry Ireland, in his 'Neglected Genius', has as the flower of his collection a poem

celebrating Chatterton as 'the unknown knight' - he is 'the youth divine' who rides in and takes all the honours) (30). But the tournament where his presence is only hinted at is child's play compared to the tournament at which he appears:

For his Life to John Rumsee he rendered his thanks,  
Descended from Godred the King of the Manks - }

(31)

And, like the first 'Battle of Hastings', there is a listing of the external trappings of arms, as though there is something in the centre which will be arrived at in time, if only he keeps enumerating names and families and armour:

In <sup>c</sup>heckee of Redde and Silver sheeninge -  
With Steede and Gold trappings beseeming a <sup>k</sup>ynge  
A gilded fine Adder twyned Round his Swerde <sup>e</sup>

(32)

But after the poetry has been made public; -  
when the unknown knight has been  
acknowledged, the adder, with its Rowleyan  
spelling, is incorporated into the very  
texture of the poetry itself; it is no longer  
a device upon a sword but a recurrent and  
central image; it is the adder of 'Aella', of  
Celmonde, of the voice which questions  
'Trouthe': (33).

{Th'rowe the marke Shade of twestyn<sup>e</sup> Trees he rydes;  
The flemed Owlette flapps her Eve-speckte Wynges;  
The Lordynge Toade in alle hys Passes bides,  
The berten Meders atte hym darte the Stynges.

(34)

And so as the apprentice and the  
Bristol gentlemen shook hands with the  
printer of Felix Farley and nodded to his  
errand-boy, and turned out together into the  
bright clear October sunlight, they were all  
more or less aware that some decision had  
been reached; those clear Augustan skies, for  
Mr. Lambert's apprentice, were never to look  
quite the same again; they had merged with the

landscape of the Red Lodge, with its lawns that ran to the water's edge, and its ravens and adders and swords glistening in the sun, and so both, from now on, were to seem infinitely darker and more complex; that street, so near to Mr. Lambert's office, where Mr. George Catcott shook his hand and winked and nodded and hinted suggestively at further meetings - perhaps the young discoverer would like to meet his brother, the Reverend Mr. Alexander? (35) - or his friend Mr. Barrett the surgeon, who had a library filled with books? (for that strange dubious figure, whose spirit had dominated the printer's office, had by this time disappeared along with Rowley himself); - those Bristol streets, where formerly Sir Charles Baldwin had walked to a pure heroic death without looking to left or right, had been changed forever: such a procession would be impossible from now on; Rowley is always looking about him; the nature of heroism itself has changed. The unknown knight has emerged from the shadows of complete anonymity. The child's game has been routed by the adult world - they have entered irretrievably into the lumber-room; they have

surprised the tripod where the magic potions are being arranged and the spell worked out. But they have not overturned it; they recognize in the child's game some qualities which could be assimilated into their own; they realize that some agreement may be reached. It is not merely a matter of bartering qualities - their sophistication for the game's naivety, their surprising naivety for the precocious sophistication of the child's game; it is an agreement by which sophistication and naivety merge into one another, so that we are never quite sure who is duping whom:

Barrett had no use for poems, unless they bore directly on his history; he wanted the entire collection of Rowley's MSS. Frequently, Seyer tells us, he told Chatterton how absurdly he acted in bringing him these piecemeal, and that, if he would bring the whole together with a fair account of them, he would run the risk of printing them and Chatterton should have the profits. (36)

And again:

Barrett never saw such eyes; one was still more remarkable than the other. You might see the fire roll at the bottom of them, as you sometimes do in a black eye, but never in grey ones, which his were.

Barrett....would differ from him to make him earnest and see how wonderfully his eye would strike fire.

(37)

All sources agree that Barrett was a shrewd, intelligent and worldly man. He knew Latin and was surrounded by books - which gave him, strange as it may seem to us, a romantic glow for the apprentice-poet; for the poet - whose fiery eyes so fascinated Barrett - sensed that myth is built upon things more substantial than brilliant eyes, important though those are: books, a house, a lumber-room, a Latin phrase corrected and improved; words not only as fragmented images but 'the whole together with a fair account of them'. After this occasion in the printer's office and the meeting with Mr. Barrett the poet was to carry with him the possibility of accounting for words, as well as shillings and for hours spent away from Mr. Lambert's office. To argue with someone on purpose to see their eyes strike fire is the act perhaps of a manipulator; it is also the tactic of a lover. Mr. Barrett, with his books and his knowledge and his tacit

quizzical insight into what was going on, was yet also a lover held in thrall. And so it is hopeless to speculate on victim and dupe, as futile as dwelling on truth and sincerity. These severe qualities had been softened and at the same time made more difficult and austere by that decision taken in the printer's room, that the poems in question came not from a personality but from a chest in a muniment room which no-one, of course, thought to visit. The apprentice knew, as he made his way back to the lawyer's office on that October afternoon, that 'Trouthe' for Thomas Rowley would never be the same again. Nothing was obviously changed. The printer went back to his arrangements for the next edition of *Felix Farley*; Mr. Barrett was still planning his *History of Bristol*; Mr. Catcott returned to his pewtering business and told his partner, Mr. Burgum, that they had found out the origin of the bridge narrative, so curious a reminder of his own recent adventure, and that the youth who produced it was worth cultivating and even introducing to the Reverend Mr. Alexander. And meanwhile in London Wilkes' fortunes were temporarily at an ebb (38), and Horace

Walpole was confined to his couch with the gout, and missed a great ball at Sion House because of it (39).

But beneath the surface - though who can speak of surfaces in that dismissive fashion when the surface itself creates the inner world of myth - the lumber-room, the printer's office, the oddly brilliant eyes? The surface, then, had changed, and Rowley's character and landscape and temperament had changed with it. He is no longer entirely secret, the solace and passion of a lonely child; he is 'both discovered and conceal'd together' (40). His name is heard to be uttered by at least ten people in Bristol, and it is not to be supposed that such people would be content with the utterance alone. With it went certain expectations and certain demands. His status is altered with these duties, for his author is no longer a mere apprentice wasting time, but an apprentice with an uneasy precarious position in Bristol - working for Lambert, putting the world to rights with his fellow apprentices, dining with Mr. Barrett, walking and discussing set topics with Catcott; - as strange and tenuous

a position as Rowley's own at the Court of  
Canynge.

CHAPTER THREE - NOTES

1. Roland Barthes, 'Myth Today', in *Mythologies* (1973), p.129.
2. *Mythologies*, p.141.
3. Meyerstein, p.110.
4. "He was obliged to sleep in the same room with the foot boy, and take his meals with the servants". - Dix, p.25.
5. Meyerstein, p.141.
6. "Soon after he left school, he corresponded with a boy, who had been his bed-fellow while at Colston's, and was bound apprentice to a merchant at New York...At the desire of this friend, he wrote love verses to be transmitted to him, and exhibited as his own. It is remarkable, that when first questioned concerning the old poems, he said he was engaged to transcribe them for a gentleman, who also employed him to write verses on a lady with whom he was in love". - Gregory, p.22. See also *Works I*, pp.165,173 & 256.
7. Robert Browning, 'Mr.Sludge, the Medium', in *The Poems of Robert Browning*(Oxford 1962), p.500.
8. Donald Smalley (ed.), *Browning's Essay On Chatterton* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1948), pp.105-134.
9. *Works I*, p.51-7.
10. Meyerstein, p.141.
11. 'A Brief Account of William Cannings', in *Works I*, p.51.
12. Ibid.
13. See *Works I*, p.134.
14. 'A Brief Account of William Cannings', in *Works I*, p.51
15. Dix, p.6.
16. 'A Brief Account', in *Works I*, p.51.
17. See Ch.7, n.8 & 9.
18. 'Eclogue the Third', ll.83-4, in *Works I*, p.315.

19. Samuel Seyer, *Memoirs Historical and Topographical of Bristol and its Neighbourhood, from the earliest period down to the Present Time* (Bristol, 1821), p. 190.
20. 'A Brief Account', in *Works I*, p. 55.
21. Ibid.
22. 'Lyfe of W: Canynge -by Rowlie', in *Works I*, p. 233.
23. 'A Brief Account', in *Works I*, p. 54.
24. Ibid., p. 55.
25. 'Bristowe Tragedie', ll. 253-260, in *Works I*, p. 15.  
 "Chatterton can write well while he is busying himself with solo melodramatics, but he just does not know how to handle an interpersonal and emotional scene such as the final confrontation of Bawdin and Florence, so the verse movement lapses into jingle and the poem becomes distressingly comic". - Robert Nye, *The Sleepless Soul that perished in his pride* (Article in *The Times*, August 15, 1970).
26. 'Aella', l. 272, in *Works I*, p. 185.
27. 'Nowe Brodher in the Chyrche I amme safe, an hollie Preeste unmarriageabil'. - 'Lyfe of W: Canynge', in *Works I*, p. 233.
28. Meyerstein, p. 63.
29. 'The Tournament. An Interlude', in *Works I*, pp. 282-90.
30. W.H. Ireland, *Neglected Genius; A Poem, Illustrating the Untimely and Unfortunate Fate of many British Poets; from the Period of Henry the Eighth to the Aera of the Unfortunate Chatterton* (1812).
31. 'The Tournament', ll. 39-40, in *Works I*, p. 24.
32. 'The Tournament', ll. 76-8, in *Works I*, p. 25.
33. See Ch. 5, 'The Tragedy of "Aella"'.  
X
34. 'The Tournament. An Interlude', ll. 55-8, in *Works I*, p. 285,
35. Alexander Catcott, the eldest brother of George Catcott, was the Vicar of Temple Church from July 1766 until his death in 1779. - Meyerstein, p. 306. See also List of Characters, n. 3.
36. Meyerstein, p. 141.

37. Meyerstein, p. 524.
38. Walpole, *Correspondence*, p. 19 (vol. 23).
39. *Ibid.*, p. 61 (vol. 23).
40. *Moll Flanders* (Oxford 1981), p. 175.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STORY OF WILLIAM CANYNGE

The Red House, Bristol, 1430

My dear Rowley,

My father is dead. He sent for me at seven o' clock this morning as I was on my way to chapel. The message was brought to me by Iscam, who would tell me nothing except that my father had sent for me. One would have thought ours was the King's Court, so importantly did our good Iscam usher me to that chamber, tight-lipped and mysterious, and prefiguring change in his dear solemn face. My father was, as you know, a dark man and very stern in his appearance. On his deathbed that darkness and sternness was

still apparent, but so shrivelled and helpless that he appeared part a monster, part a pathetic supplicant, such as we two have seen many times in this vicinity, and succoured too, as well as was in our power, and in despite of my father and Robert.

My father lay in that dark room of death, and his thoughts were, as they have ever been, of money. 'My son', he said, 'I must now pay my debt'. But what a debt was this one, - to Nature and to Heaven, from one who had never spent an unnecessary mark in his life! Is the lack of actual worldly indebtedness a dissipation really, and is extravagance a kind of generosity from an unlimited store, and a method of payment more pleasing to God? We can discuss this question when we meet, but for my father it quite clearly admitted of no discussion. 'Do not be foolish about expenditure', he said, 'but be cautious and aquire much gain, as I have done. I leave you 30,000 marks with 7000 more through usury. Robin's estate is mighty and the lands unbounded. I have been the richest man in the King's land albeit not the happiest'. That was the nearest he came to expressing any regret. Caution and



<sup>c</sup>  
a<sub>q</sub>quisition was his last counsel, and as  
befitting a son, caution and acquisition was  
what I promised. He died at the tenth hour.

My dear Rowley, I must speak the  
truth and admit that I cannot be sorry.  
Nothing could be more unfortunate than my  
father's temper, and he never loved me. His  
last thoughts were for Robin - or rather, for  
Robin's estates. I remember how they both  
despised us for our friendship and our love  
of learning all those years ago when we were  
boys together at the White Friars, and how  
they always disdained you, my only friend at  
that time. Such thoughts are sorrowful, and  
yet they endear you to me more than ever, and  
my thoughts fly to our youth, and poetry, and  
our long talks.

My brother John is left portionless,  
and dependent upon my bounty. I am  
frightened by these riches. Rowley, if you  
are in health, as I pray you are, hasten to  
me.

William Canynge

Gloucester, 1431.

Dear Rowley,

Here I am and married. Epiphany was the day. How times are changed! - nothing but fiddles and bagpipes from morning to night. Two mansions, seventeen ships, and a manor-house, together with 700 marks. I have given back the lands to my dear wife and the marks to her brother. Such happiness so soon after neglect and constraint! You must relieve my tenants of their debts. Give all the Lammas-tide rent to those people of Chewe Manoure whose children are to marry - let them have weddings as joyous as my own. Let old William Cooke open his cellar and pantry to all comers. Give new white garments and marks to the needy and let the fiddlers entertain the crowd. Do not take it amiss, my dear Rowley, that I thus make you my servant. Our long friendship will contain servitude.

Wm. Canynge.

Bristol, 1431.

My dear Rowley ,

How little is the lying tale of Fortune to be credited.. My wife, my dearest soul, is dead. Come to me, and assuage my grief, for I am not the man I once was. Brother, father, wife, - those two former I never loved, the latter I adored, yet what is love or the lack of it in the face of death? I feel my death in me, yet I feel also the need to build something that will not die. Worship, buildings, poetry, friendship, these are the things that last. My sorrow shall not create more - my sorrow shall exist in itself, while worship and buildings and friendship and poetry grow up around it.

If you come through Keynsham call on Yeoman Stanton and discharge his rent. I know you love to convey glad tidings.

I miss your company and your counsel.

Wm. Canynge.

The Red Lodge, 1432

Dearest Rowley,

I have your letter from Bath, and am thankful for your encouragement and approval of my designs here. My mason's lodge was opened on the vigil of the Epiphany, a day imprinted on my heart forever, and now doubly sacred. Seven and twenty friars, sixteen gentlemen and three brother aldermen made up the assembly. I spoke of the use of the arts to improve trade. The friars gawped, the gentlemen listened, and the councilmen fell asleep. I had prepared in Latin a paper about the aims of the company and this I read out. It was on that favourite subject of ours - how this noble soul of Man is kept in subjection to the gross humours and desires of the body - those humours which ascend into the brain and play havoc there, hindering the bright pure spirit of Man and cooling the juices of his noble fantasy; but how some men are set apart by their wit and knowledge, with vapours as subtle and fine as the dew which ascend the sun-beams; and these it is who are ordained to bring into the open

mysteries which are otherwise hidden and lost. Those gross others who were subject to baser passions, I said, might just as well be hewers of wood or tillers of the field - and then I added that I was sure there were none of that sort *here*, for some of the company, especially those who had been asleep, I thought looked rather slighted at this. My dear Rowley, looking round at that polite or sleeping company I wished you could be with me, to help me with the Latin and perhaps read out the paper in your own inimitable clever style. Then everything was approved and framed. We shall meet every Thursday. You shall have an account of the next.

Wm. Canynge.

The Red Lodge, 1432

Dearest Rowley,

On Thursday we had a full Lodge - two hundred and thirty friars besides others - gentlemen, masons, carpenters and dealers. Over my great seat was depicted Architectura

in a Saxon habit: I opened the house with a long speech setting forth my willingness to serve the Church, and other things. Then your drawings were shown and considered, but your last being the delight of not just myself but the whole company, the rest were set aside. The land is bought, the masons hired and all things in readiness. Now for a wondrous building to astound the eye. Write, my dear Rowley, an interlude to be played upon the laying of the first stone of the building. Iscam spoke much in your praise on Thursday, and in such well chosen words as did praise himself. But he is cunning: I had spoken of my desire for you to write an Interlude, and Iscam is anxious to be included. So write a great part for Iscam: you know his innocent vanity, and such is his latest desire. I forbid any excuses for absenting yourself at the laying of the foundation. Sister Agnes can spare Brother Robin for the feast. Come in two days' time.

Wm. Canynge. (1)

Thomas Rowley held out these letters from his dead master and patron and surveyed

them as fragments in a long and curious life. The wind, which he had grown used to hearing almost continuously since he had lived in lonely eminence on Redcliffe Hill, swept around his house, and he heard no other sound, unless it were the servant bringing his frugal meal - frugal not through poverty or meanness, but because Rowley these days had no bodily hunger. His hunger was all for History and for the unsettled account he had with it. He spent his days amidst parchments and ink, and he was not afraid of the ghost of William Canynge appearing in the doorway at the top of that narrow draughty staircase instead of the servant. William Canynge had ever been an affable and humorous personage, whereas the servant was rather dour. But what Canynge represented - history, myth, poetry, the possibility of one human life containing them all - Rowley was not so sure about them. And, looking back over his career as poet for the Red Lodge, Rowley felt that it was possibility that Canynge represented more than anything else, not only for those sweeping forces which were Rowley's deep concern, but mirth and grief and generosity and meanness and domesticity and

austerity. Canynge's character, Rowley thought, had been infinitely suggestive; and curiously enough, at the same time it had been suggestible, so that Canynge, as a boy lounging with Rowley in the Redcliffe meadows, had caught the older, poorer boy's passion for poetry, but no sooner had he done so than he seemed to become Poetry himself, so that it was Rowley who was held in thrall. Rowley remembered thinking up daring and enlightening subjects for discussion, merely to watch Canynge's dark eyes glow with interest or pleasure. The entire colour of the world could change under Canynge's mirth or grief. Rowley, glancing over his handful of letters, recalled those two famous Epiphanies of Canynge's youth - the first a riot of colour and sound, with nothing but fiddles and bagpipes from morning to night, and the Lammas-tide rent being dispensed with for marriages, as though the whole world were a wedding-party; and the next one dark, not with the sombre darkness of grief, but with the bright almost plumaged darkness of grief assimilated, grief ennobled and enshrined - 'Mie owne Dole shalle ne bee cause of Dole'.

Rowley put aside the letters and began to write about his friend: William Canynge was a merchant of the city of Bristol and five times its mayor, and when he died he left vast estates to his five sons and he made Thomas Rowley executor. He had manors at Horsefield and Wye, eleven houses in Redcliffe Street, nine shops in Temple Street, and twelve long Halls for Cloth workers. He had a fleet of ships, with names like the Galllott, the Katharine and the Mary Redcliffe (2).

Then Rowley got up and looked out from his house on the hill overlooking St. John's and Redcliffe Back and Redcliffe Street, and he remembered the evenings in the Red Lodge, and he thought back to the time before then, when he had been insulted by Canynge's brother and father, and then the new era setting in with their deaths and Canynge's accession to power. He remembered how Sir Charles Baldwin had rebuked King Edward 1V on St. Michael's Hill, before going on to execution (3); he remembered Tewkesbury and Towton; he remembered how Iscam had begged for an important part in 'Aella'; and he thought of how now there was only the

servant coming up the draughty staircase instead of the ghost of William Canynge. Too many fictions had ended. Soon the land would be filled with another breed of men, who jangled their keys self-importantly and demanded security for every pleasure. And meanwhile there was William Canynge lying dead in Redcliffe Church with his two tombs (4), offering a last bastion against this ghostlessness. The potential fictions which Canynge had offered in life he was still suggesting in death. And Rowley had the pen in his hand and could alter and adorn the fiction at his pleasure, from the privileged position of poet and servant at the end of a long life. He drew a firm line through what he had written about houses and estates and sons and ships, and tore up the work and discarded it to a corner of the draughty room. He was continually doing this and the room was beginning to be cluttered with pieces of paper not so big as sixpences, into which he tore his discarded fictions (5).

'In order to write of a man's life', he wrote now, 'it might be enough to say of some that he was born at such a place and time, and to say where he died. But others

there are whose lives lack recital because so many noble matters are contained in their story. Of such a kind is he of whom I now write, and I entreat the gentle reader to note that the author is well stricken in years, and that he must therefore amend faults' (6).

Canynge's life would be a 'story'. Rowley's formal opening to the 'Life' of Canynge is an echoing of that other opening he had written years ago, and performed to Canynge's Court - the prologue to 'Aella'. Then, as now, he had made his claims for fiction-making under the guise of a formal apology. For posterity, as for Canynge himself, he would bypass the 'truth of history' while seeming to acquiesce with it:

Wee wylle ne cheynedd to one pasture bee,  
Botte sometymes soarz'bove trouthe of hystorie.

(7)

He would forget about Canynge's ships and houses and shrewd financial ability. He would forget those five swaggering bickering

sons of his, and write them out of his fiction. He would forget his own bitterness and resentment when Canynge had written to him announcing his marriage to Joanna Young and giving him orders about the Lammas-tide rents, as though he were Court treasurer and not Canynge's lifelong friend, with whom he had discussed poetry and the transformation of the Red Lodge once his father's reign was over. All those youthful resentments seemed futile now. Canynge in his last years had returned to his boyhood affection for his old friend, and the hours they had spent together at Westbury were tenderly reminiscent of those long-ago passions and plans. Canynge had had no family; he had remained as boyish, as devoted to Rowley, as he had been before his marriage. His wife had died after a year and he never forgot her memory - Rowley was quite content for the dead wife to become an object of reverence. It added a poignancy to Canynge's fate, and interesting marks of sorrow to his countenance. He sifted through another pile of documents and began writing an abstract from a letter he had written years ago: 'William Canynge is tall and stately. His eyes and hair are jet black.

His aspect is sweet and his skin white. Had he not so much nobility in his figure, he would be womanish; if he had not so much sweetness, he would be proud and discourteous in looks' (8).

It was the perfect balance in Canynge's appearance which Rowley wished to present. And yet, in the act of writing, he felt that he had not succeeded in doing merely that. He had suggested, he thought, reading over his description, those qualities in Canynge which were always on the edge of being something else - dignity becoming indignity, gentleness becoming pride. Canynge's beauty, as well as his character, was ambivalent and suggestive. And Rowley realized, with a quick rush of consciousness, that his fascination with Canynge sprang not from the personality of the man, but how that personality was suffused by his wealth and his function and the aura which went with it - the distancing charm, the arbitrary fickleness of the great. Canynge had known this and had not minded. There were worse lies than the lie which Rowley wove around him. 'How little is the lying tale of Fortune to be credited', he wrote in his

grief, and later, 'Happiness is nowhere to be found. Society has pleasures, solitude has pleasures, but Content alone can dispense with pain' (9). Rowley loved Canynge for his willingness to be inhabited by differing fictions - Society, Solitude, Content - and because by this very willingness he embodied the fictions of the past - Canynge was Aella and Warburgh and Fitzharding; and he was England with her crowns of osier weeds and water plants. When his world collapsed about him his instinct was to build himself another - and not as many heroes rebuild their worlds, with spleen or bitterness, but lovingly, as a shrine to the tragedies which had befallen the world and to the tragedies which might yet befall - 'Howe littelle ys the lyinge Page of Fortune to bee credited....I be not the Manne I once was', and then, 'The Londe ys boughte the Maconnes hyred and alle thynges ynne readynesse. nowe for a wondrous Pyle to astounde the <sup>E</sup>kyne'. This edifice, Canynge thought, would defy the lies of fortune. It would, with its counterpart the Red Lodge, be a stronghold for truth and disinterested friendship and patronage. Poetry would adorn and maintain

it. Rowley admired this candour and desire for truth and goodness in Canynge. He liked the straightness and simplicity of his life:

Strayt was I carry'd back to Tymes of yore  
Whylst Canynge swathed yet yn fleshlie Bedde  
And saw all Actyons whych han been before  
And all the Scroll of Fate unravelled  
And when the Fate mark'd Babe acome to <sup>S</sup>yghte  
I saw hym eager gaspeynge after Lyghte.

(10)

But Rowley was no such simple creature of light. He was a poet, and had always been. He had never married or contemplated any other way of life. There would never be two tombs for Rowley. He was a poet, moreover, who had been neglected for years and who was at odds with the accepted code of the Court of the Red Lodge, generous and kindly though that Court was. And so that simplicity and purity which was Canynge's, and which formed the subject of Rowley's poetry, yet offered at the same time a theme of conflict. The life of Canynge was ushered into Rowley's daydreams by the figure of 'Trouthe' (11), but Rowley's idea of truth was at that very time being worked out and expounded before the

kindly, sleeping audience of the Red Lodge, in the form of 'Aella' (12).

And so Rowley, in his old age in his house on the hill, thinking of Canynge's two tombs posing the choice between Canynge the merchant and husband, and Canynge the priest, decided he would choose neither of them. He would choose the fiction which he had begun long ago and which neither of the two tombs could contain. Rowley was old and mellow and his friends were dead. He had been lucky in that change of fortune which had occurred on the death of Canynge's brother and father. He had been sent away again, it was true, almost immediately on the dedication of the mason's lodge, collecting drawings when he would rather have been writing poetry. He dimly remembered the interview with Canynge when he had smiled at Rowley's declaration of devotion and joked mildly at his offer to go to Rome. Looking back over his life, it seemed to Rowley that, central though his role at the Red Lodge had been, he had yet been a perpetual exile; - he had been absent at the opening of the Lodge, and Canynge's opening speech about the gross humours and the bright pure spirit of Man. He had been

travelling through the countryside, like any hewer of wood or tiller of the field. And it was as though by missing that occasion and that speech of Canynge's he had missed something that remained with the others, even the sleeping councilmen. Some plain notions about virtue, some uneasiness about what constituted truth, some indolent acceptance of their higher faculties and their position as freemasons, which Iscam and Gorges and the councilmen and Canynge himself possessed, were denied to Rowley. His attitude to such notions was taut and difficult, and part of the difficulty was how to keep this attitude a secret from Canynge - Canynge his friend and protector, who had complete faith in Rowley's utter devotion to the Red Lodge and its values. But, looking now over what he had written about Canynge - how he had extolled the Red Lodge and ignored the sons and the fleet of ships - Rowley wondered whether it wasn't History he was trying to control and evade; and that the game he played with Canynge was played so stealthily and yet so passionately because in Canynge was contained History itself, with its bright and knowing countenance, with its mixture of

severity and flippancy; with its strictures and its ideas. And so Rowley, as he gathered together his vast and fragmented papers and imposed upon them his own version of truth, was only half-afraid of the ghost of William Canynge appearing on the draughty staircase.

#### CHAPTER FOUR - NOTES

1. These letters are based on those in Rowley's 'Lyfe of W:Canynge', in *Works I*, pp.229-231. I have modernized the Rowleyan spelling and made some additions.
2. See Charles Edward Russell, *Thomas Chatterton, the Marvellous Boy: The Story of a Strange Life 1752-1770* (1909), pp1-12.
3. 'Bristowe Tragedie', ll.305-332, in *Works I*, pp.17-18.
4. "Two effigies of him adorn St. Mary Redcliffe. One showing him in his magisterial robes as mayor of Bristol was made in his lifetime and designed to lie by the side of his wife's image. The other, copied from this, is carved in alabaster and shows him garbed as the Dean of Westbury. The rare tribute of two effigies in one church is sufficient evidence of the esteem in which the community held this unusual man". - Charles Edward Russell, *Thomas Chatterton, the Marvellous Boy*, p.10.
5. *Love and Madness*, pp. 217,222 and Meyerstein, p.380.
6. Adapted from 'Lyfe of W:Canynge', in *Works I*, p.228.
7. 'Aella', ll.87-8, in *Works I*, p.178.
8. From *Works I*, p.134.
9. 'Lyfe of W:Canynge', in *Works I*, p.233.
10. 'The Storie of Wyllyam Canynge', ll.269-274, in *Works I*, p.245.
11. *Ibid.*, ll.221-226, in *Works I*, p.243.
12. 'Aella', ll.1-104, in *Works I*, pp.175-178. See also Ch.5, 'The Tragedy of "Aella"'.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE TRAGEDY OF 'AELLA'

The 'interlude' which Canynge demanded from Rowley to celebrate the founding of St. Mary Redcliffe was presented to the Court early in 1432 (1); the 'great part' begged for by Iscam was granted, and he played the villain Celmonde. John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, was present for the occasion (2). Rowley himself played Aella - Aella, 'the darling of futurity' (3).

The outward fabric of the work, divided into four major movements of marriage celebration, battle, treachery and reunion, was rigid enough to please the Court of Canynge. The spectators, becoming rather restless, yet listened politely - as they had listened to Canynge himself when he had spoken in Latin of the aims of the Company -

to Rowley's opening of the entertainment, as he prefaced the occasion with not only two letters to Master Canynge, but with an uncharacteristically heated appeal to him as patron and arbiter of poetry - even though tempered by that grace and deftness of wit which had earned Rowley his place as Court favourite, and which he was too astute a man to neglect, even in the cause of poetry and virtue. But it did seem as though, in Rowley's half-passionate, half-veiled appeal for a higher ideal of 'truth', Canynge himself - if one remembered that recent complacent Latin speech of his - was almost reproved:

Syr Johne, a knyghte, who hath a barne of lore,  
Kennis Latyn att fyrst syghte from Frenche or Greke,  
Pyghte he hys knowlacheinge ten yeres or more,  
To ryngge upon the Latynne worde to speke.  
Whoever spekethe Englysch ys despysed,  
The Englysch hym to please moste fyrste be latynized.

(4)

The learned knight, culling from ten years' knowledge in order to produce one Latin phrase, is perhaps what has become of that

dreaming boy in Redcliffe meadows whom Rowley  
so admired:

As wise as anie of the Eldermenne  
He'd wytte enowe to make a Mayre at Tenne

(5)

Rowley's complaint was of the boredom,  
perhaps, of a fulfilled brilliance. Canynge,  
who even in his days of hardship had been  
admitted to be exceptional and worthy, was  
content, now prosperity had come, to sit  
still and enjoy his good fortune; Rowley, who  
had been kept waiting for years, who had  
patiently and gradually developed his gift,  
became enamoured in his middle years of  
immediacy, of unsustained and fitful  
pleasures; of a 'somwhatte evere yn the  
mynde', as he had his minstrel sing (6),  
which it is folly to resolve, for as soon as  
it is resolved it turns into marriage, or  
fame, or this very hall in the Red Lodge  
where the council-men fall asleep, almost,  
waiting for Rowley to finish talking about  
Latin and virtue and truth so that the

interlude can begin, and where John Howard Duke of Norfolk frowns slightly across at Canynge and begins to drum his fingers on his chair uneasily. This lodge had been built, St. Mary Redcliffe was being built, because Canynge loved the past. And yet Rowley knew, as he looked round upon the ageing, greying audience and at Canynge in his flowing robes and his fulfilled glory, that there was no such thing as a sense of the past: there was only the past of the senses - a summer evening setting in over Redcliffe meadows, a glance across a noon-day feast (7), the axe glistening in the sun. And, in the face of this new knowledge, he felt sad and half-angry for his long and dreary apprenticeship, and for his lean and hungry body, starved of food and love. And this sense of loss combined with this anger he knew he had managed to bring into his poem, compliant and Court-bound though it was.

For at the heart of 'Aella' is a great well of love never consummated, joys never expressed. A feast is prepared and

then snatched away by the announcement of  
battle:

O love, was thys thie joie, to shewe the treate,  
Than groffysche to forbydde thie hongered gwestes to eate?

(8)

But the feast itself is poisoned. The minstrels' songs celebrate courtship and marriage, but end on the vague unfinished note which Aella finds imperfect, and which is in fact his own situation: in the first minstrel's song, a courtship, hovering between the innocent and the brutal, is played out, and ends when the shepherd and his love resolve to be 'yn wedlocke bonde' at 'Cothbertes shryne'. But Aella wants more: he is the representative of the 'demand' made by Rowley in the 'Letter to the Dygne Mastre Canynge' prefaced to the poem:

{ Vearse maie be goode, botte poesie wantes more,  
An onlist lecturn, and a songeadygne.

(9)

This is the assertion Aella is seemingly upholding when he finds the first minstrel's song imperfect. Aella the courtier praises the song and grandly hands over 'monie for yer syngeynge' (10); (monetary gifts are always given generously and spontaneously in the Rowleyan world, in marked contrast to the Walponian world where the poet could not get 'a guinea for a consideration') (11); but Aella the poet and lover asks

Butte have you noone thatt marriage-blessynges telle?

(12)

Aella and Birtha are the only characters in the play who ever question things as they are, demanding love, honour, truth to oneself; but there is something equivocal about their demands: theirs is hardly the proud voice of Rowley, which declares it will

soare on hyghe, and yn the sonne-benes sheene;  
And where we kenn somme ishad floures besprente,  
We take ytte, and from oulde rouste doe ytte clene;  
Hee wylle ne cheynedd to one pasture bee,  
Botte sometymes soare 'bove trouthe of hystorie. (13)

Rowley has chosen a poor representative in Aella, handing out payment with one hand and calling for a different theme with the other. This first demand, for marriage-blessings, from the triumphant, newly-married husband, although outwardly granted, is in fact denied, not only by Celmonde's sly aside,

In marriage, blessynges are botte fewe, I trowe,

(14)

but by the texture of the language itself. What Chatterton is doing throughout 'Aella' is denying, at the very root of the poetry, that to which at the surface-level he acquiesces. This duality is achieved in this song largely through the use of the concluding alexandrine which, after the build-up of the gentle and delicate beauty of nature, can add,

Whenn gentle wyndes doe blowe, to whestlyng dynne ys broght

(15)

and

<sup>y</sup>  
H~~o~~nter, and brownie hylles, wyllø have a charge for thee,

(16)

and the note of emptiness and dissatisfaction  
in

Albeytte alle ys fayre, there lackethe somethynge styllø;(17)

<sup>e</sup>  
Methynkes <sup>e</sup>die hartys joie ys steynced wyth sonne care.(18)

This assertion of sincerity in the midst of acquiescent blitheness is restressed in different ways throughout the poem: images and phrases are re-worked or merely re-suggested: the next minstrel's song is written by Syr Thybbot Gorges, not so eminent a member of the Rowleyan Court, and it gives Chatterton the opportunity of

repeating his 'Albeytte alle ys fayre' line in a blander form. Elynour, as she sits knitting, reflects 'whatte pleasure ytt ys to be married'. Then she begins a reverie which seems to keep pace with the clicking of needles: she looks back to the time before she was married, in her father's house 'yn merrie Clowd-dell', where there was a distinct sense of dissatisfaction amidst her contentment -

I stulle wanted sonethynge, botte whatte ne coulde telle

(19)

Then she puts aside her knitting and goes to meet her husband, and we are left with the same open-endedness as we have found in the former minstrel's songs:

Shée sayde, and lorde Thomas came over the lea  
As hee the fatte derkynnes was chacynge,  
Shée putte uppe her knyttynge, and to hye wente shée;  
So wee leave hen bothe kyndelie embracynge.

(20)



This echoes Birtha's

Thou wardest mee as gyf ynn hondred foeres,  
Alest a daynous looke to thee be sente,  
And offrendes made mee, doe thann yie compheeres,  
Offe scarpes of scarlette, and fyne paracente;  
All thie yntente to please was lyssed to mee,  
I saie ytt, I noste streve thatt you aneded bee.

(23)

We can almost imagine that Eleanour's father is Birtha's, and that Eleanour's reflection on her unsatisfactory maidenhood is Birtha's also. And so we begin to receive the prose accompaniments to this poetic love, and learn that it did not begin with the glance across the 'noon-day feast', but with visits to 'merrie Clowd-dell', consultations, monetary comparisons, barterings -

I am Loves borro'r, and canne never paie,  
Bott be hys borrower styll, and thyne, die swete, for aie.

(24)

This recognition of the beauty of the generosity of love, forever eluding payment, rings through the trite compliments of

'achievements', sufficiency, debts and returns, and the gifts which Aella could afford to make above all the other bickering grasping courtiers ('moe thann yie compheeres') (25). Viewed in this social sense rather than in isolation, the love of Aella and BIRTHA takes on a more doubtful meaning, reminiscent of Mr. and Mrs. Bennett and Dr. Johnson:

Such is the common process of marriage. A youth and maiden, meeting by chance or brought together by artifice, exchange glances, reciprocate civilities, go home, and dream of one another. Having little to divert attention, or diversify thought, they find themselves uneasy when they are apart, and therefore conclude that they shall be happy together. They marry, and discover what nothing but voluntary blindness before had concealed: they wear out life in altercations, and charge nature with cruelty. (26)

Although ostensibly we know little of the courtship of Aella and BIRTHA, and nothing of their parentage or previous history, through the minstrel's songs we know both. We are given a view of them both before and after their marriage, and both views are flawed by pettiness, mercenary considerations and trivial contentment.

Meyerstein has said that in his view of woman in 'Aella', Chatterton has invested 'all the sweetness, all the love, in his lonely nature', so much so that he was left with 'nothing spiritual to bestow, thereafter, on any actual woman'; and that in the creation of Birtha he has produced 'a clinging, tender, trustful being' (27). But in actual fact she savours too much of those 'clinging, tender, trustful beings' of whom he had first-hand experience - his mother and sister. (Especially telling are the wiles and passionate entreaties she employs in order to try to keep Aella at home - to hinder his being his 'true self') - and it is through the Alices and Elynours of the minstrels' songs that Chatterton suggests her true nature, stripped of the formal heroic adornments of speech and feeling. The feeling of the transience of love and happiness is thus not at odds with the brother who could write, in May 1770,

I am this minute pierced through the heart,  
by the black eye of a young lady, driving along in a  
hackney coach, - I am quite in love: if my love lasts  
till that time, you shall hear of it in my next. (28)

It is the equivalent of the 'noon-day feast'; for casual meetings, sudden glimpses, a whole social world of loves that will not last, buildings which will collapse, is evoked by the suggestion of imperfection and betrayal in 'Aella'. Birtha is partly Eve - on the heroic level she is Eve:

Women bee made, notte for hemselves, botte nanne,  
Bone of hys bone, and chyld of hys desire; <sup>o</sup>

(29)

but on a more authentic level she is the serpent - she tempts Aella to dishonour, suggesting that Celmonde should go into battle in his stead, and she describes her love for Aella in the terms of a 'neder', an adder:

O! lyche a nedenz lette me rounde thee twayne,  
And hylte thie boddie from the schaftes of warre,

(30)

I, lyche a neder, wylle untoe thee byde;  
Tyde lyfe, tyde deathe. (31)

The sinister quality of this image as an avowal of love is enhanced when it is used later by Magnus, in quite a different context; - Magnus, the 'recreand', is cursing the brave Danish warrior, Hurra:

Eternalle plagues devour this baned tyngue!  
Hyrrriades of neders pre upponne this spryte!

(32)

and the image takes on further importance, when it is remembered that it was used by Rowley in his 'Epistle to Mastre Canynge', as applied to the moral effect of poetry:

But rhym wythe sonne, as nedere without teethe,  
Make pleasaunce to the sense, botte maie do lyttel scathe.

(33)

The re-echoing of images and scenes is one of the ways in which Rowley mocks the edifice he has created, and confesses that it is, in a certain sense, a sham; in which he mocks this very celebration of St. Mary Redcliffe, for the past is so vulnerable, youth so fleeting,

and buildings may collapse about one's ears; and furthermore, Thomas Rowley was not so sure that he did not prefer this uncertainty and transience and potentiality for collapse over and above the solidity of the Red Lodge and St. Mary Redcliffe and the countenances of the polite council-men. One way out was to be both confessor and denier, creator and destroyer together; to provide a poisoned feast and then snatch it away, so that one is never quite sure whether the poet is saviour or poisoner; to resolve nothing and to be, if possible, when great matters are being decided, either swaggering through the countryside or being beaten from a lady's house or dallying with Sister Agnes; to be, at any rate, somewhere else. Throughout 'Aella', love, beauty, and honour are constantly questioned by being considered on different ground: Birtha's words 'Ofte have I seene thee atte the none-dale feast', celebrating her love for Aella and their tentative first meetings, find an uneasy parallel in Magnus' boasting and accusing words to Hurra:

Efte I, caparyson'd on bloddie stede,  
Havethe thee seene binethe mee ynn the fyghte,  
Wythe corses I investynge everich dede,  
And thou aston, and wondrynge at mie nyghte.

(34)

The characters' view of one another is on one level distanced, cautious (eg. Aella's indecision with regard to BIRTHA, 11.166-8), although on an obvious level there is a sense of constant display and assertion:

Thou art <sup>e</sup> a varrioure, Hurra, thatte I kenne

(35)

I kenne thee, Magnus, welle; a wyghte thou art...

(36)

I Hurra amme miesel, and aie wylle bee

(37)

I am greate Aella's wyfe. (38)

Besides this constant assertion of identity there runs a statement of meaning and feeling: characters are always being asked to repeat or qualify or re-assert their

declarations, and it is in the compliance with these demands that the more subtle and authentic feeling is often sounded: Birtha's reaction to Celmonde's 'fitter tyde for love' with the sad

Saiest thou for love? ah! love is far awaie, (39)

and Celmonde's answer to her 'How, Celmonde, dothe thou mene?' with the strong 'Thys Celmonde menes', - followed by a revised, more passionate and dangerous version of the first minstrel's song (cf. esp. ll. 237ff.):

Thys Celmonde menes,  
No leue, no eyne, ne mortalle manne appere,  
Ne lyghte, an acte of love for to beureene;  
Nete in thys forreste, botte thys towe, dothe sheene,  
The whyche, pette oute, do leave the whole yn nyghte;  
See! howe the brauncyng trees doe here entoyne,  
Makynge thys bower so pleasyng to the syghte;  
Thys was for love fyrste made, and heere ytt stonde,  
Thatte hereynne lovers maie enlyncke yn true loves bondes.

(40)

It is Celmonde who comments wryly on Aella's demand for 'marriage-blessings', and it is he who changes the pretty artifice of the first minstrel's song into a deeply-felt emotion. The sense of danger and shame attending love, which was deftly suggested and evaded in that early ballad, by the resolution of 'wedlock' and 'Cothbertes shryne', is here accepted utterly and without evasion. The poetry of 'virtue', as opposed to the poetry of artifice - which was the substance of the demand in the Epistle prefixed to the poem - has found in Celmonde its proper spokesman.

So thought Rowley, glancing over the assembled company, and uncomfortably aware of Iscam, reading over his great part excitedly. Thomas Rowley, thinking of the hopelessness of his position, drew his lengthy preface to an end. He was feeling rather haughty and foolish, for it was almost certain that, as he returned to his seat after sending Canynge the good wishes of Bishop Carpenter, who unfortunately could not be present (41), there was not a man in the hall of the Red

Lodge who was not rather relieved that he had done at last. Canynge was smiling in a mildly exasperated manner, and looking uneasily towards the Duke of Norfolk. The cast was getting restless, especially Iscam, and Sir Tybbot Gorges was hurriedly glancing once more over his minstrel's song, which he knew was nowhere near as good as Rowley's, but which for some reason Rowley had insisted be included.

And as the play began, and Aella and Birtha began their delicate and tentative exchange of compliments, there was a settling down in the hall at the Red Lodge, Canynge's features relaxed, John Howard Duke of Norfolk stopped drumming his fingers restlessly, and everyone forgot that rather strange apology of Rowley's. Its images and even its tone of pleading integrity had faded away from the thoughts of the listeners, and there was a general, though tacit, agreement that Rowley had been nervous merely. And so when, at the very moment of leading Birtha into the woods, Iscam as Celmonde said 'The stede, on wyche I came, ys swefte as ayre', no-one in the audience realized that his tone was exactly

that of Rowley as he introduced his play with the same image:

Canynge and I from common course dyssente;  
Hee ryde the stede, botte yev to hyd the reene;  
Ne wylle betweene crased dolterynges bookes be pente,  
Botte soare on hyghe, and yn the sonne-bees sheene;  
And where wee kenn some ishad floures besprente,  
We take ytte, and from oulde rouste doe ytte clene;  
Hee wylle ne cheynedd to one pasture bee,  
Botte sometyme soare 'bove trouthe of hystorie.

(42)

Rowley glosses over any uneasiness his riding the steed of poetry may cause at the Court of Canynge, by taking Canynge along with him, and by use of the images of sunbeams, of scattered flowers - the potential riches waiting to be cleansed of the rust of ages, of pastures and their boundaries and the longing to soar above them - he takes Canynge back to the Bristol of his childhood, and his idealistic youth, when all his goodness and promise existed in that dreamy state of as-yet-unrealized fulfilment; or rather, he fixes Canynge within that myth of his boyhood which he, Rowley, has built, so ensuring that in order to 'soar above truth of history', it

is necessary to be firmly enclosed in those mythical boundaries by which Rowley keeps his tenuous position as poet, courtier and tireless myth-maker:

Strayt was I carry'd back to Types of yore  
Whylst Canynge swathed yet yn fleshlie Bedde  
And saw all Actyons whych han been before  
And all the Scroll of Fate unravelled  
And when the Fate mark'd Babe acome to Syghte  
I saw hys eager gaspeynge after Lyghte.

In all hys shepen Gambols and Chyldes plaie  
In everie merrienakyng, Fayre or Wake,  
I kenn'd a perpled Lyghte of Hysdon's Raie,  
He eate doune Learneynge wyth the Hastie Cake,  
As wise as anie of the Eldermenne,  
He'd wytte enove to make a Mayre at Tenne.

(43)

Rowley shares with Celmonde the desire for appropriation, and wants not only to alter the subject of poetry, but actually to take poetry itself somewhere else: while Aella, impotent and distraught, is cursing his wounds at Watchette, like a poor poet 'chained to one pasture', Celmonde brings Birtha, bland and suggestive 'subject' of poetry, to the edge of the dark woods, the

feared and forbidden boundaries of the minstrel's songs. He has even managed to make her utter, unconsciously, his own thoughts: earlier in the play, before the battle which separated the lovers, Celmonde delivered his rather Falstaffian thoughts on 'honour':

O honnoure, honnoure, whatt ys bie thee hanne?  
Hailie the robber and the bordelyer,  
Who kens ne thee, or ys to thee bestanne,  
And nothyng does thie wyckle gastness fere.

(44)

On entering the woods with Celmonde, Birtha also envies the 'bordeleire', and wishes to be free of fear of the dark, of the unknown, and of those uneasy longings which beset her existence:

Thys darkness doe affraie die wobbanns breaste.  
Howe sable ys the spreddyng skie arrayde!  
Hailie the bordeleire, who lyves to reste,  
Ne ys att nyghtys flemynge hue dyspayde.

(45)

She is afraid of that flickering torch  
carried by Celmonde which 'potte oute, do  
leave the whole yn nyghte' (46). She is a  
timorous receptacle for poetry, but she has,  
at least for one moment, been brought to  
assent to the reversal of values which the  
wood demands, just as a little later she is  
forced to repeat her image of clinging love  
for Aella in an intenser form: earlier she  
had expressed her love for Aella in the terms  
of an 'adder' image, a strange and ambiguous  
phrase for a lover, and one which may or may  
not have been picked up by Rowley's audience:

O! lyche a neder,<sup>e</sup> lette be rounde thee twayne,  
And hylte thie boddie from the schaftes of warre, (47)

No, thou schalte never leave thie Birtha's syde;  
Ne schall the vynde uponne us blowe alleyne;  
I, lyche a nedre, vylle untoe thee byde;  
Tyde lyfe, tyde deathe. (48)

Now, <sup>e</sup><sub>A</sub> seing her danger in the wood, she  
declares she will run from Celmonde, despite  
the adder:

I wylle be gone, and groape mie passage oute,  
Albeytte neders stynges die legs do twayne aboute.

(49)

But Thomas Rowley himself is firmly behind this image. At the very beginning of his introduction of 'Aella', in his 'Epistle to Mastre Canynge', Rowley began by telling how in ancient times the law used to be delivered in verse-form, and poetry worked for the cause of goodness. But nowadays, he lamented, this situation is sadly reversed, and everything is thrown into confusion:

In hallie preeste apperes the ribaudes penne,  
Inne lithie noncke apperes the barrones pryde.

(50)

Humbly, Rowley presents his poetry as verse which will do no harm and give some pleasure:

But rhym wythe somme, as nedere widhout teethe,  
Make pleasance to the sense, botte maie do lyttel scathe.(51)

But here Canynge and his Court first became aware of an uneasiness in their response to this courteous poet, this loyal servant who wanted merely to offer a mildly pleasing Court entertainment but who takes at least another hundred lines introducing it. He certainly has something up his elegant priestly sleeve; it is perhaps nothing more than a wish to get in a few vicious jibes at some rival poets of his, Vevyan the monk, and one Sir John who writes in Latin and despises the English tongue (52). ('I wish I knew the classicals, I then could do anything', wrote Chatterton to his sister. 'As it is, my name will live three hundred years' (53). And to Mr. Catcott he reflected bitterly,

But my objections may be reckon'd weak,  
As nothing but my mother tongue I speak).

(54)

But there are darker intentions behind Rowley's use of this strange image, intentions with regard to poetry itself and

not to rival poets whom he was quite sure nobody would ever remember in three hundred years' time. But if poetry is an adder without teeth, then the poetry which sustains Aella and Birtha, like their beauty and their desire, is an impotent poetry, and any poison it may contain cannot reach or transform them; their poisoned feast lies untasted at Bristol while the shepherds are conducted to the brink of marriage, the minstrels sing of loss and love, and Elynour sits knitting and waiting for Lord Thomas to return home:

O love, was thys thie joi, to sheve the treate,  
Than groffyshe to forbydde thie hongered gwestes to eate?

(55)

cries Aella of his unconsummated marriage and his poisoned feast he has not been allowed to taste. And for all Birtha's adder-like expressions of love, it is not until she ventures into the woods with Celmonde that she catches her first and only glimpse of real love, real danger, poetry and poison. It only lasts a few moments, and then the

adder is silenced completely - the Danes arrive and kill the villain Celmonde, and return BIRTHA to her husband. As Celmonde lies dying in the woods where he meant both to poison and unleash the unfulfilled and insipid love of BIRTHA, the Danes work out their generosity in a mercenary, rewards-and-punishment kind of way:

Scalle wee forslage hys wyfe, because he's brave?  
Bicaus hee fyghteth for hys counryes gare?  
Hylle hee, who havith bynne yis Aella's slave,  
Robbe hyn of whatte percasse he holdith deere?  
Or scalle we menne of dennys sprytes appere,  
Doeynge hyn favoure for hys favoure donne,  
Suefte to hys pallace thys damoiselle bere,  
Beurynne oure case, and to oure waie be gonne?  
The last you do approve; so lette ytte bee;  
Damoyselle, comme awaie; you safe scalle bee wythe mee.

(56)

This line of argument takes us straight back to Aella and BIRTHA's boasts of their love in terms of gifts and commodities at the beginning of the play, - especially when BIRTHA's response to the Danes' mercy is to assure them that Aella will consider for them 'too smalle a guyfte the londe and sea' (57). Already we are leaving the woods and

returning to the Court of Canynge, where Canynge sits with the Duke of Norfolk in the great hall at the Red Lodge; Rowley is after all graciously complying with the expected cycle. We are led back to the courtly world by Hurra, who talks of the passing of night, the coming of daylight, what will have happened by a certain time. And Rowley, just to show that he returns with no bad grace, puts into Hurra's mouth the words

The shepster dayden, dyghtynge her arraie,  
Scante sees her vysage yn the wawie glasse -

(58)

It is a sudden focusing of everyday tasks, still undefined, but busy, and moving towards definition. It is a world not of the Court, nor of the dark woods, but of somewhere between them, where after all love is not always dangerous, and not always tragic, but where all the maidens of the minstrel's songs are glimpsed all at once for the last time, hopeful and tremulous. It is Rowley's sad concession to them, when we know - because

the last minstrel's song is over - that  
however the girl may eagerly seek her visage  
in the rimy looking-glass of morning, her  
lover's image is gone forever -

Blacke hys cryne as the wyntere nyghte,  
Whyte hys rode as the sonner snowe, (59)

It is the world which Thomas Rowley knew as  
he travelled through the countryside of  
England, while his contemporaries prated or  
snored in the Red Lodge - a world of early  
morning grange and cottage and candlelight  
and ruined braids.

'Dear Iscam', wrote Canynge, the  
morning after the performance of 'Aella'  
(60), 'I hereby send you my thanks for the  
good part you have played in which the author  
and yourself seemed one. Celmond's raging in  
the war excelled the thought of fantasy;  
Rowley alone could have played Aella so well.

All seemed proper - no strained voice, no writhing of the body, no distorting of the face. When Aella said' - Canynge paused, frowning, and looked through his papers for the copy of the play Rowley had urged upon him the night before, looking rather demented and odd and interrupting Canynge's civilities to the Duke of Norfolk - 'when Aella said

O! speak no more: my hearte flames yn its keste  
I once was Aella's nowe bee notte hys Shade  
Han all the Fury<sup>v</sup> of Mysfortunes wylle  
Felle onne my benned Head I han beene Aella's styll  
Thys alleyn was unburld of all my Spryghte  
My Honoure Honoure frownd at the dulce wynd  
That stealed onne ytte -

only then was the action united with the words, and so much more striking for the former restraint'. William Canynge pulled his fur robes around him against the draught which rushed through the narrow doorway. He was beginning to feel rather cold and rather bored. The Duke of Norfolk, he mused, was convinced that Rowley was a madman, and perhaps he was. 'I say no more', he wrote to Iscam, 'but next to Rowley's Aella was Iscam's Celmonde. Nor did Birtha, Magnus or the rest

shame the company and therefore you will please to take this as a small token from' - and he signed his name with a relieved and world-weary flourish - 'William Canynge'. He sent a few marks with the letter to Iscam and washed his hands of the matter; except that eleven years later, when the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe was finally completed, Canynge, thinking back to 'Aella' and Rowley's animated manner and his lengthy introduction to the play, commissioned Rowley 'in all haste to make a small interlude' (61), to be performed at its commemoration, and begged him this time to bring Bishop Carpenter with him. He was accordingly presented with 'The Parliament of Sprites' (62), in which the ghost of Aella defers to the magnificent structure of St. Mary Redcliffe, laments his wasted life during which he aspired to meaner things, and ends the interlude by praising Canynge and his bishops and councilmen; but the ghost of Celmonde has not a voice.

## CHAPTER FIVE - NOTES

1. Canynge to Rowley, 1432 - "Penne anne Entyrlude to bee plaied uponne laieynge the fyrste Stone of the buyldeynge ande wricte a greate Parte for Iscamme". - 'Lyfe of W:Canynge', in *Works I*, p.231.
2. 'Aella', Title: "also before the Duke of Norfolk, Johan Howard", in *Works I*, p.174. See also *Works II*, p.928,<sup>c</sup> for note on this.
3. "O Thou or what remains of thee  
Ella the Darlynge of Futuritie". - 'Songe toe Ella', ll.1-2, in *Works I*, p.61.
4. 'Aella', ll.13-18, in *Works I*, p.175.
5. 'The Storie of Wylliam Canynge', ll.279-80, in *Works I*, p.245.
6. 'Aella', l.310, in *Works I*, p.187.
7. "Ofte have I seene thee atte the none-daie feaste..." ll.163-6, in *Works I*, p.180.
8. 'Aella', ll.374-5, in *Works I*, p.189.
9. 'Aella', ll.93-4, in *Works I*, p.178.
10. 'Aella', l.270, in *Works I*, p.185.
11. "Having intelligence that the Tragedy of Aelle, was in being, after a long and laborious Search, I was so happy, as to attain a Sight of it. Struck with the beautys of it, I endeavoured to obtain a Copy... to send to you; but the Present Possessor absolutely denies, to give me one, unless I give him a Guinea for a Consideration..." - 'Letter to James Dodsley', 15 February 1769, in *Works I*, pp.171-2.
12. 'Aella', l.271, in *Works I*, p.185.
13. 'Aella', ll.84-8, in *Works I*, p.178.
14. 'Aella', l.272, in *Works I*, p.185.
15. 'Aella', l.283, in *Works I*, p.186.
16. 'Aella', l.295, in *Works I*, p.186.
17. 'Aella', l.289, in *Works I*, p.186.

18. 'Aella', ll. 306-7, in *Works I*, p. 186.
19. 'Aella', l. 336, in *Works I*, p. 187.
20. 'Aella', ll. 345-8, in *Works I*, p. 188.
21. 'Aella', ll. 450-1, in *Works I*, p. 192.
22. 'Aella', ll. 330-3, in *Works I*, p. 187.
23. 'Aella', ll. 167-172, in *Works I*, p. 181.
24. 'Aella', ll. 181-2, in *Works I*, p. 181.
25. 'Aella', l. 169, in *Works I*, p. 181.
26. *Rasselas* (Oxford, 1926), p. 105.
27. Meyerstein, p. 242.
28. 'Letter to Mary Chatterton', 30 May 1770, in *Works I*, p. 589.
29. 'Aella', ll. 314-5, in *Works I*, p. 187.
30. 'Aella', ll. 370-1, in *Works I*, p. 189.
31. 'Aella', ll. 408-9, in *Works I*, p. 190.
32. 'Aella', ll. 630-1, in *Works I*, p. 198.
33. 'Aella', ll. 11-12, in *Works I*, p. 175.
34. 'Aella', ll. 594-7, in *Works I*, p. 197.
35. 'Aella', l. 590, in *Works I*, p. 197.
36. 'Aella', l. 620, in *Works I*, p. 198.
37. 'Aella', l. 668, in *Works I*, p. 199.
38. 'Aella', l. 1198, in *Works I*, p. 220.
39. 'Aella', l. 1131, in *Works I*, p. 216.
40. 'Aella', ll. 1134-1142, in *Works I*, p. 21<sup>6-17</sup>~~7~~.
41. "Goode Byshoppe Carpynter dyd byd mee saie,  
Hee wysche you healthe and selinesse for aie". -  
'Aella', ll. 103-4, in *Works I*, p. 178.
42. 'Aella', ll. 81-8, in *Works I*, pp. 177-8.

43. 'The Storie of Wylliam Canynge', ll. 269-280, in *Works I*, p. 245.
44. 'Aella', ll. 526-9, in *Works I*, p. 195.
45. 'Aella', ll. 1123-1126, in *Works I*, p. 216.
46. 'Aella', ll. 1137-8, in *Works I*, pp. 216-7.
47. 'Aella', ll. 370-1, in *Works I*, p. 189.
48. 'Aella', ll. 406-9, in *Works I*, p. 190.
49. 'Aella', ll. 1151-2, in *Works I*, p. 217.
50. 'Aella', ll. 9-10, in *Works I*, p. 175.
51. 'Aella', ll. 11-12, in *Works I*, p. 175.
52. "...Whoever spekethe Englysche ys despysed,  
The Englysche hym to please moste fyrste be latynized". -  
'Aella', ll. 13-8, in *Works I*, p. 175.
53. Meyerstein, p. 62.
54. 'Epistle to the Revd. Mr. Catcott', ll. 153-4, in *Works I*, p. 416.
55. 'Aella', ll. 374-5, in *Works I*, p. 189.
56. 'Aella', ll. 1224-1233, in *Works I*, p. 221.
57. 'Aella', l. 1237, in *Works I*, p. 221.
58. 'Aella', ll. 1250-1, in *Works I*, p. 222.
59. 'Aella', ll. 968-9, in *Works I*, p. 210.
60. Adapted from Canynge's letter to Iscam, in the 'Lyfe of W: Canynge'; *Works I*, p. 231-2.
61. 'Lyfe of W: Canynge', in *Works I*, p. 233.
62. *Works I*, pp. 106-116.

## CHAPTER SIX

### 'A HOLY PRIEST UNMARRIAGEABLE'

Over three hundred years after William Canynge had sat in the draughty hall of the Red Lodge writing that slightly bemused, slightly admiring letter to Iscarn on the performance of 'Aella', Horace Walpole sat in his study in his house in Arlington Street, re-reading certain letters he had received from a lawyer's clerk in Bristol. It is as though that picture of William Canynge set off the signal for a thousand gentlemen to desert their usual occupations and to make for their studies, where they sit, rather self-consciously, writing about the lawyer's clerk. The mythology of Chatterton could not survive without them; they spring from the lumber-room side of the story, rather than the garret and Henry Wallis side, and so consequently many of their names have been lost. No-one, so far as we know, ran off

with their wives (1), no ghost of Chatterton pleaded with them not to take their own lives on murky nineteenth century evenings, where they lingered under archways, opium-drugged and wretched (2). Yet, for all this lack of incident, the myth could not survive without them. They are its victims and its butt, and yet they are also partly its creators. Their aspect, viewed from this distance, is pedantic yet strangely passionate, and highlights the pedantry and passion which clings to the rest of the story.

Most of these writers, time has laughed into oblivion. Many are nineteenth century reverend gentlemen, who only became disagreeable, perhaps, when writing about the lawyer's clerk. There was something about that lawyer's clerk, with his pert claims to brilliance, and his enlisting of sympathy from sensible people, which roused them to anger in the same way as the mention of Wat Tyler disturbed Sir Leicester Dedlock. We can just make out their staunch figures as they pick up a cloak and hat and

stride out over the fields to the next village, in order to work off spleen. But we cannot follow them very far.

However, the picture of the comfortable, cosseted eighteenth century aristocrat in his study in Arlington Street has been preserved;- his cat, his furs, his books, the comfort and dignity of his room, his pen scratching the page, the flicking of his wrist during moments of abstraction which come to all writers, when it appears to anyone watching that there is either nothing going on inside his head, or that there is something terrifying going on - pity the writer who is caught, at this stage in his thinking, by amazed or pitying onlookers, for the writer looks, poor creature, at this moment either like an imbecile or a visionary hearing voices.

But Horace Walpole was shut in his study, and thought he was safe against onlookers. He did not know that the picture of himself at that moment - the satisfied smiles, the flicking of the wrists - was being watched by whichever Angel or Demon it is who sanctifies such moments, and that two hundred years later it was again to re-

appear, heightened and envenomed, - the smile become a sneer, the flicking of the wrists no longer a symptom of a process of thought but a dandified gesture of disdain - in an account of someone else's story:

One visualizes the man and his surroundings; the sombre, low-tuned library in Arlington Street, where the warmth of the fire draws out a vague pervasive perfume of cedar-wood and morocco leather bindings; the atmosphere of quiet, studious repose; the solitary seated figure of the writer, bending over his task; the pen skimming lightly, with smooth, unbroken movement from line to line; the little self-satisfied pauses; the quick egotistical flicks of the wrist; and on the pen races once more, to an accompaniment of soft feline purrings of aesthetic gratified achievement. Mr. Walpole is taking his fill of aesthetic enjoyment, rolling life round on his tongue, and finding its savour wholly exquisite. (3)

And that someone else, whose story was to rise and declare war against his own, was no other than Thomas Chatterton, the law-copier from Bristol, whose letter Walpole now held in his hand as he brooded over his entire correspondence with that youth. This first letter had been one such as he received every day - importuning, if from a pauper; assuming an equality of

knowledge, if not of rank, if from a provincial scholar; an equality of rank, if not of knowledge, if from an aristocratic collector. This had the marks of all three - 'Being versed a little in antiquitys...' They all began like this, with some inconspicuous participle, as though by so doing they could slide into the written world and remain unnoticed until, paradoxically, it was too late to ignore their existence because they had been there so long - 'being laid up with the gout', 'having recourse to our previous correspondence',

Being versed a little in antiquitys, I have met with several Curious Manuscripts among which the following may be of Service to you, in any future Edition of your truly entertaining Anecdotes of Painting - In correcting the Mistakes (if any) in the Notes you will greatly oblige

Your most humble Servant

Thomas Chatterton

Bristol March 25th. Corn Street. (4)

And it was at that moment - that early moment when Walpole read Chatterton's

first letter and took up his pen to reply, that the sprites of History left whichever battle they were attending in Europe or America, deserted the tea-table of Queen Charlotte, the bedside of the Countess of Coventry, the pen of Mr. Junius, and tightened their wings and rushed through the air to the study of Horace Walpole like the imps to the toilette of Belinda in Mr. Pope's poem; and prepared to adjust the little poetical myth which had reached such an interesting stage in its development.

Had Horace Walpole received no warning of their presence as he poised his pen above the answer he wrote? - no rush of air as they alighted upon his shoulders, no intake of breath as he prepared to write, no delighted titters as he signed his own doom? No; Horace Walpole, because he had abjured party and faction, and Court except as an eccentric onlooker; because he had comfortable sinecures as Comptroller of the Pipe and Clerk of the Estreats (5); because he was above the folly of faction, the impertinencies of office, and the exigencies of want; Horace Walpole thought he was above the imps of mythology as well. And so his

pen sped across the page, as though he were alone.

Horace Walpole wrote as a bemused innocent to that poised, waiting world:

I cannot but think myself singularly obliged by a Gentleman with whom I have not the pleasure of being acquainted, when I read your very curious and kind letter, which I have this minute received. (6)

Walpole had lately published his own 'Anecdotes of Painting' (7), and he thought the 'Ryse of Peyncteynge' (8) to have come from some comfortable scholarly gentleman in Bristol - someone like Mr. William Barrett. He was introduced to Rowley:

<sup>S</sup> a <sup>P</sup> secular priest of St. John's, in this city. his Merit as a Biographer, Historiographer is great, as a poet still greater: some of his pieces would do honor to Pope; and the person under whose patronage they may appear to the World, will lay the Englishman, the Antiquary, and the Poet, under an eternal Obligation - (9)

and to Canynge:

The Founder of that noble Gothic Pile,  
Saint Mary Redclift Church in this City: the Mecenas  
of his time: one who could happily blend the Poet,  
the Painter, the Priest, and the Christian - perfect  
in each: a Friend to all in distress, an honor to  
Bristol, and a Glory to the Church. (10)

But Walpole, in being favoured by  
this introduction to the medieval poet and  
his patron, was encountering the outside of  
the myth, conveyed by the rhetoric of  
eulogy. And not only of eulogy, but the  
same kind of rhetoric which is found in the  
poetry itself, until it is undercut and  
questioned by that use of repeated imagery  
which exists alongside the outward fabric of  
the poem. Walpole is encountering Canynge  
as 'the Maecenas of his time', but he has  
not been shown a glimpse of him as a boy  
lying in Redcliffe meadows, and so to him  
there is nothing of sadness or loss in his  
being 'a friend to all in distress, an  
honour to Bristol, and a Glory to the  
Church'; just as Chatterton saw Walpole  
himself from the outside, as 'the person  
under whose patronage (the poetry) may  
appear to the world', as the Maecenas of *his*

time, and thought only of the rich antiquary in his study in Arlington Street, and knew nothing of the delicate, brooding boy passing the long days at Houghton, or the youth at Cambridge who loved his friends. But Chatterton's was a prepared fiction, with the imps of mythology hovering over it, and so it is Horace Walpole who is bemused and confined:

I have not the happiness of understanding the Saxon language, and without your learned notes, should not have been able to comprehend Rowley's text...The Abbott John's verses, that you have given me, are wonderfull for their harmony and spirit, tho there are some words I do not understand. (11)

The language of the story is denied to Walpole, and he confuses - as we are meant to confuse - the 'learned notes' aspect of it, with its 'harmony and spirit'; the lumber-room with the famous odes; the pedantry with the passion. It is the knowledge of this necessary confusion, rather than any 'learned notes', that Walpole lacks, and with it the glance across the noonday feast; the tossing horses on St.

Michael's Hill; the axe glistening in the sun.

He is given no opportunity to get to know this world. For a while his own voice is silenced; his letters are lost; and when next we meet him, he is still on the outside of the fiction, but irrevocably bound to it. But it is Chatterton's voice we encounter first. Obviously during the interval that has elapsed some trust has been broken, some hope shattered. The voice is high-handed and resentful:

I am not able to dispute with a person of your literary character....Though I am but sixteen years of age, I have lived long enough to see that poverty attends literature. I am obliged to you, sir, for your advice, and will go a little beyond it, by destroying all my useless lumber of literature, and never using my pen again but in the law. (12)

The rest of the correspondence is the same voice talking, demanding back manuscripts, asserting their authenticity, resenting neglect. It may be as well to listen to Walpole's account, written years later, when the imps were beginning to take their toll:

rom

I wrote according to the <sup>enclosed</sup> direction, for farther particulars. Chatterton, in answer, informed me that he was the son of a poor widow, who supported him with great difficulty; that he was clerk or apprentice to an attorney, but had a taste and turn for more elegant studies; and hinted a wish that I would assist him with my interest in emerging out of so dull a profession, by procuring him some place, in which he could pursue his natural bent. He affirmed that great treasures of ancient poetry had been discovered in his native city, and were in the hands of a person who had lent him those he had transmitted to me; for he now sent me others, amongst which was an absolute modern pastoral in dialogue, thinly sprinkled with old words. (13)

Others were called in. A lady at Bath was consulted; so were Mason and Gray (14). The latter assured Mr. Walpole that the manuscripts were forgeries; the former verified Chatterton's origins and situation, though she remained silent about his diligence and reputation. Walpole wrote again to Chatterton 'with as much kindness and tenderness, as if I had been his guardian' (15), - although the letter is lost, and we hear of it through an older Walpole, one defending his position as a reluctant Maecenas, trapped within a fiction not his own:

I undeceived him about my being a person of any interest, and urged <sup>to him</sup> that in duty and

gratitude to his mother, who had straitened herself to breed him up to a profession, he ought to labour in it, that in her old age he might absolve his filial debt; and I told him, that when he should have made a fortune he might unbend himself with the studies consonant to his inclinations. I told him also, that I had communicated his transcripts to *much* better judges, and that they were by no means satisfied with the authenticity of his supposed MSS.

(16)

Chatterton complained that he was insulted by Walpole, who did not return the manuscripts he asked for. Walpole, in his written defence of his behaviour, is still the bemused outsider of a world whose language he cannot speak, and his excuses have the authentic plea of confused affairs:

When I received this letter, I was going to Paris in a day or two, and either forgot his request of the poems, or perhaps not having time to have them copied, deferred complying till my return, which was to be in six weeks. I protest I do not remember which was the case; and yet, though in a cause of so little importance, I will not utter a syllable of which I am not positively certain; nor will charge my memory with a tittle beyond what it retains.

Soon after my return from France, I received another letter from Chatterton, the style of which was singularly impertinent. He demanded his poems roughly; and added, that I should not have *dared* to use him so ill, if he had not acquainted me with the narrowness of his circumstances. (17)

Walpole then wrote another epistle 'expostulating with him on his injustice, and renewing good advice' (18), but having second thoughts about what might become of anything he wrote to 'so wrong-headed a young man', he flung the letter into the fire, and merely returned all his poems and letters.

Meanwhile, in Bristol, the wrong-headed young man, after boasting to the Juvenile Society of Mr. Walpole's patronage, became their butt. They had grown tired of his eminence over them, tired of his position as 'the most talked of young person in the city' (19), tired of his constant dining-out with Mr. Barrett and walks with Mr. Catcott since that occasion in the printer's office. They were not sorry that, after all, the great man in London had not joined in the toadying around Thomas Chatterton. He was beginning to share the fate of all favourites, and to make enemies at Court.

The great man in London was not to be forgiven:

Sir,

I cannot reconcile your behaviour to me, with the notions I once entertained of you. I think myself injured, sir; and, did not you know my circumstances, you would not dare to treat me thus.

(20)

'The notions I once entertained of you': Horace Walpole did not ponder over those words. He presumed that they referred solely to the duration of their correspondence, the beginning of which had been rather affable. He could not know that with his refusal to accept Chatterton's Rowleyan offerings, a whole world was threatened - a dark shadow passed over the lawns of the Red Lodge, and the building seemed to tremble on its foundations. Thomas Rowley, shuddering from a wave of cold air which seemed to sweep through the chamber where he spoke with William Canynge, heard his master's voice not as the warmth of encouragement but as that kind of indulgence and kindness which accompanies indifference. 'Not so far distant', said William Canynge, when Rowley spoke of going to Rome, if necessary, such was his devotion to Canynge and his world (21). But it was

not to be. 'I told him, that when he should have made a fortune he might unbend himself with the studies consonant to his inclinations'. Yes, it was certainly at that moment, as Horace Walpole penned those kindly, well-meaning words to Chatterton, that William Canynge smiled at Rowley's suggestion of Rome and said 'not so far distant, dear Rowley', and Rowley, shuddering at something he could not name - some childish dream fading away, some resplendent image dimmed, some hope blighted,- looked at that moment out of the chamber and over the grounds of the Red Lodge and there, passing the willows by the water's edge, was an elegant gentleman on a very fine steed.

He was a gentleman of the Church, probably an Abbott and - Rowley knew immediately - he was saying his rosary backwards. He was the picture of devotion, but he was saying it backwards (22). Rowley was about to point him out to Canynge and ask him whether it was perhaps a messenger from the King's Court - for there was no priest dressed so finely at the Red Lodge - when the figure was gone (for Horace Walpole

had thrown his letter into the fire), and turning back to Canynge, Rowley saw that his eyes had been upon him all the time, quizzical and benign, and that he was wondering at Rowley's abstraction, and fingering a fine ring he wore on his finger.

Horace Walpole threw his letter into the fire: for what was the use of reasoning with such a preposterous youth? A clerk, too, stealing his master's time; - it was beneath him to enter into such a correspondence. There was a deep fastidiousness in his nature which made him shrink from faction and the squabbles of the pen: 'I hate to be the talk of the town' (23). Nothing was more offensive than the petty squabbles of literature:

You know I shun authors, and would never have been one myself, if it obliged me to keep such bad company. They are always in earnest, and think their profession serious, and dwell upon trifles, and reverence learning. I laugh at all those things, and write only to laugh at them and divert myself. None of us are authors of any consequence, and it is the most ridiculous of all vanities to be vain of being mediocre. A page in a great author humbles me to the dust, and the conversation of those that are not superior to myself reminds me of what will be thought of myself. I blush to flatter them or to be flattered by them, and should dread letters being published sometime or other, in which they should relate our interviews, and we should appear like those puny conceited wittlings in

Shenstone's and Hughes's Correspondence, who give themselves airs from being in possession of the soil of Parnassus for the time being, as peers are proud because they enjoy the estates of great men who went before them. (24)

It was this very delicacy - this feeling for the transience of fashions and the rarity of excellence, - a quality he shared with Rowley himself - which drew Walpole to the outskirts of the Rowleyan myth, and forced him to inhabit 'the soil of Parnassus for the time being', as one of those lesser characters he so despised.

Meanwhile, the Rowleyan world, so self-contained during its early youth, had been made public, and had to adjust itself accordingly. Within its confines, visits had been made, marriages avoided, intrigues entered into. The question of truth had been raised, not as an absolute as in its former days when Sir Charles Baldwin had marched to death with no glance to left or

right, but in its more ambivalent aspect,  
encumbered with deviousness and vanity:

In hallie preeste apperes the ribaudes penne  
Inne lithie moncke apperes the barronnes pryde

(25)

But the pen of the rake, the pride of the baron, it could not be denied, held a charm which was of a different order to the absolute, austere beauty of the world of Sir Charles Baldwin. There had been a fascination in the prospect of the elegant churchman telling his beads backwards which had not escaped Rowley even as he contemplated with some disdain the fineness of his dress and with some chagrin a trespass upon the sacred ground of the Red Lodge. There was a suggestion of freedom and abandonment in such vanity and trespass which held for Rowley one of those fleeting but tremendous promises that anything can be accomplished, any obstacle defied, despite constrictions placed on one's movements and the impracticability of travelling to Rome.

'There is a something ever in the mind'  
(26), was to be the answer to Canynge's 'not  
so far distant'. That 'God had sent his  
creatures into the world with arms long  
enough to reach anything, if they could be  
at the trouble of extending them' (27), was  
Chatterton's to the inadequate education at  
Colston's and the drudgery at Lambert's.

Still, the hours of drudgery went  
on, despite such assertions, and despite  
that meeting in the printer's office which  
had resulted in the patronage of Mr. Barrett  
and talks with Mr. Catcott. Such elated  
assertions belong to the moment, when the  
world is lifted into the realm of myth, and a  
whole life can be viewed at a glance. But,  
although on such occasions the moment  
spreads out to eternity, it is almost never  
the case that eternity rushes to the moment,  
when it most needs saving, bound by boredom  
and constraint. And so at the end of 1769  
five years of chaste and servile  
apprenticeship stretched ahead of  
Chatterton, made up of days and days of law-  
copying which no glimpse into a timeless  
world could recover:

...during which said time,...Taverns he shall not frequent, at Dice he shall not play, Fornication he shall not commit, Matrimony he shall not contract (28)

Outside the world of the Red Lodge, too, great changes were taking place. The long days of childhood were over. Time had been acknowledged and portioned out; certain strictures had been placed upon it. This had always been the case for Chatterton, for the days at Colston's had been so portioned. But at Lambert's there was a freedom which contradicted the stern prohibitions which spoke for all apprentices, for Mr. Lambert had not much work for Chatterton to do, and what there was he could accomplish swiftly and expertly, used as he was to rapid and concentrated work. Consequently most hours of the day were free for Rowleyan productions (29). But instead of bringing a sense of ease and alleviation of pressure to the young apprentice, this situation had a different effect. Free as he was to write, the voice of prohibition was still ringing in his ears, and this voice carried to the

Rowleyan world the idea of a freedom which was no longer absolute, as in the old days when Rowley had lain with Canynge in the meadows around Redcliffe and thought that together they could do anything, but freedom confined and waylaid by obstacles.

Sometimes this voice urged Rowley to grand gestures, like defying the King and sweeping Canynge away to sanctuary in order to avoid a marriage into the Woodville family, and to secure Canynge as a 'holy priest unmarriageable' (30). That was an instance when the prohibitive voice came from a larger world which had power even over Canynge, and Rowley made full use of an occasion when Canynge's defiance coincided with his own. Chatterton was 'unmarriageable' too, though for him the position was reversed, and it was the larger world which required him to be so. Rather than defying such a requirement by marrying, which he was shrewd enough to realize would be releasing himself from one bondage only to find himself in another, the only grand, and also subtle defiance would be to break his apprenticeship completely, for by so doing he would become 'unmarriageable'

indeed, by placing himself beyond any thoughts or strictures about marriage altogether. So Chatterton deftly veered a course between the Rowleyan and the Bristolian voices: between 'Matrimony he shall not contract', and 'A holy priest unmarriageable'.

But before this gesture could be accomplished, there was Bristol to be confronted and confounded. Many things had changed since Thomas Chatterton had been summoned to the printer's office of 'Felix Farley's Bristol Journal'. Firstly, Mr. Lambert, always more or less indifferent to the scribblings of his copier, now became completely so, and Chatterton soon ceased to worry about interruptions from him. In any case Mr. Lambert was often away.

Mr. Lambert's mother - possibly on the orders of her son - also ceased her frequent interruptions, although the poor woman could not help looking worried and suspicious every time she came across the young apprentice with his stained hands and his strange eyes, outside the offices in Corn Street, or on his way to or from meals (31). But these meetings were as rare as Mrs.

Lambert could wish. Rowley proceeded in peace, so far as Mr. Lambert's office was concerned, no matter what was happening within the Red Lodge itself, with Rowley's new consciousness of the boundaries of freedom and the dreams of boyhood fading away.

But the greatest perceptible change was in the position of the young clerk. After making his way back to his desk at Lambert's on that bright October day after the confrontation with the gentlemen in the printer's office, he had sat down to his work with the consciousness that some new stage in his fortune had been reached. Unexpected as it was, and despite the fact that he took up his usual place at his desk afterwards, this occasion was more significant by far than the day he had left Colston's and been entered for his articles, with solemn oaths and signed papers and the handing over of money and the presence of other just such solemn local gentlemen as those who had gathered in the printer's office (32). Perhaps there had been no more momentous occasion in his life since the day he had realized the existence of the lumber

room over St. Mary Redcliffe and its potential richness. He had not missed the latent excitement of those gentlemen; he had not been blind to that mixture of bullying and pleading which they had employed in their questioning, and their final choice of a placating, indulgent flattery as an appropriate manner towards him.

Soon after that Mr. Barrett had sent for him, for dinner at his house (33). Mr. Barrett was a strange man, and Chatterton approved of his strangeness. He had been writing his 'History of Bristol' for some time now (34), and naturally he was interested in talking to a young man who had discovered such important manuscripts. He had heard also of Chatterton's great industry and passion for all kinds of learning. He himself possessed a large library which he would be only too pleased to put at Chatterton's disposal. Many books were on medicine, of course, since that was Mr. Barrett's profession, but also on history and philosophy and music. Mr. Barrett remembered Chatterton's own father's musical talents - a man far above the common run of Bristol talents (35). What did

Chatterton himself think of music? - oh, he preferred Allen; he was certainly very fine, though there was something to be said for Broderip (36). Broderip, said Chatterton, had thrown him out of the organ loft for talking too loudly with his friends (37). Mr. Barrett laughed, and asked what the conversation had been about, which had caused Mr. Broderip to take so decisive a step? Polly Rumsey, said Chatterton, and Jack Wilkes. Mr. Barrett mused, and said he had heard that Chatterton was a great patriot; was he perhaps also a great profligate? I am a rake rather than a buck, said Thomas Chatterton (38). But to return to my library, said Mr. Barrett, - borrow any book you choose, but may I suggest that you pay special attention to those on Latin, and to those on heraldry? (39) But meanwhile was he sure that he wouldn't take another glass of wine? Really for a rake and a member of the Juvenile Club he drank very little (40). I never drink to excess, said Thomas Chatterton, with the rather charming priggishness of youth; I have a work in hand. Mr. Barrett smiled knowingly.

It was surprising how Mr. Barrett, talking of the talents of Chatterton's father, and placing them above the common run of Bristol, managed to convey a picture of the elder Mr. Chatterton and his son and Mr. Barrett himself as superior intellects who must be indulgent towards their lesser peers; it was surprising also, how when Mr. Barrett spoke of those lesser intellects and talents, he evoked a vivid picture of Mr. Catcott, waving from the steeple at the dead of night, without mentioning Mr. Catcott's name or making any gesture out of the ordinary except perhaps a slight lifting of one eyebrow, and a slight intensification of his glance towards the young apprentice which was at all times rather intense. But these ideas, and these pictures, were conveyed, and Thomas Chatterton went back to the sparse bedroom at Mr. Lambert's which he had to share with the kitchen boy thinking that he had found an intelligent, cultivated friend in Bristol, and a patron worthy of his talents.

It was Mr. Barrett who was consulted when the matter of applying to the London patron became imminent (41). By all

means write to Mr. Walpole, said Mr. Barrett (but the real suggestion by Chatterton of applying to such a gentleman had already been rejected in the printer's office, when he was gently persuaded to change his mind about saying that the 'Bridge narrative' had been procured from a gentleman who also employed him to write love verses.) (42)

Mr. Barrett suggested that Chatterton begin his correspondence with the wealthy antiquary by sending him the 'Ryse of Peyncteynge' rather than any poetical pieces; he was behind the 'curiosity and kindness' of the short, restrained letter. But Mr. Barrett was also thinking jealously of his 'History of Bristol', and therefore, when the inquiry arrived from the lady at Bath, - and who is to say that it did not? - Mr. Barrett sat at his desk and sent his compliments to the lady, and through her to Mr. Walpole, and was happy in being able to answer her questions about Thomas Chatterton. The situation he had himself described to Mr. Walpole was correct; he was an attorney's clerk, and was apprenticed to Mr. James Lambert in Bristol. His mother was a widow. He was a devoted son, but he had

the ambition and wildness which marked many young men in Bristol, and some few of the older ones. Thomas Chatterton was known as 'the mad genius' by his contemporaries, for his precocity and wilfulness (43). He was a member of the Bristol Juvenile Club, and was a patriot and, Mr. Barrett feared, a profligate. He said nothing about the recent discovery of the ancient manuscripts, since the lady had not mentioned these in her letter. He sealed his missive, and awaited the outcome.

The outcome was rather more uncomfortable than Mr. Barrett had expected. He grew used to the figure of Thomas Chatterton pacing his dining room and talking of the contempt shown towards genius when it manifested itself through the poor and the confined. There was something about the rejection from Walpole which unleashed in the lawyer's apprentice that element of strangeness, anger and haughtiness combined which so alarmed Mrs. Lambert as she passed him coming or going from her son's offices. Chatterton was no longer so grateful towards Mr. Barrett for the loan of his books and the

warmth of his fire and the enjoyment of his food; he seemed to regard them as his right. His lip positively curled with contempt at the mention of Mr. Catcott or Mr. Burgum, although he was constantly taking walks with Catcott, and they were to be seen walking through the streets of Bristol or along the road from Clifton, Chatterton striding ahead and Mr. Catcott limping behind and short of breath. Mr. Barrett had to be very careful these days how he approached the subject of certain mistakes in Rowley's Latin or his knowledge of certain events which took place after his death (44). Sometimes he would arrive at Mr. Barrett's house in a state of feverish triumph, and tell how he had destroyed the arrogance of some member of the Juvenile Club, or written a satire on the Reverend Alexander Catcott's absurd 'Treatise on the Deluge', and - what did Mr. Barrett think had happened? - the ridiculous man had banned him from his house (45). He was beginning to think that the Vicar of Temple Church was as ignorant and blind as his brother. To these stories Mr. Barrett listened quietly. He was not displeased to hear about the Reverend

Mr. Alexander. He was the only person in Bristol who held any sway over Chatterton apart from himself, and his dinners had the additional advantage of being larger and having a familial atmosphere. But the restlessness and the constant making of enemies filled Mr. Barrett with foreboding. He was not so eager these days to deliberately disagree with Chatterton, even for the pleasure of watching his eyes fire up; they were fiery enough anyway, and the cultivating of the young discoverer of the manuscripts, which Mr. Barrett had so deliberately undertaken, had reached proportions far beyond the scope of the 'History of Bristol'. The strange friendship, Mr. Barrett realized, had always been more than this, but now he was beginning to be frightened by the intensity of the personality he had unleashed. He had always wanted to appropriate more than a few documents, but the appropriation was of a personality which was both oddly quiescent and at the same time ungovernable, - a quality which echoed the nature of the documents themselves. Mr. Barrett was beginning to wish he had written more

enthusiastically to the lady at Bath.

Nothing would delight him more, now, than an alleviation from responsibility; he would wave Thomas Chatterton off to London with the kindest, most generous feelings in the world.

Chatterton's restlessness increased after the rejection from Mr. Walpole because it seemed as though Fame, like Time, had been circumscribed. Just as the long hours of the Rowleyan poetical world were rounded by the confinement to Mr. Lambert's office and the voice of prohibition which spoke to all apprentices, so Fame was confined to the petty triumphs of Bristol. This was quite obviously worse than no time and no fame at all.

Chatterton's spleen visited the most tender and solemn occasions: the clerk who had been rejected by Mr. Walpole could be plainly heard in the elegy he wrote for his friend William Smith, after hearing of his suicide:

Ye Callous breasted Brutes in human form  
Have you not often boldly wishd him dead?  
Hes gone, Eer yet his Fire of man was warm,  
O may his Crying blood be on your head,

(46)

That Fame had his wings clipped may be observed also at this period by the note of the incongruous with which it is attended: it was not William Smith, Chatterton discovered, who had taken his life, but his brother Peter, so it was only necessary to add a relieved note to the poem: 'Happily mistaken having since heard from good Authority it is Peter' (47). It is as though, both Fame and Time inhabiting a mockery, Time's daughter, Truth, joins in the mockery too: for that dilemma of truth, which the Rowleyan world had reached, is given no ground on which to resolve itself except the muddled ground of George Catcott's Bristol, where one young man retires to his room to kill himself after a severe lecture (48), and another young man writes an elegy to the wrong brother. 'Trouthe' in Rowley's terms, which concerned the nature of friendship and a changing view of the past, and was a quest pursued within

the realm of poetry, has moved to the edge of that realm and trespassed beyond it, and the result is a poem which belongs only marginally to the realm of poetry and partly to the farcical world of Bristol. The dilemma of 'Trouthe' has been banished from the ground of its resolution - the ground of poetry. Its banishment coincides with Rowley's fears when he spoke to Canynge and saw the priest saying his rosary backwards. This picture offered a vision of a potential escape - it was a picture of freedom through trespass. Chatterton, responding to this picture, knew what he must do - he must break the rules, the terms of his apprenticeship, and remove his poetry onto different ground.

In the meantime it was a period of satire and elegy. Hate Bristol though he did, the hatred had to be assimilated into a feeling for the city which mixed present contempt with memories of friends who had died, longings which barely found expression, and a picture of gaudy ballrooms and ludicrous behaviour:

There in the dull solemnity of Wigs  
The dancing bears of Commerce murder Jigs;  
Here dance the dowdy belles of crooked trunk,  
And often, very often, reel home drunk;  
Here dance the Bucks with infinite delight,  
And club to pay the Fiddlers for the night.

(49)

Rowley for a while was laid aside. There was the Juvenile Club to boast to, there was the Reverend Alexander to defy. There were friends to be mourned, and satires to be written and sent to London as a prelude to his arrival (50). In the midst of these activities and these musings, there was the 'Elegy at Stanton Drew' (51) to be composed. This speaks for the whole of this period, for it is addressed not to any person whom Chatterton knew, not to either William or Peter Smith or Thomas Phillips (52), the usher at Colston's whose literary gatherings Chatterton had not attended, but bewails a loss which includes them all, and the world of Rowley also. The elegy marks a transition - it is a recognition that the Rowleyan poetry is a mode as well as a self-contained world. There are hints of the Rowleyan poetry within it - of 'Sir Charles

Baldwin' and 'The Battle of Hastings'  
especially:

The solemn Dirges sung,  
And drove the golden knife,  
Into the palpitating Seat of Life

(53)

Those pillars and blasted oaks and dreary altars of the second stanza could belong anywhere. Stanton Drew reads like a falling out of love, and the emptiness which accompanies such a feeling. For the Rowleyan world is no longer the self-contained world of childhood fancy. Another world impinges, and although eventually this will enhance and develop the poetry, for the moment it lays its landscape to waste. It was a time of both farewell and of preparation for a different world, and this partly explained the mixture of strenuous and feverish pride with the rather sad lethargy which so worried Mr. Barrett and Mrs. Lambert at this time.

It being a secular and satirical period of his development, and the subtle

developments of Rowley being silenced, Chatterton was driven to more robust and decisive assertions. Truth was not what it seemed, fidelity, goodness and freedom were more complex than the Juvenile Club would believe possible, were they to spend half an hour within the environs of the Red Lodge; there were feelings and friendships which Mr. Wilkes had never dreamed of, and which his world, it seemed, made no room for. Thus spoke the voice of Rowley. But, after all, the Juvenile Club must be faced daily, and Mr. Wilkes, though granted he might be coarse and limited, was certainly splendid in his way, whereas Rowley's voice was beginning to sound sad and remote. Rowley, thought Chatterton, reflecting on the excitement of speculating on the next stage in Mr. Wilkes's fortune (54), was beginning to sound his age. He spoke with the dust of old books and old feelings upon him, and therefore Chatterton awoke every morning beset by a feeling of loss, like falling out of love, and so turned to the robust outer world on which to write robust outer assertions:

The Articles of the Belief of  
Me Thomas Chatterton

That God being incomprehensible: it is not  
required of us, to know the mysterys of the  
Trinity &c.&c.&c.&c.

That it matters not whether a Man is a Pagan  
Turk Jew or Christian if he acts according  
to the Religion he professes

That if a man leads a good moral Life he is  
a Christian

That the Stage is the best School of  
Morality

and

The Church of Rome (some Tricks of  
Priestcraft excepted) is certainly the true  
Church

T.Chatterton (55)

Nothing could be more  
straightforward, more free of Rowleyan  
ambiguity, more full of Patriot feeling.  
And yet that old world of strange fancy and  
sentiment was still visible; there was the  
Abbott saying his rosary backwards; it might  
yet be saved, and removed to another ground.  
But the business was precarious and it must  
be done, it was quite clear, with many  
concessions to the world of Mr. Wilkes even  
as it employed a few 'tricks of priestcraft'  
in order to free itself.

And so Chatterton's biographers  
love to tell us how the poet was so  
desperate and world-weary that at an evening

gathering when the talk came round to Peter Smith's tragedy and the justification of suicide, he suddenly pulled a pistol from his pocket and held it to his head (56); how he left a note for his friend Mr. Clayfield in the office where he worked for Mr. Lambert, informing him that when he read that note he, Chatterton, would be no more; how this so alarmed Mr. Lambert - who of course intercepted the note, as he was meant to do - that he passed it on to Mr. Barrett, who delivered to Chatterton such a stern lecture on the horrors of suicide that the youth was moved to tears (57); and how he sent to Mr. Barrett the next day a letter trying to describe his emotions and frustrations:

In regard to my <sup>M</sup> motives for the supposed rashness, I shall observe, that I keep no worse Company than *myself*; I never drink to excess, and have, without Vanity, too much <sup>S</sup> sense to be attached to the mercenary retailers of Iniquity. - No; it is my ~~PRIDE~~ my damn'd native, unconquerable Pride, that plunges me into Distraction. You must know that the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> of my Composition is Pride. I must either live a Slave, a Servant; to have no Will of my own, no <sup>S</sup> sentiments of my own which I may freely declare as such; - or ~~Die~~ - Perplexing Alternative! <sup>But</sup> it distracts me to think of it - I will endeavour to learn Humility,

Pride

Die

but it cannot be *here*. What it may cost me  
in the Trial Heaven knows! I am

Yr. much Obliged, unhappy  
hble sert.

T.C.

Thursday Even. (58)

There is no need to doubt  
Chatterton's sincerity when he wrote about  
his pride, or to suppose that when he wrote  
the note to Mr. Barrett on that Thursday  
evening in April 1770 he was not very upset  
indeed. But it is beyond doubt also that he  
was at the same time enjoying himself  
immensely, with his damns and his capital  
Pride versus Death and his perplexing  
alternatives. There was great enjoyment to  
be had from writing a phrase like 'damn'd,  
native, unconquerable pride', almost like  
saying 'false, fleeting, perjured Clarence'.  
Subdued though he was after Mr. Barrett's  
lecture, it was the prelude to yet another  
and more successful bid to escape: one  
morning in April 1770, Mrs. Lambert, coming  
early into her son's offices, found on the  
desk where Chatterton was accustomed to work  
a 'Last Will and Testament' prepared by him,  
and left there for his employer to discover  
(59). This time she was determined that her

practical fears for her son's reputation, not to mention her less practical ones based upon the strange manner of the young apprentice, should be listened to.

Suddenly his release was assured; his contract was broken and he was absolved from any responsibilities towards Mr. Lambert (60). The months of preparation, of hostilities, of conflict with almost everyone in Bristol were over. Chatterton wrote to his old rival Thistlethwaite that he need not be concerned for his welfare in London:

My first attempt shall be in the literary way: the promises I have received are sufficient to dispel doubt; but should I, contrary to my expectations, find myself deceived, I will, in that case, turn Methodist preacher: Credulity is as potent a deity as ever, and a new sect may easily be devised. But if that too should fail me, my last and final resource is a pistol.

(61)

A week before leaving, he sold 'Aella' to George Catcott (62). It only remained to dine with Mr. Barrett for the last time, receive a guinea apiece from his friends and

family for the journey (63), and board the  
coach to the metropolis.

CHAPTER SIX - NOTES

1. The model for the figure of Chatterton in Henry Wallis' painting 'The Death of Chatterton' was the novelist George Meredith, at the time about twenty-eight. Two years later Wallis eloped with Meredith's wife, a daughter of the novelist Thomas Love Peacock. See Meyerstein, p.518.
2. The poet Francis Thompson saw the ghost of Chatterton, and was prevented by him from swallowing a fatal dose of laudanum. See Meyerstein, pp.518-9.
3. John Cranstoun Nevil, *Thomas Chatterton* (1948), p.86.
4. 'Letter to Horace Walpole', 25 March 1769. In *Works I*, p.258.
5. Dorothy M. Stuart, *Horace Walpole*, (1927), p.22.
6. 'Letter from Horace Walpole', 28 March 1769. In *Works I*, p.262.
7. The first three volumes of Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting in England* were printed at Strawberry Hill in 1762-3. The fourth volume did not appear until 1780. See Dorothy M. Stuart, p.149.
8. Chatterton accompanied his first letter to Walpole with a copy of *The Ryse of Peyncteynge, yn Englande, wroten bie T. Rowlie, 1469 for Mastre Canynge*. See *Works I*, p.259.
9. A footnot to *The Ryse of Peyncteynge*. *Works I*, p.259.
10. Ibid.
11. 'Letter from Horace Walpole', 28 March 1769. *Works I*, p.262.
12. 'Letter to Horace Walpole', 8 April 1769. *Works I*, p.271.
13. Walpole, *Letter*, p.125-6 (vol.16) The 'modern pastoral' is almost certainly 'Elinoure and Juga'.
14. Meyerstein, p.261-2.
15. Walpole, *Letter*, p.127 (vol.16).
16. Walpole, *Letter*, p.127-8 (vol.16) In 1777, Tyrwhitt published his *Poems, supposed to have been written at Bristol by Thomas Rowley, and others in the Fifteenth Century*, and the

notices of the book in the *Monthly Review* blamed Walpole for Chatterton's death. In January 1779, Walpole printed privately 200 copies of his defence, but did not publish until 1782 his *Letter to the Editor of the Miscellanies of Chatterton*, which then appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*,

17. *Letter*, p. 128 (vol. 16) The letter Walpole refers to is that of April 14 1769, in which Chatterton declares his conviction of the authenticity of the manuscripts, and demands their return. *Works I*, pp. 273-4.

18. *Letter*, p. 129 (vol. 16).

19. E.H.W. Meyerstein, *A Bristol Friendship: Thomas Chatterton and John Baker* (The Wedmore Memorial Lecture, 1947), p. 45.

20. 'Letter to Horace Walpole', 24 July 1769. *Works I*, p. 340.

21. See 'A Brief Account of William Cannings, from the Life of Thomas Rowlie Preeste', in *Works I*, p. 51. See also Ch. 4, 'The Story of William Canynge'.

22. See 'An Excelente Balade of Charitie', l. 47, in *Works I*, p. 646.

23. Walpole, *Correspondence*, pp. 40-1 (vol. 33).

24. *Ibid.*, p. 309 (vol. 1) -

25. 'Aella', ll. 9-10, in *Works I*, p. 175.

26. 'Aella', l. 310, in *Works I*, p. 187.

27. Meyerstein, p. 96,

28. Meyerstein, p. 63.

29. Dix, pp. 26-7-

30. See 'Lyfe of W: Canynge - by Rowlie', in *Works I*, p. 233.

31. Dix, pp. 26-7, and Meyerstein, pp. 66-7.

32. "Chatterton left Colston's School on the 1st of July, 1767, having remained there about seven years; and was bound apprentice on the same day to Mr. John Lambert, attorney of Bristol, who had offices on St. John's Steps, for the term of seven years, to learn the art and mystery of a scrivener"- Dix, pp. 24-5. Soon afterwards Mr. Lambert removed his offices to Corn Street.

33. There is some conflict of opinion about when Chatterton was first introduced to Barrett. George Catcott boasted to Bryant that he was responsible for their acquaintance; but Croft asserts that Barrett often used to send for Chatterton 'from the charity-school' (*Love and Madness*, p. 272) - although Ingram suggests that Croft confused the charity-school with Lambert's office. I have chosen the later date - after October 1st, 1768, for their acquaintance, for it was after this date that Chatterton became known in Bristol as the possessor of ancient manuscripts, and therefore of interest to William Barrett, whose *History of Bristol* was at this time 'suspended for the want of materials' - Meyerstein, p. 131.

34. Barrett's *History of Bristol* was finally published in 1789 by W. Pyne of Bristol. See Meyerstein, p. 482.

35. Thomas Chatterton, senior, was a lay chorister at Bristol Cathedral from January 1746 until his death in 1752. The only remaining testimony to his musical talents is 'A Catch for Three Voices' celebrating the joys of a tavern called 'The Pineapple', where Mr. Chatterton was a member of a club which met there every week. Meyerstein, pp. 8-12.

36. Broderip and Allen were two rival Bristol musicians. See Ch. 7 for the Bristolian division of taste and Chatterton's attitude towards them.

37. Meyerstein, p. 321.

38. See 'Journal 6th', ll. 207-254, in *Works I*, pp. 370-1.

39. "July, 1779. Mr. Barrett assured me that Chatterton knew no other language than his own" - Lort; see Meyerstein, p. 62. Barrett often corrected Chatterton's orthographical or historical mistakes. See Meyerstein, p. 133 and pp. 142-6 for examples of Barrett's interference.

40. "With all his profligacy Mr. Barrett could never make him drink: he spent the money he got upon gingerbread, &c., and was in his behaviour quite boyish" - Seyer; quoted in Meyerstein, p. 144.

41. J. H. Ingram, *The True Chatterton* (1910), pp. 131-2.

42. See Ch. 3, pp. 70-1.

43. "The Soundness of my Mind the Coroner and Jury are to be judges of - desiring them to take notice that the most perfect Masters of Human Nature in Bristol, distinguish me by the Title of the Mad Genius therefore if I do a mad action it is conformable to every Action of my Life which all savored of Insanity" - 'Will', in *Works I*, pp. 502-3.

44. ". . . when the youth first mentioned to Barrett his earliest known Rowley poem, now commonly miscalled "The Bristowe Tragedie", he said he had got 'The Execution of Sir Charles Brandon'. The surgeon said that was impossible, as Sir Charles Brandon lived long after Rowley's time. Chatterton persisted that the poem was in Rowley's writing, but when he next called and produced his transcript, it was of 'The Execution of Sir Charles Bawdin', which Mr. Barrett said was the right name" - J.H. Ingram, *The True Chatterton*, p. 129; also p. 131 for Barrett's interference with the "De Bergham" pedigree.

45. In 1768 the Reverend Alexander Catcott, Vicar of Temple Church, and brother to George Catcott the pewterer, published his *Treatise on the Deluge*, reconciling the discoveries in geology with the Scriptural Creation and Flood. In response Chatterton wrote his 'Epistle to the Revd. Mr. Catcott' (*Works I*, pp. 412-19) and lost the Vicar's favour. See Daniel Wilson, *Chatterton: A Biographical Study* (1869), pp. 194-202.

46. 'Elegy on Mr. Wm. Smith', ll. 13-16, in *Works I*, p. 353.

47. *Works I*, p. 352 and Meyerstein, pp. 287-8.

48. "Peter Smith was another *bon compagnon*, and incurred by his irregularities with Chatterton, the displeasure of his father, so that he was most severely lectured; of which such was the effect, that he retired to his chamber, and set to his associate an example that was but too soon followed" (Richard Smith, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Dec. 1838).

49. 'Kew Gardens', ll. 141-6, in *Works I*, p. 516.

50. On New Years' Day, 1770, Edmunds, of the *Middlesex Journal*, promised anonymity to anyone contributing to his publications. In February 1770, Chatterton wrote 'February' for the *Town and Country Magazine* and the letter 'To the Duke of Grafton' for the *Middlesex Journal*, signed 'Decimus'. Between February and April 'Resignation' and 'Kew Gardens' were sent to the *Middlesex* - the latter not printed, although parts of its variants, 'The Whore of Babylon' and 'Resignation', appeared in the *Freeholder's Magazine* for April and May. See Meyerstein, pp. 318-347.

51. Written October 27th 1769 (Meyerstein, p. 91).

52. Phillips died at Fairford on November 1st 1769 (Meyerstein, pp. 49-50),

53. 'Elegy, Written at Stanton Drew', ll. 23-5, in *Works I*, p. 379-

54. Wilkes was released on April 17th 1770, and on the 24th was sworn in as alderman for the Ward of Farringdon Without (Meyerstein, pp. 365-6).
55. *Works I*, p. 426,
56. "It has been supposed that his violent death in London, was the sudden or almost instant effect of extreme poverty and disappointment. It appears, however, that long before he left Bristol, he had repeatedly intimated to the servants of Mr. Lambert, his intention of putting an end to his existence..." - Gregory, pp. 74-5.
57. Meyerstein, p. 335,
58. 'Letter to William Barrett', Feb/Mar 1770, in *Works I*, p. 494,
59. Meyerstein, pp. 336-344,
60. "With principles and passions such as Chatterton displayed, Mr. Lambert considered it as no longer prudent, after so decisive a proof, to continue him in the house; he accordingly dismissed him immediately from his service, in which he had continued two years, nine months, and thirteen days." - Gregory, p. 75,
61. Gregory, p. 75.
62. Meyerstein, p. 346,
63. Barrett, *The History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol* (1789), p. 647.

CHAPTER SEVEN

'HAD ROWLEY BEEN A LONDONER'

London, April 26, 1770

Dear Mother,

Here I am safe, and in high spirits - To give you a journal of my tour would not be unnecessary. After riding in the basket, to Brislington, I mounted the top of the coach, and rid easy; and agreeably entertained with the conversation of a quaker, in dress, but little so in personals and behaviour. This laughing friend, who is a carver, lamented his having sent his tools to Worcester, as otherwise he would have accompanied me to London. I left him at Bath, when finding it rained pretty fast, I entered an inside passenger to Spee<sup>n</sup>hamland, the half<sup>f</sup>oway stage, paying

seven shillings: 'twas lucky I did so, for it snowed all night, and on Marlborough downs the snow was near a foot high.

At seven in the morning I breakfasted at Spee<sup>n</sup>hamland, and then mounted the coach box for the remainder of the day, which was a remarkable fine one.- Honest gee-ho complimented me with assuring me that I sat bolder and tighter than any person who ever rid with him - Dined at Slough most luxuriantly, with a young gentleman who had slept all the preceding night in the machine; and an old mercantile genius whose school-boy son had a great deal of wit as the father thought, in remarking that Windsor was as old as 'our Saviour's time'... (1)

In London no-one had heard of Thomas Chatterton; not the Thomas Chatterton of legend, for the legend needed the period in London in order to complete its development. The name had been encountered by Horace Walpole and by one Mrs. Ballance (2), but it was not the name as we

experience it - sanctified by paintings and odes. Certain London editors had heard of *Decimus, Probus, Libertas* and *Dunhelmus Bristolensis* (3), and these they were not averse to encountering again, but these fragmented creatures, solidified into the personality of one poet, they had not discovered. The myth, like the parchments and Rowley's biographical sketches, was as yet a scattered and undecided affair, and needed some grand gesture, and at the same time some fine tempering, in order to become whole.

But, by leaving Bristol, some part of this order had been achieved: the first words Chatterton utters after leaving home have an air of liberation, and have shaken off some of the tensions of the last few months: the 'laughing friend' the carver, the rain at Bath, the snow on the Marlborough downs, the early breakfast, the luxuriant dinner, the travel-weary young gentleman, the ridiculous old one whose only ridicule lay in loving his son and repeating his most insipid comments as though they reflected the greatest wit: and would the son grow up to despise his 'mercantile'

father, and would he be reduced to riding forever on the roads of England, a pathetic and broken-hearted figure, telling amused or bored fellow-travellers of his son's cleverness and wit? One could almost be sure that there was a novel budding beneath the studied banter of Chatterton's letters and essays. Chatterton on the roadways and in the inns between Bristol and London is an agreeable travelling companion - courageous and agile, generous and goodnatured. He commiserates with the young gentleman who had spent the whole night in the coach, he encourages the 'mercantile genius' to tell stories of his son. But all the time he is seeing the characters as chance participants in the history of himself, Thomas Chatterton. The quaker's laughter, the coachman's compliments, the old gentleman's boasts must be heightened and resplendent because they are taking part in a journey to the metropolis which must equal in historical power that of Johnson and Garrick, and surpass that of Bute:

A joy prophetic, until then unknown,  
Assur'd him all he view'd would be his own,

(4)

Nevertheless, Chatterton was bemused by the consequences of having left Bristol, for he sensed that there were consequences for having done so, not only in his own life but within the Rowleyan world. He was aware of deep and central changes, and like many youths before and since who have experienced such feelings, it was the externals which ushered in their presence: Chatterton noted the quick, easy talk of the Londoners, their casual yet elegant dress, and the way in which subjects, which had been of great import in Bristol, although still of great import in the capital, were yet discussed with the same easy, half-negligent manner, as though they were of no import at all; he noted how seriousness lost nothing by being treated with a studied flippancy, and how frivolous topics, treated with passionate concern in a coffee-house, seemed on a level with discussions of Mr. Wilkes' next move, or the bravery and nobility of the Lord Mayor. He enjoyed, further, the easiness of

converse, the immediacy of friendships and plans:

Last week being in the pit of Drury-Lane Theatre, I contracted an immediate acquaintance ( which you know is no hard task to me) with a young gentleman in Cheapside; partner in a music shop, the greatest in the city. Hearing I could write, he desired me to write a few songs for him: this I did the same night, and conveyed them to him the next morning. These he showed to a doctor in music, and I am invited to treat with this doctor, on the footing of a composer, for Ranelagh and the gardens. *Bravo, hey boys, up we go!*

(5)

Mr. Fell was in the King's Bench, others were soon to follow him, but things went on swimmingly nevertheless (6): at the Chapter coffee house, where Chatterton knew all the 'geniuses' (7), he met a gentleman who would have introduced him to the Duke of Northumberland as a possible companion to him in his forthcoming tour - 'but alas! I speak no tongue but my own!' (8). He could perhaps become a physician on board a ship, and see the world that way, but Mr. Barrett seemed strangely averse to organizing this for him (9). Mr. Lambert had, quite naturally enough, made difficulties about

writing a reference for his young apprentice (10) - although it mattered little, as the apprentice had no intention of being apprenticed ever again, except to his own pen, where lay the only 'character' he would ever need (11). Still, though life was so free, and so large, and so full of possible adventures, it seemed as though, if there were any constriction which *could* be placed upon them, Bristol would do it: Bristol had sent him to the charity-school where he had learned no languages and was not taught to associate with Dukes; Bristol had lent him books on medicine, and watched him reading them, and yet would not say the word which would send him over the seas with his knowledge. Bristol, 'that place I am sickened to write of' (12), was yet the haven of the Rowleyan world at the same time as being the thorn in the side of the author of that world, and Chatterton in his thoughts on Bristol at this time was facing the dilemma of every myth-maker: the letter to Thomas Cary of July 1770 (13) demonstrates that the city was still the ground for his thoughts about the processes of poetry. Removing poetry onto different

ground was not enough. Once thus removed, it had to be viewed from afar. St. Mary Redcliffe partook easily of the nostalgia of childhood, and could effortlessly be viewed as a whole, but no sooner had Chatterton done this than the whole seemed to scatter into fragments, like the life of Canynge, and the intricacies of detail must be contemplated - 'minute Carvings of Minute Designs, whose chief Beauties are deformity and Intricacy' (14). The newness and the vastness of London caused Chatterton to entertain thoughts of horror concerning the world he had created - its minuteness and detail, the hours of work he had done, furtively and with dirty hands, might be merely dirt and detail and secrecy after all. Perhaps, after all, the cart-horse by which he had travelled to London, and been complimented upon riding so well, was the jade of the hack and not the steed of poetry in disguise:

Instead of mounting on a winged horse,

You on a cart-horse drive in doleful course,\* (15)

Had Rowley been a Londoner (16), thought Thomas Chatterton, his shabbiness might have appeared a little more like elegance; he might, perhaps, have behaved with a little more decorum towards the Duke of Norfolk, and he might have roused the councilmen in the Red Lodge to some lively appreciation of his poetry rather than sending them to sleep with his talk about history and heraldry and how it was not the same these days. Rowley had been half romantic, and half ridiculous, and those qualities in his verse had caught up with Chatterton:

Canyng and I from common course dissent,  
We ride the steed, but give to him the rein,  
Nor will between craz'd mouldering books be pent,  
But soar on high, amid the sunbeams' sheen;  
And where we find some scattered flowers besprent,  
We take it, and from old rust make it clean;  
We will not chained to one pasture be,  
But sometimes soar 'bove truth of history. ✱

(17)

History was pageant and spectacle - the tossing horses at St. Michael's Hill, the rebuke delivered to a tyrannical King, the axe glistening in the sun. But it was also

the glance across the 'noon-day feast', the book which Canynge reads as a boy lying in the sun, the message of good cheer sent by Bishop Carpenter to Canynge. And then it was unendingly complex. It was both the petty calculations of loss, and the overwhelming sense of loss itself, which comes upon you suddenly when you are alone on a summer evening and the meadows are running green and gold -

Eke the highe <sup>S</sup>gonge and everych joie, farewell,  
Farewell the verie Shade of fayre dysporte,

(18)

It was both Liberty as represented by 'the inferior set of people' as Wilkes called the mob on a famous occasion (19), and

Soft Pity's voice unnotic'd by the Crown,  
Stole in a murmur thro' the weeping town,  
And Freedom wandring restless and alone... (20)

Fragile and tentative, the world of Rowley may at any time become the world of Bristol or London: Canynge may be Bute, Aella may be Walpole; Rowley, at the very moment of seeing 'Trouthe', may have to guard against his own potential licentiousness (21).

Behind the inane boasts of a merchant on the coach-road to London may heave a sorrow and loss profounder than that which clings to the heart of 'Aella'. Rowley may be fed scantily upon bread and water, but if you happen to be looking at the right moment, you might catch his creator taking a sheep's tongue surreptitiously from his pocket (22), or dining luxuriantly at Slough. You may even be glancing into the apothecary's shop window at the famous moment when he devours a barrel of oysters (23).

'Aella' with this I send, and hope that you  
Will from it cast away what lines may be untrue,\*

(24)

and the time had come for Chatterton to contemplate the 'scattered flowers' (25) of

his myth and to try to impose some order upon it - something which would survive in the London world, so easy in its dress and so careless of any truth at all, and which invited one quite charmingly to Ranelagh and the gardens.

Safely away from Bristol, Chatterton could evaluate the city from the point of view of his art. Rowley was a complete 'Bristowyan', and it is with Bristol that he must come to terms before anything else, and from the midst of events in London, it is the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe which stands as a symbol of a still unrealized vision. The church is at the centre of the world of the Red Lodge:

Well maiest thou be astound but view it well  
Go not from hence before thou see thy fill  
And learn the Builder's Vertues and his name  
Of this tall Spyre in every Countye telle  
And with thy Tale the lazing Rychmen shame  
Shoue howe the Glorious Canynge, did excelle  
How hee good Man a Friend for ~~C~~<sup>S</sup>ynge became  
And gloryous paved at once the Waie to Heavn and Fame,

(26)

But it is not until Chatterton reaches London that the church can be assimilated into his art, and used as a touchstone for its values:

Step into Radcliff Church, look at the noble Arches, observe the Symetry the Regularity of the whole. how amazing must that Idea be which Can comprehend at once all that Magnificence of Architecture, do not Examine one Particular Beauty, or dwell upon it Minutely, take the Astonishing whole in your Empty, Pericranium and then, think that what the Architect of that Pile was in Architecture, is Allen in Musick. (27)

We are still to 'see our fill', but not in order to dwell upon the virtues of the builder, but for a different reason which appears, when we consider it thoroughly, more insistent in tone than the poetic eulogy for the benefit of the 'curious Traveller: in the letter to Cary there is a wilfulness, a tension. We are of course in the middle of a dispute - a dispute about music. There were two musicians in Bristol for the purposes of Chatterton's story - Broderip and Allen. Bristol was divided in its taste, as London was divided between Handel and Mozart. Chatterton in his

elegiac mode admired Broderip - and his 'On  
Mr. Broderip's Excellent Performance on the  
organ' celebrates his 'solemn melting  
strains', which

Unbinds the soul from earthly chains,  
And wings her to the Blest, (28)

But for the purpose of argument about art,  
and for demonstration of ideas about it,  
Chatterton preferred Allen. Allen appeals  
to the intellect and to the sensibility, and  
for an example of how superior this is, we  
are to be taken on a tour around St. Mary  
Redcliffe - or rather we are to be told how  
infinitely superior it is to see the whole  
church at once, than to possess the  
tourist's attitude of mind towards it:

You accuse me of Partiality in my  
Panegyric on Mr. Allen. Pardon me, my Dear Friend,  
but I believe there are few, very few in Bristol who  
know what Musick is. Broderip, has no taste, at  
least no real Taste, - Step into Radclift Church,  
look at the Noble Arches, observe the Symetry the  
Regularity of the whole. (29)

So it is the demon Taste which haunts the particularity of the artist, and threatens him with boredom and vulgarity. Of course Chatterton was jealous of the musician's art, which had Bristol in quiet raptures and which even took place simultaneously with worship in St. Mary Redcliffe; and which produced those external trappings of fame - disputes and side-taking which was not to happen to Rowley until the 1780's. In 'Kew Gardens', three months before the letter to Cary, Chatterton had sided with Allen as opposed to Broderip's 'heav'nly music of domestic spheres', by which the listeners are

Rous'd to Devotion in a sprightly Air,  
Danc'd into Piety and jigg'd to Pray'r (30)

which has far too much of Bristol in it - too much of the Bristolian pedantry, too much of the Bristol Assembly Rooms where

in the dull solemnity of Higs  
The dancing bears of Commerce murder Jigs;  
Here dance the dowdy belles of crooked trunk,  
And often, very often, reel home drunk, (31)

Broderip is too much the imitator of Bristol  
behaviour and fashion. His art does not  
give the inhabitants any consciousness of  
other modes of feeling, of things outside  
themselves. It does not colour the known  
world so that they feel, afterwards, almost  
ashamed of their lives so far; humbled, if  
they are George Catcott; moved, if they are  
Thomas Phillips; rather envious and  
emulative, if they are Thomas Chatterton.  
Broderip rather confirms the city in its  
stodginess - it encourages their silliness  
and their pettiness:

How unlike Allen! Allen is divine!  
His touch is sentimental, tender, fine.  
No little Affectations e'er disgraced  
His more refined, his sentimental taste:  
He keeps the passions with the sound in play,  
And the soul trembles with the trembling ~~key~~.

(32)

Cary in his letter to Chatterton had questioned him on this unkind dismissal of Broderip in favour of Allen. But Chatterton while still in Bristol had been reprimanded by Broderip and turned out of the organ-loft, where he had been talking with his friends while Broderip was playing (33). But besides this remembered slight, both Broderip and Allen, like St. Mary Redcliffe itself, were the vehicles for Chatterton's ideas about poetry and excellence and style. These preferences for other artists which Chatterton speaks of, allow a freedom in which he can express latent ideas about his own art; - the more so as these subjects of his admiration or raillery - Allen, Broderip, Catcott, Burgum, - were provincial figures; they belonged to Bristol and by this time Chatterton had escaped from their stultifying influence; they were almost certainly not going to make their mark anywhere outside the Juvenile Club or Barrett's dinner-table; even Alexander Catcott, intelligent and urbane, from whose house Chatterton had been banned for his comments on his 'Treatise on the Deluge' (34), was likely only to be known and

respected in a small academic circle. But it is in the sister-art of music that Chatterton chooses to place his dilemma, and his letter to Cary, written in a spirit of fashionable bravado and dispute, reveals also real tensions in Chatterton between wit and virtue, nature and fashion, the myth-maker and the artist: Shaftesbury related the love of beauty and harmony in art to the love of the good in Man:

Shou'd a Writer upon Musick, addressing himself to the Students and lovers of Art, declare to 'em, 'That the Measure or Rule of HARMONY was Caprice or Will, Humpour or Fashion', 'tis not very likely he shou'd be heard with great Attention, or treated with real Gravity. For HARMONY is Harmony by Nature, let Men judge ever so ridiculously of Musick. So is Symmetry and Proportion founded still, in Nature, let Mens Fancy prove ever so barbarous, or their Fashions ever so Gothick in their Architecture, Sculpture, or whatever other designing Art. 'Tis the same case, where Life and MANNERS are concern'd. Virtue has the same fix'd Standard. The same Numbers, Harmony, and Proportion will have place in MORALS; and are discoverable in the Characters and Affections of Mankind; in which are laid the just Foundations of an Art and Science, superiour to every other of human Practice and Comprehension. (35)

Chatterton's letter to Cary is ambivalent in its attitude of acquiescence in this natural beauty and order on the one hand, and the

embellishments of style on the other; for although the substance of the letter is against concentration on 'Intricacy', the persuasion of the language is elsewhere:

You see minute Carvings of Minute Designs, whose Chief Beauties are deformity and Intricacy... If it is not too much Trouble, take a walk to the college gate, view the labyrinths of knots which twist round that mutilated Piece, trace the windings of one of the Pillars and tell me, if you don't think a Great Genius lost in these minutiae of Ornaments. (36)

Despite the fact that Chatterton remembers vividly these details which he is disdaining, the very tone of the language itself is a reversal of this disdain. 'If it is not too much trouble...view the labyrinths...trace the windings...and tell me...' These read like a lover's recommendations of beauty rather than a disavowal of 'littleness'. It is of the same tone as the earlier 'how amazing must that idea be which can Comprehend at once all that Magnificence of Architecture'; so that the style of the language, if not its ostensible argument, is coming to terms with

the fact that the 'littlenesses' and 'intricacies' of art must all be assimilated into an 'Idea', and that style and taste and hard work and fashion must all be acknowledged as elements in it. Thomas Rowley is more nearly allied to the thought of Mandeville than of Shaftesbury - Mandeville with his wry insistence on the necessity for the dubious, the selfish action in order to ensure the good of the safe nurtured poetic hive of Canynge's Bristol: how readily he whisks Canynge away from the prospect of a marriage to a lady of the Woodvilles, so protecting the world of the Red lodge and their own little coterie of poets, and his own secure world of patronage! (37). And how disarmingly does he declare to that same patron, before the assembled Court of the Red Lodge, that he will bypass the truth of 'History' for the flower of poetry, and, for the appearance of the steed, will give the reins to the cart-horse (38). The world of Canynge survives against a background of war and intrigue and worldliness, only because Rowley manoeuvres events in such a way as to defeat tyranny in his own devious unexpected way; poetry

survives the pride and demands of patronage by pretending to be history, pretending to mean what it says; in this way tradition, the Court, the poet and the patron are preserved. Otherwise the world would be in the same condition as Mandeville's hive, when Jove decides to teach the bees a lesson and actually give them what they demand - honesty, truth and virtue; with the result that all the real builders and craftsmen take their leave:

The building Trade is quite destroy'd,  
Artificers are not employ'd;  
No Limner for his Art is fam'd,  
Stone-cutters, Carvers are not nam'd,  
Those that remain'd, grown temp'rate, strive  
Not how to spend, but how to live,  
And when they paid their Tavern Score,  
Resolv'd to enter it no more:  
No Vintner's Jilt in all the Hive  
Could wear now Cloth of Gold, and thrive.

(39)

Certainly more than a sense of personal freedom and greatness beset him. For a young Patriot like Chatterton it was an exciting time to come to London. On the very day that his mock 'Last Will and Testament' was discovered by Lambert, thus

finally achieving his release from his apprenticeship, the 'North Briton' was jubilant with the anticipated release of Wilkes. On April 17th. Wilkes was released. On the 24th., the day before Chatterton arrived in London, he was returned unopposed as alderman of the Ward of Farringdon Without, and 'banqueted famously'. Chatterton's arrival coincided with the news of the Boston Riot, depicted in the May edition of the *Freeholder's Magazine* by a copperplate showing the shooting down of American citizens (40). The patriot 'Decimus' from Bristol, whose arrival had been heralded by the satirical elegy 'February', 'Resignation' and 'Kew Gardens', was quick to respond to the atmosphere of the moment:

Think of the recent murders at Boston.  
O, my Lord! however you may force a smile into your countenance, however you may trifle in the train of dissipation, your conscience must raise a hell within. I cannot think you so hardened a ruffian, as to view without concern the miseries you have occasioned. If greatly villainous, you could rejoice in the ruin of a nation - the distresses of a private family, the cries of the widow, must awaken the torture of your soul. (41)

He was lodging at this time with one Mrs. Ballance, a cousin of his mother's, in Shoreditch. At Drury Lane Theatre they were showing *The Provoked Husband* and *The Ladies Frolic*. (42). He spent his days in coffee houses talking politics and fashion, his nights scribbling while Mrs. Ballance's nephew slumbered beside him, and 'every morning the floor was covered with pieces of paper not so big as sixpences, into which he had torn what he had been writing before he came to bed' (43). He dined sparingly upon bread and water - except occasionally he was sighted taking a sheep's tongue out of his pocket (44). He was generally amenable except that once he raved at Mrs. Ballance for calling him 'Cousin Tommy', and asked her if she had ever heard of a poet called *Tommy*. (45). She said he was proud as Lucifer.

On the 23rd. May Beckford, the Lord Mayor, delivered his 'humble Remonstrance' to the King. Horace Walpole, of course, wrote an account of it, with a mixture of excitement and outrage:

A Remonstrance had been sent from Newcastle, and, on May 23rd, the second remonstrance from the City of London was presented by the Lord Mayor and Common Council. It had been drawn up by Lord Chatham, or formed on one of his late speeches. The King made a short and firm answer, referring to his former. He had no sooner spoken it, than, to the astonishment of the whole Court, Beckford, the Lord Mayor, desired leave to say a few words. This was totally unprecedented. Copies of all intended harangues to the Sovereign are first transmitted privately to Court, that the King may be prepared with his answer. On this occasion, the King was totally at a loss how to act. He was sitting in ceremony on his throne, and had no means of consult, no time to consider what to do. Remaining silent and confounded, Beckford proceeded, with great expressions of loyalty, and of assurances of the respect and attachment borne to his Majesty by the citizens, and he besought his Sovereign not to listen to secret and malevolent insinuations against them, and humbly solicited some favourable syllable of reply. The King, however, made none, but suffered them to kiss his hand, notwithstanding the murmurs of the courtiers who surrounded him, and who were scandalized at the innovation. (46)

As Meyerstein points out, this has a very neat parallel with another 'remonstrance' to another King: Sir Charles Baldwin, being drawn up St. Michael's Hill to his execution, confronts King Edward 1V sitting at the 'grete mynster wyndowe', and prophesies the disasters which will befall the land ruled by a tyrant and usurper (47). Chatterton so admired Sir Charles for this bold stand that he added a footnote: 'I defy Homer, Virgil, or any of their Bardships to produce so

great a Hero as Syr Charles Bawdin as he's going to execution' (48). And here was Beckford imitating such heroism, reproducing the spectacle outside the world of Rowley, and holding out for Chatterton the hope that all would be well in the writing of his biography, since great occasions could find a place within it:

Your Lordship has proved the goodness of your heart, the soundness of your principles, and the merit of the cause in which you are engaged, by the rectitude of your conduct. Scandal maddens at your name, because she finds nothing to reproach you with; and the venal hirelings of the Ministry despair of meriting their pay by blackening your character... The City of London has, in an extraordinary manner, testified the opinion of your abilities; and at a time when Liberty, and all an Englishman holds sacred, was at stake, reposed a trust in you; which, were you to betray, would inevitably ruin the constitution of this country.- I would ask a troop of gartered vassals, Could the most misguided favour of a King, the greatest reward of a minister, bestow such an honour as has been bestowed upon you? Birth and fortune were not the bribes which purchased it: an unshaken fidelity, a tried integrity, and the spirit of a Briton, actuating a man whose private life is irreproachable; that, and that only, deserved and received it. (49)

At the same time he was writing a letter condemning Wilkes, writing an 'Introductory Essay to the Moderator' in favour of the

government, and writing to his sister, 'he is a poor author, who cannot write on both sides' (50).

On June 21st, Beckford died 'of a violent fever, contracted, as supposed, from the agitation into which his violence had thrown his blood, and from sudden cold caught in the country, whither he had retired for a little repose' (51).

Chatterton's 'Elegy' for Beckford appeared on June 30th in the *Public Advertizer*:

But he is gone! - And now, alas! no more  
His generous Hand neglected Worth redeems;  
No more around his Mansion shall the poor  
Bask in his warm, his charitable Beams.

No more his grateful Countrymen shall hear  
His manly Voice, in martyr'd Freedom's Cause;  
No more the courtly Sycophant shall fear  
His poignant Lash, for violated Laws. (52)

His second letter to the Lord Mayor on his Remonstrance had been accepted by Bingley, proprietor of the *North Briton*, but was stopped by the Mayor's death. Chatterton wrote

Accepted by Bingley, set for, and thrown out of the  
N. Briton, 21st June, on account of the Lord Mayor's death

	£	s.	d.
Lost by his death on this essay	1	11	6
	-----		
Gained in Elegies	2	2	0
" " Essays	3	3	0
	-----		
Am glad he is dead by	3	13	6

(53)

But in Shoreditch, the Mayor's death caused a scene stormier than the 'Cousin Tommy' incident. According to Mrs. Ballance, 'When Beckford died, he was perfectly frantic, and out of his mind; and said he was ruined' (54). By a fitting irony, the 'Elegy for Beckford' in the Oxford edition of Chatterton's poems is included with the 'Works of doubtful authenticity' (55). He mourned the noble patriot; he was glad he was dead by three pounds thirteen shillings and sixpence; he was quite distracted and said he was ruined; and soon afterwards he changed his lodgings to 39 Brooke Street.

CHAPTER SEVEN - NOTES

1. 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton', 26 April 1770, in *Works I*, p.510.
2. Mrs. Ballance was a cousin of Chatterton's mother, with whom he stayed when he first arrived in London. Dix, p.287.
3. Names used by Chatterton for his various political essays and satires; see Meyerstein, p.324. As early as November 1768, he is found in the acknowledgements to contributors in the *Town and Country Magazine*: 'D.B. of Bristol's favour will be gladly received' - Dix, p.66.
4. 'Resignation', ll.143-4, in *Works I*, p.472. In this poem Chatterton writes a satiric idealization of Bute's ('Sawney's') youth, and his heroic arrival in London. The account of his youthful learning and promise is not unlike that of Canynge in 'The Storie of Wylliam Canynge'. (*Works I*, p.245).
5. 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton', 14 May 1770, in *Works I*, p.570.
6. Ibid.
7. 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton', 6 May 1770, in *Works I*, p.560: "I am quite familiar at the Chapter Coffee-house, and know all the geniuses there".
8. 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton', 14 May 1770, in *Works I*, p.570.
9. "I intend going abroad as a Surgeon, Mr. Barratt has it in his Power to assist me greatly by giving me a physical Character; I hope he will" - 'Letter to George Catcott', 12 August 1770, in *Works I*, p.670. See also Dix, p.289.
10. "Call upon Mr. Lambert, shew him this, or tell him, if I deserve a recommendation, he would oblige me to give me one - or if I do not, it would be beneath him to take notice of me" - 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton', 26 April 1770, in *Works I*, p.510.
11. "A Character is now unnecessary; an author carries his character in his pen" - 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton, Thomas Cary and others', 6 May 1770, in *Works I*, p.560<sup>61</sup>
12. 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton', 14 May 1770, in *Works I*, p.570,

13. 'Letter to Thomas Cary', 1 July 1770, in *Works I*, p.639.
14. Ibid.
15. <sup>Adapted from</sup> 'Aella', ll.79-80, in *Works I*, p.177.
16. "...had Rowley been a Londoner, instead of a Bristowyan, I could have lived by copying his works" - 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton', 14 May 1770, in *Works I*, p.570.
17. <sup>Adapted from</sup> 'Aella', ll.81-88, in *Works I*, pp.177-8.
18. 'Eclogue the First', ll.27-8, in *Works I*, p.306.
19. R.J.White, *The Age of George III* (1968), p.70.
20. 'Kew Gardens', ll.61-3, in *Works I*, p.514.
21. 'The Storie of Wylllyam Canynge', ll.239 >, in *Works I*, p.244.
22. "The nephew...says, that he lived chiefly upon a bit of bread, or a tart, and some water; but he once or twice a week saw him take a sheep's tongue out of his pocket" - Meyerstein, p.380.
23. Meyerstein, p.432.
24. <sup>Adapted from</sup> 'Aella', ll.41-2, in *Works I*, p.176.
25. 'Aella', l.85, in *Works I*, p.178.
26. 'Stay curyous Traveller and pass not bye', ll.207-214, in *Works I*, p.99.
27. 'Letter to Thomas Cary', 1 July 1770, in *Works I*, p.640.
28. 'On Mr. Broderip's Excellent Performance on the Organ', ll.11-12, in *Works I*, p.168.
29. 'Letter to Thomas Cary', in *Works I*, p.640.
30. 'Kew Gardens', ll.157-8, in *Works I*, p.517.
31. 'Kew Gardens', ll.141-4, in *Works I*, p.516.
32. 'Kew Gardens', ll.169-174, in *Works I*, p.517.
33. Meyerstein, p.321,
34. See Ch.6, n.45,
35. Quoted in Munro, *The Ambivalence of Bernard Mandeville*, p.182.

36. 'Letter to Thomas Cary', in *Works I*, p. 641.
37. 'Lyfe of W: Canynge - by Rowlie', ll. 165-180, in *Works I*, p. 233.
38. 'Aella', ll. 81-8, in *Works I*, pp. 177-8.
39. Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* (Oxford, 1957), p. 33, ll. 8-17.
40. Meyerstein, pp. 365-6.
41. 'Decimus to the Earl of Hillsborough', in *Works I*, p. 565.
42. Meyerstein, p. 365.
43. Meyerstein, p. 380.
44. Ibid.
45. Meyerstein, p. 378.
46. Walpole, *Memoirs of the Reign of King George III* (London, 1845), p. 154.
47. *Works I*, p. 17.
48. Ibid.
49. 'Probus to the Lord Mayor', in *Works I*, p. 582.
50. 'Letter to Mary Chatterton', 30 May 1770, in *Works I*, p. 587.
51. Walpole, *Memoirs*, p. 156.
52. 'An Elegy on the Much Lamented Death of William Beckford, Esq', ll. 69-76, in *Works II*, p. 716.
53. Meyerstein, p. 382.
54. Meyerstein, p. 381.
55. *Works II*, pp. 713-718.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CHATTERTON'S FINAL HOUR

Thomas Rowley, though not a Londoner, had been obliged, some time after the performance of 'Aella', to spend some time in London, helping Canynge to sort out problems which had arisen within his family: his brother John, who had been left in Canynge's care, had caused the usual trouble natural to younger sons (1); and it seemed as though, as time went on, the Court of Canynge was to become more and more worldly, more and more attached, through its shipping and trading associations, and through connections at Court, to that London world which Rowley found vaguely threatening, but which Canynge found himself drawn to, by that strain of vanity and worldliness within his nature which made him pleased to be in the midst of great events and

controversies; so that although he had been disconsolate at his wife's death, and 'was not the man he once was', he had so far accepted her loss ten years later, as to be quite happy at the prospect of the King's wedding, and of presenting the Queen with his father's gold chain (2). It seemed for a long time as though Canynge had a way with Kings, employing some of that tact and deviousness which he had inherited from his father: 'In the wars of the Houses of Lancaster and York he sent three thousand marks to King Edward, who therefore tendered him many honours' (3). But this habit of diplomacy was renounced in the most sudden and dramatic manner. The occasion was a feast at the Red Lodge, at which King Edward was present: 'Kynge Edwarde yestardae dyd feeste atte mie rudde House goeynge ynne the Boate uponne the Tyde' (4). He had already beheaded Sir Baldwin Fulford, so soon to be celebrated by the pen of Rowley, and two knights called Bright and Heysant, all of whom had fought for the House of

Lancaster (5). And so the feasting was wary, and the guests were made aware that the King was in no mood for defiance from the Mayor of Bristol who had been of the wedding party of King Henry IV and had given his father's gold chain to his Queen as a wedding-gift. This atmosphere of veiled distrust and compromise was suddenly shattered by a short conversation which occurred between Canynge and the King, under the cover of the feigned merriment of the gathering. 'Canynge', said the King, leaning towards the Mayor with a strange watchful expression, 'I have a wife for thee of noble house'. 'My good Liege', answered Canynge immediately, his eyes still on the minstrels who were entertaining the company, 'I am old and need not a wife'. 'By our Lady, you must have one' (6). The command and the refusal took place under the guise of the mildest of pleasantries, but the history of Canynge's Bristol, the poetry of Rowley, the fate of Thomas Chatterton changed direction in that moment. Thomas Rowley, who was not present at

the feast - as indeed when was Rowley present anywhere, involved as he always was on his secret tasks and reveries - suddenly emerged in Canynge's consciousness as the saviour of the mason's lodge; Canynge moved, willingly at last, into the boundaries of the world which Rowley had prepared for him; for an instant, he thought that world was ruined - the running meadows of his boyhood, the sorrow of his wife's death, the glory and austerity of the Red Lodge, was to be dissipated into obedience and into a worldly marriage, and Canynge wanted it contained, even if by a defiance which would end in another such incident as the execution of Sir Charles Baldwin. And so at last Rowley was called upon to act in the preservation of Canynge's world:

I saied ne moe bethynkeynge  
ytte a Jeste botte I now unkeven ytte ys  
a Trouthe; comme to mee and arede mee  
for I wylle ne bee wedded for anie  
Kynge. (7)

Rowley sent for Carpenter, Bishop of Worcester, and together they arranged for Canynge to take Holy Orders, and to be beyond the power of the King - 'an hollie Preeste unmarriageabil'. The King was very angry, and had to be appeased - there is some confusion about the three thousand pounds (9); there is mention of Canynge's trading rights and his ships ( 10) - but with these confused references the world of merchants and shipping and negotiations fades, and the story of Canynge slides to an end, with Content and Solitude and Poetry in the College at Westbury.

Horace Walpole continued to write to his friends of his unfortunate collision with the story of Chatterton, and in 1779 circulated privately two hundred copies of his defense of his behaviour, which did not appear in public until 1782, as his *Letter to the* <sup>Editor of</sup> *Miscellanies of Chatterton* in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (11); for by then the fiction had begun to take hold on

the imagination of the age, and Walpole knew that he had lost, that some lives assume the shape of fictions, and that some deaths are symbolic; but he knew, also, how arbitrary the workings of myth, and how at an instant the steed may become the cart-horse; and therefore he wrote with confidence and conviction that the death of the lawyer's clerk was irrelevant, for if he had not taken arsenic for poetry, he would have died on the gallows for 'promissory notes' (12); so sudden are the decisions of the imps of mythology, so unwittingly do their chosen creatures lie in the sun and receive their instructions:

Within the <sup>G</sup>Garret's spacious dome  
There ~~is~~ <sup>lies</sup> a well-stored ~~rich~~ <sup>wealthy</sup> room. (13)

There is no knowing what such promise of riches may lead to in a poor apprentice who is, after all, no better than other apprentices (14); and there is no telling at what moment the imps of

mythology matched his life with the life of a fifteenth century poet so that he died surrounded by papers in a garrett room rather than on the gallows. But Horace Walpole knew something of this, and grew weary with words, which had cheated him, and bound him to another's fiction. Unwillingly he added his store of reflection and justification to the accumulating lumber of Chatterton's story, but the story, which seemed so strong, scattered into fragments at every touch, and resisted every resolution.

'In order to write of a man's life, it might be enough to say of some, that he was born at such a place and time, and to say where he died. But others there are whose lives lack recital because so many noble matters are contained in their story. Of such a kind is he of whom I now write...' (15)

Thomas Rowley knew that the life of Canynge would always evade him, even

though in their last years, after the crisis of the proposed Woodville marriage, Canynge had abandoned Courtly matters and had lived with Rowley in the College at Westbury: 'Come my Rowley and let us spend our remaining years together' (16), he had written, as Lady Wishfort had implored Marwood; 'happiness is nowhere to be found. Society has pleasures, Solitude has pleasures, but Content alone can dispense with pain'. Rowley concludes his 'Life' here, because the recent years of companionship before Canynge's death slid into oblivion, and the only important things remained the symbols, - Canynge's bright, strange, lonely boyhood, when nothing was accomplished, and his death, after everything had been accomplished; but Canynge in death had two tombs, and of these Rowley was aware as he drew his Life of Canynge to an end with a conventional eulogy:

Heere doethe ende the Letters of  
Mastre Wm. Canynge who as a Merchante did emploie  
alle the Radcleve Syde of Brystowe ynne Trade. as  
a Manne theie wylle dysplaie hymme. As a Learned

Wyseager he excelled ynne alle thynges. as a Poette and Peyncter he was greete wythe hym I lyved at Westburie Sixe Yeeres beefore he died and bee nowe hasteynge to the Grave mieselfe.

(17)

Only the past was real, and yet the past, too, evaded him; he must write fragment after fragment, approach the life of Canynge through all its various aspects, recall the meadows of St. Mary Redcliffe, and yet still it remained intangible, a past questioned by two tombs and a sea of words, disarmed by its own rhetoric.

But of writing fictions there is no end, and fictions so fragmentary as that which emerged from the lumber-room above St. Mary Redcliffe remain more than usually suggestive. A thousand different possibilities cling to the life of Canynge, though we have it as a fact that he chose the priestly and the austere; and a myriad

conjectures cling to the death of the poet who died in Brooke Street in 1770 - (for die he did, shortly after leaving Shoreditch, and was buried in a grave marked William Chatterton, subsequently lost) (18). They found him surrounded by those papers which he was accustomed to keep at his side as he slept, pieces of paper not so big as sixpences (19). Amidst the varying contending fictions which abound about the circumstances of the death of the lawyer's clerk, the mind favours certain rumours which it chooses to treat as facts: on an August evening in 1770, the lawyer's clerk, being hungry, went into the bakery where he had been wont to buy stale bread cheaply, and asked for his usual frugal quantity; but he was in debt; mounds and mounds of stale bread had he eaten, during the long dusty London summer, while Wilkes waited for his moment and Mr. Fell and Mr. Edmunds languished in the King's Bench, and Aaron Crucifix lingered in St. Paul's, and not one had he paid for; and so on this day the bread was refused him; he

immediately crossed the road to where a  
Mr. Cross, an apothecary, kept his shop,  
and purchased a portion of arsenic, and  
took that as his supper instead, mixed  
with a little water. (20)

O love, was thys thie joie, to shewe the treate,  
Than groffysche to forbydde thie hongered gwestes to eate?

(21)

I am Loves borro'r, and can <sup>ne</sup> never paie,  
Bott be hys borrower styllie, and thyne, nie swete, for aie

(22)

Certainly the lawyer's clerk had been  
cheated: some rich vision had not  
materialized. But the nature of that  
vision, and why it ended in a garret in  
Brooke Street, is the most hopeless of  
speculations, and leads one into that  
quality, so much more desperate and  
unforgiveable than that of hopelessness,  
that of the banal; the results of which  
can be read in those outpourings of the  
very same reverend gentlemen who wrote

so prolifically of the lawyer's clerk in the nineteenth century, and whose scribbling figures are now so hazy behind their earnest volumes. But the eighteenth century gentleman they so despised, Horace Walpole, is the best voice to lead us into an understanding of Thomas Chatterton: for Walpole had been chosen by Chatterton to play a major role in his fiction, and he had refused:

I should have encouraged a propensity to forgery, which is not the talent most wanting culture in the present age. All of the house of forgery are relations; and though it is just to Chatterton's memory to say, that his poverty never made him claim kindred with the richest, or most enriching branches, yet his ingenuity in counterfeiting styles, and, I believe, hands, might easily have led him to those more facile imitations of prose, promissory notes. (23)

Many of those nineteenth century biographers, wading through the lumber-room in a haze of boredom, in search of motives and character, have mistaken Horace Walpole's words as evidence merely of a lack of discrimination and

good taste on the writer's part; but they themselves missed the merged elements of the imaginative and the monetary which hung together in the eighteenth century mind, and from which the authors of forgeries did not depart, but were affirming by the very activity of forgery itself. The 'Baron of Otranto' (24), as Chatterton called him, had himself created a world which he was always afraid would disappear: he would invite a large party to breakfast in the green and gold of Strawberry Hill, and sit with them in a wood and listen to the French horns and worry about whether his guests could understand the generous opulence of the gesture, and when he saw that they did not, he could pretend it was all a joke, and he would say 'my castle is made of paper' (25); and somehow his thoughts would get back to Florence, which he had loved in his youth, and to which he longed to return, but never would, just as Thomas Rowley would never get to Rome. And so Horace Walpole survived into the twilight of the age of Patronage, a debilitated and

often reluctant Maecenas, when all around him artists with no castles and no friends in Florence were bowing out: 'It is very provoking', he complained to Hannah More in 1790, 'that people must always be hanging or drowning themselves or going mad...' (26). That was twenty years after he had been to the dinner at the Royal Academy and been informed, during a wrangle with Goldsmith, that the lawyer's clerk from Bristol, whose peevish letters had plagued him for a time, had taken his own life in a garrett in Brooke Street (27). He had advised the boy that 'when he had made a fortune he might unbend himself with the studies consonant to his inclinations' (28); for even at that time it had been clear to Walpole that poetry was no longer confined to gentlemen - any stonemason or lawyer's apprentice could practise it. These new practitioners brought with them, apart from the odious tradesman's seriousness which made Walpole flinch at the mention of Parnassus, devious means of forcing their work on the literary world - old

bits of parchment, tales of shadowy gentlemen who could not possibly be persuaded to step forward (29) - but with this deviousness came, surprisingly, a new integrity, which seemed allied to and yet to exist apart from that trading spirit which Walpole so despised. You could no longer pretend your Strawberry Hill was a joke; you defended it and went mad for it and died for it if necessary. It was a distasteful, uncompromising, ungentlemanly affair. It involved conflicting ideas of subterfuge and publicity, fame and secrecy, pageant and retreat. 'Dear Marwood', Lady Wishfort had exclaimed, her creator recognizing the problem as long ago as 1700, 'let us leave the world, and retire by ourselves and be shepherdesses'. 'Let us first despatch the affair in hand, madam', replied Marwood, very sensibly, for there was a great deal of mess to be cleared up (30); but it disgusted Congreve, and with these words he retired and was never heard of again as an artist, but only as a gentleman, in

which capacity Voltaire visited him in 1726, and was vastly disappointed in the change.

The literary forger inhabited a strange landscape somewhere between the gentlemanly remoteness of Walpole and Congreve, and the sturdy and mundane picture of Richardson, whom Hazlitt in 1850 felt no wish to meet:

Richardson? - By all means, but only to look at him through the glass door of his back shop, hard at work upon one of his novels (the most extraordinary contrast that ever was presented between an author and his works); not to let him come behind his counter, lest he should want you to turn customer, or to go upstairs with him, lest he should offer to read the first manuscript of Sir Charles Grandison, which was originally written in eight-and-twenty volumes octavo, or get out the letters of his female correspondents, to prove that Joseph Andrews was low. (31)

Hazlitt and Lamb, with the nostalgia and carelessness of children whose own landscape, inhabited so easily, has been fought for by the struggles of the parents, would much rather have met Fulke Greville - Fulke Greville and Sir Thomas Browne. (32)

But it is with that picture of Richardson that some light begins to be shed upon those shady imposters with whom the author of *Clarissa* would be shocked and troubled, doubtless, to be associated. For these imposters were never outcasts by choice - it was their feebler constitutions, perhaps, which drove them to meet the current of the times with such shady desperate measures instead of practical sense and integrity. They were, on the whole, malleable, obliging creatures; they acquiesced as readily with whatever the age demanded as Richardson himself, or any Grub Street hack - one has only to think of Chatterton placating the impatience of Barrett for one more manuscript for his *History of Bristol*, obliging the vanity of Burgum with an ancestry, of Ireland desperately labouring to provide his father with Shakespeare's Confession of Faith (33), of Cunningham as the 'Collector' of ancient ballads for Cromek (34). The literary imposter, says E.K. Chambers,

is always in touch with the main current of ideas; the chief interests of the epoch to which he belongs are his chief interests. When, as in the Renaissance, men's minds are bent on the classics, he produces classical imitations; when, as at the end of the (eighteenth) century, they turn to primitive and forgotten literatures, these become to him a new source of inspiration. This, perhaps, could hardly have been predicted beforehand; a tendency might have been looked for in men who, after all, are in many cases eccentrics, towards antagonism rather than sympathy with the spirit of their age. (35)

And so we must approach the dilemma of literary forgery, not through the world of Shakespeare, Southampton and Heminge, not through the Court of Canynge, not even through the churchyard of St. Mary Redcliffe, but through 'the glass door of the back shop', and watch them, as Hazlitt envisaged Richardson, labouring behind the counter, with parchment and dust and dirty hands. This situation was for them, too, 'the most extraordinary contrast that ever was presented between an author and his works'. Who would believe that Thomas Rowley, any more than Clarissa Harlowe, was conceived and created in the back-shop? Richardson as a young man used to

write love-letters for the young girls of the neighbourhood (36), just as Chatterton wrote love-poems for his friend Baker; and the letters of Richardson's heroines are poised, like the most unscrupulous of fakes, between the privacy of the locked room and the abandoned appeal to the outer world; like them also, depending upon the physical, the immediate, for the ethereal and the tragic - upon ink and paper, interruptions and secrecy - smuggling letters out in flower-pots, under stones in the garden, under rose-bushes. The sentiment was bound to the finished structure, to the actual process of writing; for if pens and paper and parchments are lost, the whole structure collapses at once. Here is Pamela plotting and scheming:

I have asked her to... indulge me with pen and ink,... for I begged to be left to myself as much as possible. She says she will let me have it; but then I must promise not to send any writing out of the house, without her seeing it. I said it was only to divert my grief, when by myself; for I loved writing as well as reading: but I had nobody to send to, she knew well enough. - 'No, not at present, maybe', said she; 'but I am told you are a great writer, and it is

in my instructions to see all you write: so, look you here', said she; 'I will let you have a pen, ink, and two sheets of paper; for this employment will keep you out of worse thoughts: but I must see them always when I ask, written or not written'. - 'That's very hard', said I; 'but may I not have to myself the closet in the room where we lie, with the key to lock up my things?' 'I believe I may consent to that', said she; 'and I will set it in order for you...' But no sooner was her back turned, than I set about hiding a pen of my own here, and another there, and a little of my ink in a broken china cup, and a little in another cup; and a sheet of paper here and there among my linen; with a little wax and a few papers in several places, lest I should be searched; and something, I thought, might happen to open a way for my deliverance, by these or some other means. (37)

And here is Mrs. Edkins' account of Chatterton's writing difficulties, while working in Bristol for Mr. Lambert:

Mrs. Edkins said she loved the boy like a child of her own: he had seldom much money to spend, and she gave him frequently, when with Lambert, money to buy paper - on hearing him say, with a sad countenance, (for when with him he always looked full of trouble) 'that paper is all gone', explaining to her that Lambert had got at it and destroyed it, because written on, on subjects not appertaining to the office; and when he found his (Chatterton's) paper even in his drawer, he would frequently tax him, as if he ought not to have any, and, with great ill-nature in his manner, ask him where he got it? And on being answered, 'very honestly', even this mild reply would only irritate Lambert, and he would instantly tear it, and throw it at him with great brutality, especially when covered with manuscript; and Mrs. Edkins believes this conduct of his master grieved him most of anything, for he used to regret these ravages, not so much the

letters written to friends, for those he said he could re-write, but his poetical compositions were for ever lost! (38)

No two young people of the servant class have ever aroused as much sympathy, acrimony and controversy in their day, as Pamela Andrews and Thomas Chatterton: both were struggling against innumerable odds, both had a tendency towards the priggish and the dramatic: Pamela at one point pretends to have drowned, just as Chatterton left 'suicide notes' for Mr. Lambert to find. Both were writing in a locked room, but it was a locked room which did not ensure privacy: ever-present was an odious Mrs. Jewkes or a curious footboy who might awake at any moment; and to both the locked room meant both freedom and oppression. And when the underground world of Rowley and *Vortigern* can be seen as the same impulse which produced *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, Walpole's linking of literary forgery with the forging of 'promissory notes' takes on a new meaning; or rather

it is seen that 'all of the house of forgery are relations' indeed, and that the house they belong to is that of literary creation, where there is after all no underground level, and no respectable level, but just myriads of back-rooms and printshops and attics where the devious messy business of creation is being accomplished.

But although it may be refreshing to view the world of Rowley from the long historical perspective, and the story of Chatterton by citing other forgers, and other novelists, and by talking of the change in the idea of patronage - of the fall of Lady Pembroke and the rise of Mr. Dodsley (39) - and of how books, once so carelessly distributed and attributed, had now become of similar import as any other property (40); yet to conclude the story of Rowley and Canynge in such a way would be to act the role of Aella in that tragedy, and to seem to summon the

minstrels of history to comfort us with explanations purely historical; and it would in many ways be fitting to end in such a way, for thus does the 'Ballad of Charity' end:

Virgynne and hallie Seyncte, who sitte yn gloure,  
Or give the mittee will, or give the gode man power, }

(41)

implores Chatterton, thinking of his heroes Wilkes and Beckford, and of how Horace Walpole had dismissed him in his poverty. Here at the very end of the ballad, he suddenly decides to seek an historical explanation for a dilemma which was much larger, or much smaller, or belonged to a different world: the lawyer's clerk wanted, at last, to become the author, rather than the 'discoverer' and servant, of the manuscripts of the lumber-room, and it was this development, no doubt, which led to his downfall. When Beckford died, he said he was ruined, because he

wanted to appropriate something for his own life, and ruin would do; but next he wanted to link this ruin with the poetry of Rowley, but Rowley was self-contained, and had already admitted that most remedies were paltry, most resolutions fatal:

Dherre ys a somewhatte evere yn the mynde,  
Yatte, wythout wommanne, cannot styllid bee;

(42)

The feeling of loss, so central to the poetry of Rowley, had emerged as discontent within the life of Chatterton, the Bristol apprentice, the failed dandy:

*But oh*  
~~Oh~~ - I wyshe to be noe greate,  
In rennome Tenure and Estate,

(43)

'The boredom', says Donald  
Davie in a poem on Pushkin subtitled 'A  
Didactic Poem',

the boredom was  
No vacancy nor want of occupation  
Nor lack of resources. It was the spleen,

And Pushkin certainly fled before it  
Or circumvented it. His poems  
Record the circumventions as  
Hours when the mind, turned outwards, knew  
Friendships or the approach of death  
As gifts. The poet exhibits here  
How to be conscious in every direction  
But that of the self, where deception starts.  
This is nobility; not lost  
Wholly perhaps, if lost to art.

(44)

In the poet's ordering of his  
creativity, he balances between the  
ordinary distractions of everyday life,  
and how these are both diversions and  
vessels for the spleen. Life is a  
constant battle with boredom, but the  
poems record not the boredom itself, but  
the 'circumventions'. Visits and the  
thoughts of death are 'gifts' - the mind  
is 'always outward', totally receptive.

The balance between boredom as a personal predicament and boredom as a literary cult is a precarious one: from being 'vacancy... want of occupation...lack of resources', it must become 'the spleen', and the spleen has an acknowledged place in the mapping-out of the literary landscape, whether it be a street or a cave or a lumber-room. Chatterton was beset by this problem and it was, no doubt, the spleen that got him in the end. Ennui involves the delicate disavowal of the beautiful, and so a heightening of its beauty. Indifference, the quality Chatterton tried so hard to cultivate and yet couldn't quite achieve, has its place within ennui, and unawareness, and often a langorous mood and landscape. The nearest Chatterton gets to transforming boredom into langorous beauty is in his depicting of the boyhood of Canynge, recalled by Rowley himself, dreaming in the green fields of St. Mary Redcliffe, before interrupted by 'Trouthe' (45); or in his use of the minstrels, as in 'Aella', where Chatterton voices a sub-

text, or rather one running parallel to the poetic structure. What is approved of in this structure, is undermined or opposed in a device which is - as it is recognized and ostensibly created by the main structure - supposedly obeying its dictums. The poem's theme demands a celebration of the happiness of marriage - the minstrels sing of unfulfilment and boredom ('Albeytte alle ys fayre, there lackethe somethynge style') (46). It requires a heroic acquittal of bloodshed - it receives warnings against it ('Lett thie floes drenche the blodde of anie thynge bott menne') (47).

Those manuscripts, so lovingly wrought, so arbitrarily disposed of yet so fiercely guarded, are open to doubt, scorn, abuse and interpretation - and therefore contain all the doubt, scorn and abuse in themselves; are constantly interpreting themselves, and negating their precarious 'false' existence. The words are gifts, the muniment room a treasury of order and generosity; the words are usurpers, over-borrowed, the

treasury a shameful place of intrigue  
and theft -

Within the <sup>G</sup>arret's spacious dome  
There <sup>lies</sup> a well-stored <sup>wealthy</sup> ~~lusty~~ room (48),

and the green landscape of St. Mary  
Redcliffe and its environs is sacred  
ground which has been transgressed - not  
the rich and coloured idyll which makes  
up the myth of Canynge's boyhood and the  
Court of the Red Lodge, but the storm-  
swept convent grounds where the starving  
pilgrim is reprimanded by the rich and  
coloured priest himself - Thomas Rowley  
himself, disclaiming the poverty of his  
creator. And so the words, even at  
their most grandiloquent, confess their  
own position as usurpers.

This constant switching of  
roles involves a desperate manipulative  
assignation of roles to others. Others  
must be stereo-types, so that the poet

can be complex and expressive. That is why it was such a disaster that Walpole spurned the role of Patron - he was the only person who rebelled against the tyranny. Everyone else acquiesced: 'persons of no account' remained just that; aunts were silly and vulgar; sisters had no taste. Booksellers were high-handed and indifferent; local literati were at once indulgent and dismissive. Mr. Lambert - at the entreaties of his mother - dismissed Chatterton from his service when he discovered his 'Last Will and Testament', so falling into the prepared role of cruel taskmaster - although in fact he was only twenty-eight years old, was scarcely ever at his offices, and preferred a wild life in town to torturing neurotic apprentices, who were nothing to *him* (49). But if human beings 'have an inalienable right to invent themselves', as Germaine Greer declared at the recent debate on the 'disease' of literary biography, they have also the right to refuse to become

the invention of others - a right Horace  
Walpole recognized and employed:

Somebody has published the poems of Chatterton the Bristol boy, and in the Preface intimates that I was the cause of his despair and poisoning himself, and a little more openly is of opinion that I ought to be stoned. This most groundless accusation has driven me to write the whole story - and yet now I have done it in a pamphlet of near thirty pages of larger paper than this, I think I shall not bring myself to publish it. My story was clear as daylight, I am as innocent as of the death of Julius Caesar, I never saw the lad with my eyes, and he was the victim of his own extravagance two years after all correspondence had ceased between him and me - and yet I hate to be the talk of the town, and am more inclined to bear this aspersion, than to come again upon the stage... It is impossible to have a moment's doubt on the case. The whole foundation of the accusation is reduced to this - if I had been imposed upon, my countenance might have saved the poor lad from poisoning himself for want, which he brought on by his excesses. Those few words are a full acquittal, and would indeed be sufficient - but the story in itself is so marvelous, that I could not help going into the whole account of such a prodigy as Chatterton was. You will pity him, as I do; it was a deep tragedy, but interests one chiefly from his extreme youth, for it was his youth that made his talents and achievements so miraculous. I doubt, neither his genius nor his heart would have interested one, had he lived twenty years more. You will be amazed at what he was capable of before eighteen, the period of his existence - yet I had rather anybody else were employed to tell the story. (50)

Walpole's uneasiness and difficulty springs from his consciousness of the existence of a 'story' - buried somewhere beneath his words of protest and justification is the knowledge that he is dealing not merely with a false accusation which threatens his pride and self-esteem and conscience, but with a powerful fiction, which threatens his own mythologized self; and his task is not to disperse this fiction nor even to superimpose his own upon it, but to make his own so valid that it can exist beside the other. He fails not through lack of candour or feeling or means of expression, but because he cannot conceal those qualities of taste and modesty and compassion which Chatterton, poet that he is, can so easily dispense with or hide somewhere - in the outhouse or the lumber-room - until he can summon them afresh, when they will emerge transformed and endowed with deeper meaning - 'I hate to be the talk of the town' (51). Chatterton loved to be the talk of the town, but he knew also when

to suppress truths which the town would not want to know: 'an author carries his character in his pen' (52). Walpole is touched by the tragedy; he is over-awed by the momentous and detailed nature of the fiction, and frightened by his own role within it. The life of the hero was terrible and ruinous, and the churchyard of St. Mary Redcliffe, the garret in Brooke Street, the parchments, the arsenic, and Walpole's own short-lived correspondence with him, were all the pre-arranged and fortuitous accessories of Ruin. His difficulty was how to portray his own accessories - the house at Arlington Street, the orchards at Strawberry Hill, the dogs, the trinkets, - and wrench them into his own story, which was sad enough:

I am almost crying to find the glorious morsel of summer that we have had turned into just such a watery season as the last; even my excess of verdure, which used to comfort me for everything, does not satisfy me now, as I live entirely alone. I am heartily tired of my large neighbourhood who does not furnish me two or three rational beings at most, and the best of them have no vivacity... I cannot as you do bring myself to be content without variety, without events; my mind is always wanting new food;

summer does not suit me - but I will grow old  
some time or other. Adieu! (53)

There is as much poetry and sadness and sense of loss in this passage as there is in the Eclogues or 'Aella'. Indeed, it inhabits their landscape, - or more especially, because it summons ideas of isolation and late summer storms and the inadequacy of human contact, - the landscape of the 'Ballad of Charity'. For the Ballad is not about the Good Samaritan, or getting caught in a storm, or a comment on the eighteenth century clergy. It is about, like Walpole's letter, the 'miseries of need', the necessity for the poet to be always hovering outside convents, in the company of that most dubious of muses, Thomas Rowley. Rowley is both the wicked Abbot and the good Limitour, and Chatterton is the 'drooping pilgrim', the poor charity boy who was always wishing to be elsewhere; the banished artificer. And also of course he is the Poet without a Patron - the Ballad was

his last poem, and refused by the *Town and Country Magazine* (54); and what a comedown are the confines of the Abbey to the spacious parks of Wilton and Penshurst, and even of Strawberry Hill! But Strawberry Hill itself was a 'falling-off', and Walpole is the Patron without a Poet. With bitterness and great feeling he rebukes the paltry whinings of the poet:

Varlet, replyd the Abbatte, cease youre dinne;  
 This is no season almes and prayers to give;  
 His porter never lets a faitour in;  
 None touch mie rynges who not in honour live.  
 And now the sonne with the blacke cloudes did stryve,  
 And she ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> on the grounde his glairie raie,  
 The Abbatte spurred his steede, and eftsoones roade awaie.

(55)

Had Walpole presented his apology in the voice of poetry, rather than his sensitive and placating prose, his story had been more vivid, his character more colourful and complete. His entrance into the ballad was magnificent; the *two lines* ~~verses~~ which ushered him into the poem ~~has are~~ *are* ~~the rare privilege of a rhyming couplet~~ *confident and compact,*

<sup>and</sup>  
~~which~~ bring<sup>o</sup> a promise of extravagance  
into that starved landscape:

Spurr<sup>ey</sup>inghis palfrie o<sup>er</sup> the watrie plaine,  
The Abbot<sup>e</sup> of Seynte God<sup>e</sup>ns convente came;

(56)

It is the last appearance of the grand gesture in Chatterton's poetry, prior only a few weeks to the grand gesture in his life, but even so we are not blandly to assume that the Abbot represents evil and cunning and indifference - or at least not that such qualities mean anything except in reference to themselves and to the stormy landscape where evil and cunning and indifference may exist with beauty.

Virg<sup>y</sup>in and hallie Seynte<sup>e</sup>, who sitte yn gloure,  
Or give the mittee will, or give the gode man power.

(57)

The concluding lines of the ballad do nothing to sum up the myriad ideas contained within it, where generosity and extravagance, frugality and meanness, the independence of both poetry and the poet are all considered with the same swift movements in light and shadow as the storm itself. The effect of the line

Knights and barons live for pleasure and themselves,

(58)

is not anger or bitterness, but a sad wonder that anyone should live for anything else: 'pleasure and themselves' becomes as wearily beautiful as the picture of Strawberry Hill which Walpole paints in his letters to Montague.

Yet there is no doubt that an external resentment prompted the line also: the ballad is a coming-to-terms with biography and landscape - actual and created. It is no coincidence that the lines

{ Shakes the hie spyre and lost, dispended, drown'd,  
Still on the gallard eare of terroure hanges,

(59)

recalls George Catcott, impudent and  
ridiculous, clinging in triumph to the  
new steeple of St. Nicholas' Church, and  
Chatterton's mocking lines,

In Pomp burlesqu'd the rising Spire to head  
To tell Futurity a pewterer's dead. (60)

Chatterton is wrenching together the  
fragments of detail, significant or  
ridiculous, exalted or mundane, with  
which his life is scattered, and  
bringing to it the 'grace' of poetry -  
and poetry's conferred isolation and  
beauty - the spire without the pewterer,  
finery without either snobbery or  
resentment. But the grace is  
'dissembled', not only because this was  
a poetry which had worked its way to  
beauty through dubious avenues and  
devices, but because these means

themselves had expressed an integrity before unsuspected and only reluctantly recognized by the adolescent, worldly, and rather conventional mind of the poet. Chatterton liked to be 'a sad wag of a boy' (61). He liked to be lewd and noisy and in the fashion. All young men idolized Jack Wilkes, and wanted to go to London. Most young men wrote satirical poetry for the Patriot cause. He liked truth to be what it seemed, and to say what it meant. He envied magnificent gestures by the boasting pewterer, because gestures must confer glory - they must belong to the moment and last forever. The dissembling came about, not merely through a disdain at being associated with the likes of Catcott and the literati of Bristol. Had this been all, the development could have stopped with 'The Battle of Hastings'. But it was the very means of production which fostered the secret, superior art of Rowley, and the character of Rowley, so aloof and disdainful and ironically obliging. The hard work which Chatterton did - to no

avail, except when he endeavoured to present it to some especially favoured outsider, - brought the notion of hopeless toil into the Rowleyan world - the notion of toil with an *idea* which must be offered to others, and which will not only be rejected, but which the poet *means* to be rejected before it is fully expressed. Chatterton's technique produced within his Rowleyan poetry not only toil, but toil with concealment; which is at its most tense and strenuous in Rowley's impassioned prologue to 'Aella'. Add to this the fact that there was also open and required drudgery going on in the background - Chatterton's copying for Lambert, Rowley's collecting for Canynge - and already it is becoming evident that a poetry of mere gesture and bombast is not possible. The created language imposes a distancing whereby what in the Bristol copier would be resentful or ridiculous, becomes self-contained and a fact within its own world: so that although when Chatterton writes to his sister 'I wish I knew the classicals, I

then could do anything' (62), the effect is ruefully pathetic; when Rowley speaks of

Syr John<sup>e</sup>, a knyghte, who hath a barne of lore,

but whom

The Englysho hym to please moste fyrste be latynized

(63)

and of 'Vevyan, a moncke', who, although he preaches so well, is 'as badde yn vearse as goode yn prose' (64), - the effect is not for us to assume that Rowley is determined to undermine these scholars at all costs, but rather to create them for us at once - 'Sir John, a knight', and 'Vevyan, a monk', casually assume their personalities, and bow out again immediately to take their place at the shadowy boundaries of the Rowleyan world. So that when the real

conflict of 'Aella' comes, it is by constantly changing roles with Rowley, so that he is now the steed, now the cart-horse, now the poet, now the dissembler, that Chatterton achieves the intricate and uneasy beauty of the work.

How far Chatterton's ambiguous attitude towards the 'confessing' to Rowley is rooted within both his own circumstances and the accumulated circumstances of the poetry itself, has never been considered by biographers. Baffled by his jealous secrecy in regard to Rowley, they ask why, when everyone knew his pride, his desire for renown and fame, should he keep such creation a secret, or deny it again and again? This made one of the strongest Rowleyan arguments - not only that Chatterton's talents, judged by his satirical pieces, were not equal to the production of Rowley; but that, if he were the author, it would not have been in his nature to want the matter hushed up - the boy who, at five years' old, demanded 'an angel

with a trumpet, to blow my name about all over the world' (65). In 1838, *A Letter to the Admirers of Chatterton*, by one E. Mangin, appeared in response to an advertisement in the *Athenaeum* of a monument being raised to Chatterton in Bristol (66). The writer's purpose - 'as a worshipper of justice as well as of genius' - is to cast doubt on Chatterton's authorship of the Rowley poems, in order to prevent such a statue being erected. His arguments are the usual Rowleyan protests - Chatterton's lack of education, the difference between the Rowleyan and non-Rowleyan poetry, the list of external and internal 'evidence', and he concludes in the usual style of indignant and self-righteous bombast, as good as anything Chatterton could write in the heat of the moment or on a bad day:

Let us recollect in what light Chatterton appeared to the inhabitants of the last age. Not as his admirers esteem him now; not as the unrivalled poet, alike notorious for his genius and his sorrows - but as a poor, song-making stripling, who, through his own fault, has forfeited the advantages of an apprenticeship, and its usual profitable and honourable

consequences, tendered to him through the generosity of one of her noble public institutions; as a youth of not unexceptional morals, of incomplete education, and first remarked simply for laying claim to a chance discovery of the literary remains of distant days; and this chance, not the result of the enthusiasm of the student, but totally unsought, and such as might have presented itself equally to any other adventurer. The Bristol of 1770 may stand excused for her general conduct towards Chatterton. (67)

E. Mangin, for all his nastiness and spleen, is romantic about creative activity. He believes - and so do most of Chatterton's admirers and detractors - that it is a wonderful thing to write a poem and that anyone who does so must immediately want others to know all about it. Perhaps Mr. E. Mangin possessed an adequate income and a comfortable home - his words certainly give off, for all their unpleasantness, - a solid, book-surrounded, Arlington Street-type comfort - and liked to try a bit of versifying in his spare time. Certainly he rates the 'discovery' of ancient poetry far below the creation of it. But he has failed to understand both Chatterton's environment and character;

he has forgotten that almost all Chatterton's contemporaries were either 'song-making striplings' or pedantic but desperate collectors of antiquity, and that to be the possessor of a secret store of both poetry and antiquity was not something which could happen to anyone, but was a unique advantage. To be the generous but discriminating arbiter of poetry, like Rowley himself; to be both borrower and dispenser of words, was a role worth having. Effort, creation, the 'enthusiasm of the student', was nothing - it was going on all around him. The gestures and the liberties which such efforts conferred was everything. 'A great genius can effect anything', Chatterton was accustomed to saying, and at the heart of such an assertion is not only bombast and triumph, but desperation and boredom; for Chatterton in his provincial snobbish gesture-loving mind despised the processes of genius; he wanted not to 'effect' anything, he wanted the effects to be conferred. Anything can be created, but not

everything can be bestowed. He wanted to possess the world of St. Mary Redcliffe and the Red Lodge as Walpole possessed Arlington Street and Strawberry Hill. He wanted not to create a myth, but to inherit one. When snobbery involves such disproportionate longings and invades poetry itself, it deserves a better name. As Daniel Wilson suggests (68), the ancient deeds of the muniment room were the only inheritance left to Chatterton by his father, who first stored them there. They were the only tangible gifts left to his son, and if he could transmute them into beauty and earn distinction for them, then perhaps his penurious and sordid environment would be disproved, and Chatterton would be discovered to be a changeling, the son not of a Bristol schoolmaster whose 'mouth was so wide that he could put his clenched fist into it' (69), who was 'brutal', and 'would often pass the whole night roaring out catches with his pot companions... and neglected his wife, whom he married 'solely for a housekeeper'" (70); but of

some man of great gifts who was himself thwarted or misplaced; or a nobleman not married to his mother at all, - the fact of his posthumous birth allowed plenty of scope for exalted, Savage-like dreams, -

But oh - I wisheto be noe greate,  
In rennoe Tenure and Estate,

That is the cry which underlies his poetry; the plea of the child who, nowadays, would always be waiting to be told he was adopted. Greatness lies not only in talent and strenuous creativity, but in 'Tenure and Estate', and that is why those documents - so closely allied with the property deeds of St. Mary Redcliffe where Chatterton's family had been sextons for years - must be jealously protected. Walpole in rejecting the poetry rejected not only poetry but Chatterton's proffered inheritance - one way of making his arrival as a poet both discreet and

acceptable. That refused, he was driven to other means: on August 24th, 1770, Chatterton visited the bakery where he had been wont throughout his months in London to purchase stale bread cheaply; but he was told on this particular day that he could not have it, as he was in debt for the bread he had already eaten. So he went over the road to where his friend Mr. Cross the apothecary, who had earlier invited him to a feast of oysters (71), kept his shop, and asked him for a small portion of arsenic, 'for an experiment'. The poison was readily granted, and the experiment tried out, with what dreary consequences is generally known. This is in keeping with the general pattern of erratic acceptance and rejection, and the casting of roles upon not only the important people in his life, but on casual acquaintances, to fill out the edges of the story. Chatterton would refuse to eat meat as a child, 'because I have a work in hand, and must not make myself more stupid than God has made me' (72); and the poetry depends upon this

stern though erratic diet, so paltry until some grand moment when it is fed upon a luxuriant dinner at Slough, a barrel of oysters, or a portion of arsenic. It is the generous extravagant courage of eating such things on occasions that saved Thomas Rowley from conceding altogether to the wants of Canynge's Court, and becoming merely collector of drawings and Court poet. Like the feast in 'Aella', the forbidden bread diverts the course of the story, and supplies another, both more bland and more complex, in its place; and the obliging apothecary-friend Mr. Cross takes on the two-edged sinister character of Celmonde; he provides through his generosity both feast and poison, he is magnificent dispenser of oysters and arsenic.

## CHAPTER EIGHT - NOTES

1. "Iche shall goe toe Londonne to settle mie Brodher Johne: gif you wyll goe theere youe wylle fynde mee neere the Towerre. gif you comme heere use mie Howse as youre owne". Letter from Canynge to Rowley, in 'Lyfe of W:Canynge'. *Works I*, p.232.
2. Ibid. "The kynges Weddyng goethe onne Mie Fadres Goulde Chaine was yeven to the Queene who yave the same to Suffoulke botte of thatte I saie nothyng".
3. 'Lyfe of W:Canynge', in *Works I*, p.229/
4. Ibid., in *Works I*, p.233.
5. Seyer, pp.190-1.
6. 'Lyfe of W:Canynge', in *Works I*, p.233.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. In Rowley's preface to the 'Lyfe of Canynge', he says that Canynge gave 3000 marks to King Edward in the Wars of the Roses, and that that King therefore left him in peace and 'dyd...tender hym meynt honoures' (*Works I*, p.229); whereas in this extract of a letter from Canynge, included in the very same 'Lyfe', we learn that the 3000 marks was given to the King as a recompense for Canynge's action over the Woodville marriage. This is in keeping with various confusions over dates - for example, whether the King's visit of 1461, when Sir Baldwin Fulford was beheaded, was the same visit at which the King proposed the Woodville marriage to Canynge. I have chosen them as being the same visit, but it is by no means clear from Rowley's fragments. See also below, n.10.
10. "At the accession of Edward 4th, 1461, William Canynges was Mayor. That he was reconciled to the new government may be attributed to the influence of his half brother Thomas Young, who was burgess in parliament, and who was a zealous Yorkist... Wyrcestre says, that he paid the new King 3000 marks "pro pace sua habenda". This expression may admit of two meaning - either that it was an acquittance in the Exchequer for the merchants' general contribution, which as Mayor he was bound to receive; or, that it was a fine imposed upon himself for his former attachment to the House of Lancaster. He was included in the commission which condemned the brave Sir Baldwin Fulford (the *Sir Charles*

Bawdin of Chatterton), which must have been to him a most painful duty. Bristol owes to him, the procuring from the King, a confirmation of former charters, and grants of further liberties, which may have been partly purchased by the 3000 marks above mentioned". - James Dallaway, 'Essay on William Canynges', in *Antiquities of Bristow in the Middle Centuries* (Bristol, 1834), pp. 187-8,

11. See Ch. 6, n. 16.

12. Walpole, *Letter*, p.

13. 'Sly Dick', ll. 17-18, in *Works I*, p. 3.

14. Apprentices were notoriously wild and dissolute. See M. Dorothy George, 'The Uncertainties of Life and Trade', in *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (1985), pp. 262-312. Also Broughton, - "He possessed all the vices and irregularities of youth, and his profligacy was, at least, as conspicuous as his abilities" - *Thomas Chatterton: Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, 1778, p. xviii.

15. From 'Lyfe of W: Canynge', in *Works I*, p. 228.

16. *Ibid.*, in *Works I*, p. 233.

17. *Ibid.*

18. "Like his father the poet was entered among the burials under a wrong Christian name - 'William Chatterton Brook's Street 28', - Meyerstein, p. 443. Also F. R. Dean, *Thomas Chatterton - A Literary Masquerader* (Manchester, 1937), p. 128: "It was believed that his body was buried in a pauper's grave in 'The Pit', as it was called, of Shoe Lane Workhouse, though a story afterwards gained some credence, that it had been enclosed in a box, sent to Bristol and secretly buried in the churchyard of St. Mary Redcliff".

19. "His room, when broken open, was found covered with little scraps of paper, and all his unfinished pieces were cautiously destroyed before his death" - Dix, p. 292.

20. E. H. W. Meyerstein, *A Bristol Friendship: Thomas Chatterton and John Baker* (Royal Society of Literature, Essays by Divers Hands, v. 25, 1950), pp. 47-8.

21. 'Aella', ll. 374-5, in *Works I*, p. 189.

22. 'Aella', ll. 181-2, in *Works I*, p. 181.

23. Walpole, *Letter*, in *The Works of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford*, 5 vols. (London: G. O. & J. Robinson, 1798), vol. IV, p. 218.

24. Walpole appears as 'The Baron of Otranto' in 'Memoirs of a Sad Dog' (*Works I*, p.658) where he is "the redoubted baron Otranto, who has spent his whole life in conjectures". See also Meyerstein, p.272.
25. Oswald Doughty (ed.), *The Castle of Otranto* (1928), pp.xxxix-xlv.
26. Quoted in A.Alvarez, *The Savage God* (1971), p.148.
27. "Dining at the royal academy, Dr.Goldsmith drew the attention of the company with an account of a marvellous treasure of ancient poems lately discovered at Bristol, and expressed enthusiastic belief in them, for which he was laughed at by Dr.Johnson, who was present. I soon found this was the trouvaille of my friend Chatterton; and I told Dr.Goldsmith that this novelty was none to me, who might, if I had pleased, have had the honour of ushering the great discovery to the learned world. You may imagine, Sir, we did not at all agree in the measure of our faith; but though his credulity diverted me, my mirth was soon dashed, for on asking about Chatterton, he told me he had been in London, and had destroyed himself". - Walpole, *Letter*, pp.129-30 (vol. 16).
28. Walpole, *Letter*, p.128 (vol. 16).
29. William Henry Ireland, the author of *Vortigern*, told his father and his father's literary friends that he received the Shakespeare manuscripts from a 'Mr.H' who "being possessed of a large fortune, and being well aware of the inquiries which must take place on the production of the papers, did not think fit to subject himself to the impertinent questionings of every individual who conceived himself licensed to demand an explanation concerning them". - Bernard Grebanier, *The Great Shakespeare Forgery* (1966), p.121.
30. Congreve, *The Way of the World* (Everyman 1976) p.224.
31. Hazlitt, 'Of Persons One Would Wish to have Seen', in *Winterslow* (1902), p.32.
32. *Ibid.*, p.25.
33. Bernard Grebanier, *The Great Shakespeare Forgery*, pp.90-1.
34. Allan Cunningham (1784-1842), the Scottish poet who began life as a stone-mason's apprentice, and contributed much fabricated material to R.H.Cromek's *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song*.
35. E.K.Chambers, *The History and Motives of Literary Forgeries* (Oxford, 1977), p.36.

36. Pat Rogers, *The Augustan Vision* (1974), p.268.
37. *Pamela* (Everyman, 1972), vol. I, pp.95-6.
38. Dix, p.311.
39. See Pat Rogers, 'Books and Readers', in *The Augustan Vision* (1974), pp.76-86.
40. Ibid. See also Foucault, 'What is an author?' in *The Foucault Reader* (ed. Paul Rabinov, 1984).
41. 'An Excelente Balade of Charitie', ll.90-1, in *Works I*, p.648.
42. 'Aella', ll.310-11, in *Works I*, p.187.
43. 'Eclogue the Third', ll.83-4, in *Works I*, p.315.
44. Donald Davie, 'Pushkin. A Didactic Poem', in *Selected Poems* (Carcenet 1985).
45. 'The Storie of Wyllyam Canynge', in *Works I*, pp.241-247.
46. 'Aella', l.289, in *Works I*, p.186.
47. 'The Tournament. An Interlude', l.48, in *Works I*, p.284.
48. 'Sly Dick', ll.17-18, in *Works I*, p.3.
49. Meyerstein, p.67.
50. Walpole, *Correspondence*, <sup>xxxiii,</sup> pp.40-1.
51. Ibid..
52. 'Letter to Sarah Chatterton, Thomas Cary and others', 6 May 1770, in *Works I*, p.560. → *Walpole, Correspondence*, x, pp.130-31.
- 53.
54. Meyerstein, p.404.
55. 'An Excelente Balade of Charitie', ll.64-70, in *Works I*, p.647.
56. Ibid., ll.43-4, in *Works I*, p.646.
57. Ibid., ll.90-1, in *Works I*, p.648.
58. Ibid., l.28, in *Works I*, p.646.
59. Ibid., ll.38-9, in *Works I*, p.646.
60. 'Happiness', ll.53-4, in *Works I*, p.405.

61. Meyerstein, p. 321,
62. Meyerstein, p. 62.
63. 'Aella', ll. 13-18, in *Works I*, p. 175,
64. 'Aella', l. 22, in *Works I*, p. 175.
65. *Thomas Chatterton: Poetical Works*  
(Edinburgh, 1795), p. 298.
66. E. Mangin, *A Letter to the Admirers of Chatterton*  
(Bath, 1838).
67. Ibid.
68. Daniel Wilson, *Chatterton: A Biographical Study* (1869).
69. Meyerstein, p. 9.
70. Ibid. Also Dix, p. 3.
71. Dix, p. 290.
72. Dix, p. 6.

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